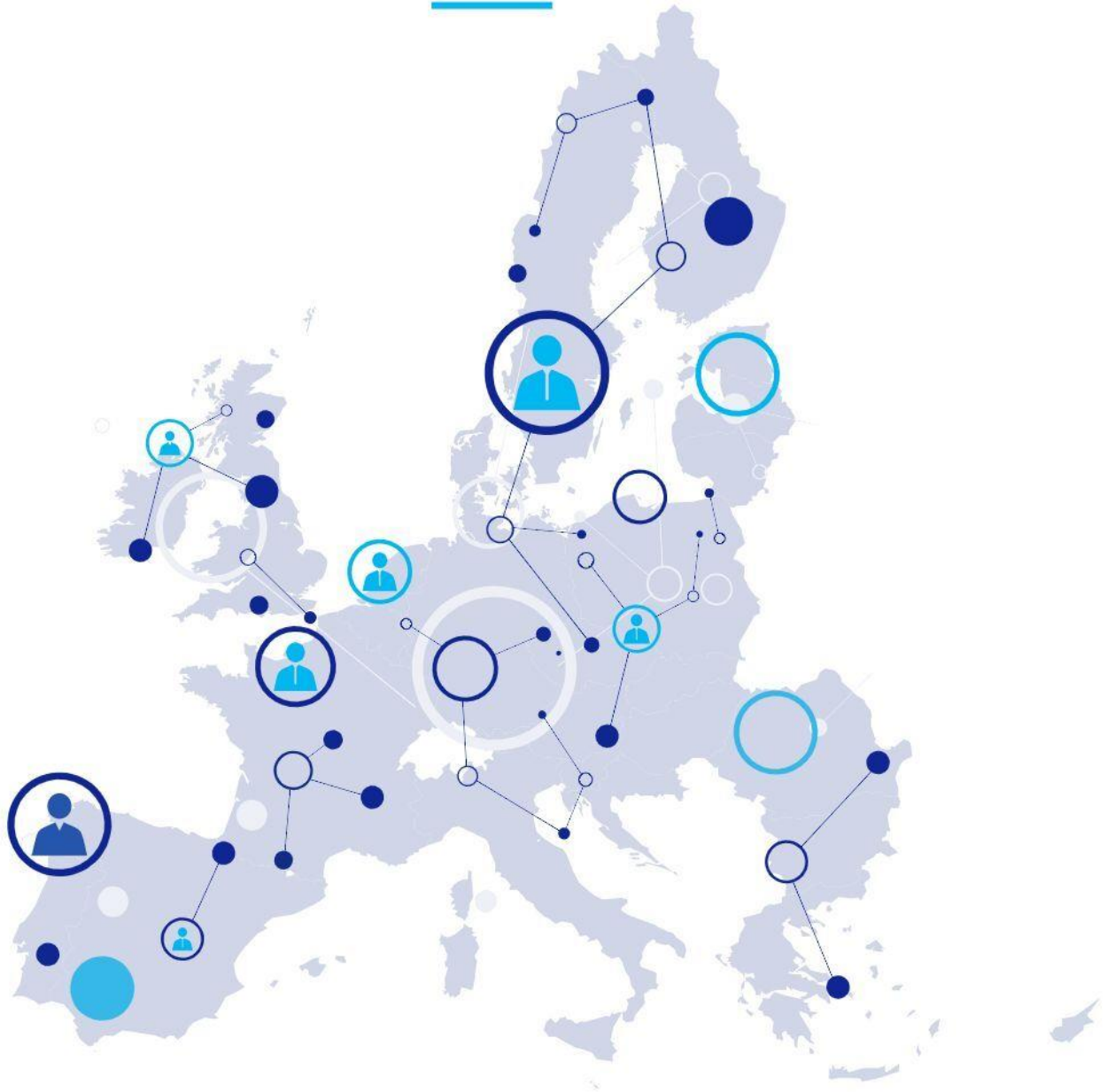




European
Commission



Study on peer learning tools for the administrative capacity building of Member State bodies involved in the management of funds from the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund

Final Report

Written by PPMi Group
December 2020

PPMi



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Final Report

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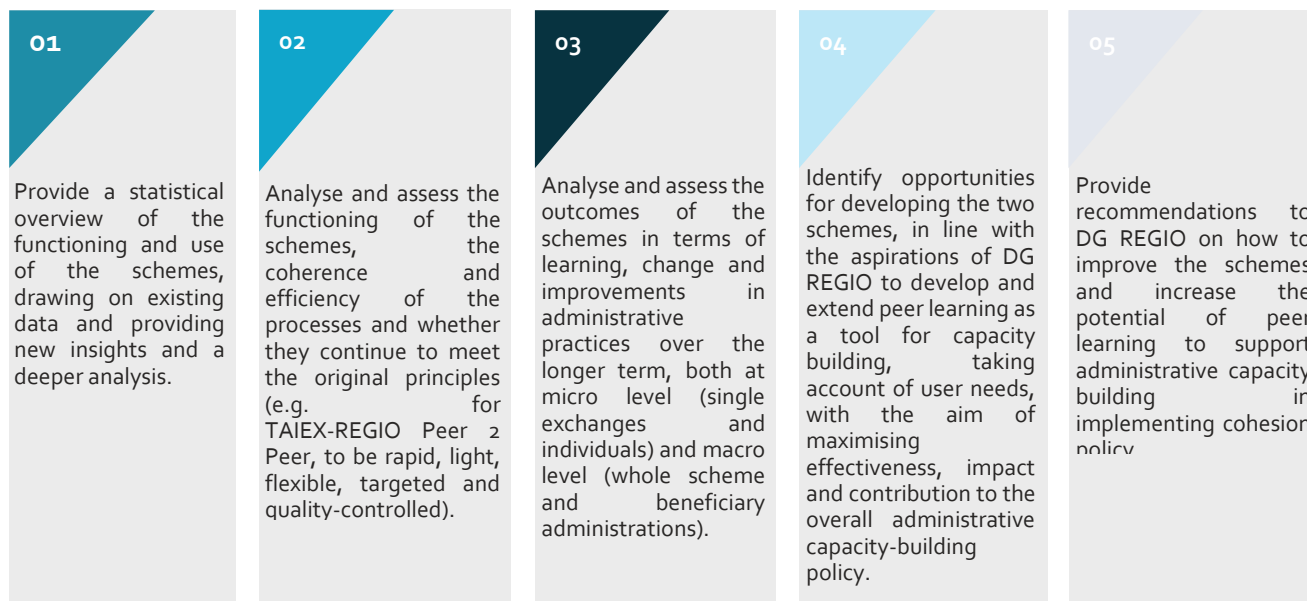
Abbreviations

AA	Audit Authority
ACB	Administrative capacity building
CoPs	Communities of Practitioners
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
EC	European Commission
EDB	TAIEX-REGIO Expert Database. The database of regional policy experts is consulted for both TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and other TAIEX activities.
EU	European Union
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESIF	European structural and investment funds
EU13	European Union Member States that joined the EU in May 2004 or later (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia)
EU15	European Union Member States prior to the accession of ten candidate countries in May 2004. (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom)
IB	Intermediate Body
MA	Managing Authority
TAIEX-REGIO P2P	TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument
UIA	Urban Innovative Actions

Introduction

Purpose of the study

FIGURE 1. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY



In line with its objectives, the study consists of **retrospective** (objectives one to three) and **prospective** parts (objectives four and five). Before proceeding to the key part of this Final Report, we present the main activities implemented and the data upon which this Report has been developed ([section 1](#)). The key part of the Report ([section 2](#)) provides a retrospective analysis: it answers the study questions as per the operationalisation provided in the Inception Report, using the extensive data collected and analysed. The concluding chapter of the report summarises the main findings of this analysis ([section 2.5](#)). Based on this retrospective analysis and conclusions, in [section 3](#), we identify opportunities to further develop TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs, in order to increase their potential for peer learning and to improve coordination with DG REGIO’s other administrative capacity building tools and networks.

Alongside this Report, we also submit five **case studies together with factsheets** that explore whether participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs has led to changes in the practices of national administrations, and whether these schemes have contributed to improvements in the management of the funds within the institutions selected.

It is important to note that the Report provides a **retrospective analysis of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs since their establishment until the end of 2019**.

Structure of the Report

This Report is structured into three key parts:

- Data collected ([section 1](#));
- Answers to the study questions ([section 2](#));
- Prospective analysis ([section 3](#)).

In addition, several annexes are attached to the Report:

- Annex 1: Social Network Analysis;
- Annex 2: Revised classification;
- Annex 3: List of interviewees;
- Annex 4: Survey results;
- Annex 5: Case studies and factsheets;
- Annex 6: Bibliography;
- Annex 7: Report of the Final Workshop;
- Annex 8: PPT presentation used during the Final Workshop;
- Annex 9: Excel file with the classification of TAIEX-REGIO Peer to Peer events.

1. Data collected

This section briefly describes the data collected and analysed, which has informed the preparation of the Report. It does not contain any information on the main insights deriving from these data. The key study findings are presented in [section 2](#) and summarised in [chapter 2.5](#), which provides conclusions. [Section 3](#) goes on to provide recommendations.

1.1. Desk research and analysis of administrative and monitoring data

Desk research **consisted of a literature and document review, as well as analysis of administrative and monitoring data**. This research fed into the preparation of the intervention logic. It also allowed us to finalise the operationalisation of the study questions, and informed the preparation of various methodological tools for data collection, such as interview and survey questionnaires, case study template, etc. Most importantly, the desk research provided information that was essential in answering some of the study questions, as well as providing the basis for the re-classification of topics covered by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and the social network analysis.

1.1.1. Literature and document review

The literature and document review covered various online sources and documents provided by DG REGIO, relating to the setup and functioning of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs. The review informed our answers to some of the study questions and the preparation of case studies, along with the primary data. Event evaluation and implementation reports from the two schemes were consulted in order to triangulate and complement the findings of the interviews and survey.

To gain a solid understanding of the context of the assignment, the literature review also included broader academic literature on the importance of administrative capacity in ensuring the efficient implementation of the Cohesion policy, as well as the concept of Communities of Practitioners and peer learning tools in general. More specifically, we consulted the recent OECD report 'Strengthening Governance of EU Funds under Cohesion Policy',¹ as well as the DG REGIO practical toolkit 'Roadmaps for Administrative Capacity Building'². In addition, we reviewed DG REGIO management plans³ and the latest annual activity report.⁴

1.1.2. Analysis of administrative and monitoring data

Administrative and monitoring data received from DG REGIO were integrated into a single comprehensive database during the inception phase. This enabled us to answer the study questions relating to the profile of the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer users using descriptive statistical techniques, and to conduct a social network analysis of the countries and institutions participating in TAIEX-

¹ Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/publications/strengthening-governance-of-eu-funds-under-cohesion-policy-9b71c8d8-en.htm>

² Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/how/improving-investment/roadmap_toolkit.pdf

³ 2019 Management plan available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/management-plan-2019-regional-and-urban-policy_en

⁴ Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/annual-activity-report-2018-regional-and-urban-policy_en

REGIO Peer 2 Peer. We also used the database, along with the feedback received from the EC at the end of the inception phase, to update the proposed reclassification of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer topics. This reclassification is aligned with the thematic objectives of the ESIF and ERDF, and addresses some past issues relating to some keywords in the initial proposal.

We compiled a database of key CoPs members using data provided by DG REGIO in addition to information from the CoPs blog. This database includes the names, affiliations and roles of the most active CoPs participants as of March 2020. In some cases, this data is unstructured and does not allow analysis at the same level of detail as per TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer.

1.1.3. Social network analysis

Social network analysis provides an innovative means to interpret, measure and visualise relationships between a number of social entities, such as people, groups or organisations. The approach is distinguished by its emphasis on relationships between rather than the attributes of individual entities. The network structure revealed using this method provides insights into network activities and how knowledge is generated and shared within the network. Social network analysis was chosen as an appropriate method for this study, given the structure of the quantitative data available. We mapped data on 208 TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges at country and institutional level, denoting contacts between entities as along with their frequency, to reveal the most active participants in the peer-learning scheme and uncover their potential clusters.

Software Gephi was used to conduct the social network analysis at the level of countries and individual institutions. The country-level analysis included only study visits, because these were the only events that involved one host and one beneficiary country. Adding in expert missions and (multi-country) workshops, which feature multiple hosts from different countries, would have led to an overrepresentation of certain nodes. The institutional-level analysis includes all types of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events, where the potential overrepresentation of interactions between participants in multi-country workshop must be considered. The detailed analysis, including an explanation of its limitations, is presented in [Annex 1](#). Insights from the analysis have been used to answer study questions relating to the profiles of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer users.

1.1.4. Revised classification of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events

The reclassification of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events has been proposed and carried out, taking into account the comments received from the EC. All 208 events in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer online library were retrospectively reclassified, and re-coded accordingly. The new classification creates a clear distinction between the cross-cutting and thematic focus of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events, but is not unproblematic. The new 'None' and 'Multi-thematic' categories in the classification may appear overrepresented. However, they also reflect the fact that many of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events either have a narrow focus on specific horizontal keywords, or focus on a broad policy area without referring to specific EU funds. Detailed discussion of the revised classification is provided in [Annex 2](#). This **retrospective reclassification should be subjected to further prospective testing using upcoming events**. Several keywords have already been added to classify events in policy areas that are likely to be crucial in the upcoming MFF, such as 'Climate change or 'Just transition'. These can easily be further adapted and adjusted to better accommodate the needs of the participants and the Commission.

1.2. Interviews

Our extensive interview programme consisted of three types of semi-structured interviews: EU-level, national-level exploratory interviews, and interviews to inform case studies. In total, we conducted 57 interviews with 66 interviewees (some interviews were conducted with more than one participant). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted online, via various online conferencing tools (WebEx, Zoom, Microsoft Teams). Semi-structured interview questionnaires were tailored to specific categories of interviewees, and were usually sent to the interviewees in advance so that they could familiarise themselves with the topics covered. A breakdown of completed interviews is provided in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF COMPLETED INTERVIEWS

TYPE OF INTERVIEW		NO OF INTERVIEWS COMPLETED	NO OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED
EU-level	Exploratory	7	9
	Exploring coherence with other networks of DG REGIO	6	7
National-level exploratory	TAIEX-REGIO P2P	4	4
	CoPs	4	4
Interviews for case studies	TAIEX-REGIO P2P	28	34
	CoPs	8	8
Total		57	66

Source: prepared by PPMI

1.3. Survey

A survey was conducted as part of this study to obtain feedback from the users of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs. In addition to quantifying the findings from desk research and the interview programme, the main objectives of the survey programme included:

- providing an overview of the main reasons that prompted participants to join the schemes;
- gaining insights into the extent of participant involvement in activities organised under these schemes;
- collecting information on outcomes, follow-up and impacts brought about by participation in the schemes;
- gathering recommendations to improve the schemes in the future.

The survey of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer users targeted all beneficiaries, participants, hosts and experts who had taken part in the scheme. Given that some exchanges had been implemented as far back as 2015, filtering questions were added to the survey questionnaire to identify whether the respondent recalled his/her participation in the scheme. If certain questions were not answered, the respondent was disqualified from the survey, based on the assumption that he/she was not able to provide informed answers. The survey of CoPs members targeted all participants in the scheme who are included in the mailing list (around 1,800 members). Merging these two target groups into a single contact database, the final population of this survey comprised 3,797 contacts. After sending out invitations, 517 emails were identified as no longer valid.

In order not to contravene the TAIEX privacy statement, DG REGIO, with the assistance of the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer manager from DG NEAR, prepared the contact database and sent out personalised invitations to participate in the survey.

The survey achieved a response rate of 12.4%. In order to maximise the response rate, several reminders were sent to those respondents who had not already completed the survey. The targeted reminders boosted the response rate significantly: 12.4% is a good response rate, particularly given the specificity of the survey population and the applicable limitations. First, the survey was launched during the summer period, while some potential respondents were on holidays (some automated out-of-office responses were received). Second, some of the exchanges were implemented a long time ago, and thus potential respondents might not have been willing to participate in the survey. Third, the CoPs mailing list also includes practitioners who have simply signed up for the newsletter, and are thus not highly engaged in the activities of CoPs. These individuals may not have been interested in participating.

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION

LAUNCH DATE	REMINDERS SENT	CLOSING DATE	TOTAL NO OF VALID CONTACTS	RESPONSES INCLUDED IN THE ANALYSIS	RESPONSE RATE (%)
6 July 2020	1-9 July 2020 2-14 July 2020 3-17 July 2020	20 July 2020	3,280	408	12.4

Source: prepared by PPMI

In total, the survey received 842 responses (of which 405 were partially completed, 37 were disqualified, and 400 were fully completed). Data cleaning of the responses was performed to eliminate incomplete answers and ensure reliability, sufficiency, authenticity and validity of the data, as well as excluding potentially erroneous information. After the cleaning, 408 valid responses remained – 400 were fully completed, and eight partial responses were also included in the final dataset because they contained a sufficient amount of information. Out of 408 respondents, 284 indicated that they had only participated in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, 68 indicated that they had participated only in CoPs, and 56 indicated that they participated in both schemes. **Those respondents who had participated in both schemes received survey questions on CoPs only.** Thus, the final survey dataset included 284 respondents who answered the survey as TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer users, and 124 respondents who answered it as CoPs users.

Representatives of all Member States except Denmark participated in the survey. The most active countries were Poland (47 responses), Romania (45 responses) and Lithuania (35 responses) – these constituted 11.5%, 11% and 8.6% of all responses, respectively. Aside from Denmark, the fewest responses were received from Austria (1), the United Kingdom (3) and France (3).

1.4. Participant observation

One method used to collect data about the CoPs was participant observation. Initially, the study team intended to attend physical events, but due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, all of these events were moved online. The study team observed three CoPs events:

- Live communities on State Aid and ERDF on 8 April 2020
- Workshop preparatory discussion on 21 April 2020

- Risk Management for ESIF – insights from the Republic of Croatia on 29 May 2020

Observation was used to collect various types of data. Most importantly, it helped in gaining greater insights into how the events were organised, as well as into the interactions between participants. This, in turn, expanded understanding of the scheme’s functioning and the levels of participation and engagement to be observed. The method was also instrumental in enabling us to observe the role of the Community Manager in facilitating discussions, as well as dealing with organisational matters involving future collaborations and an updated *modus operandi* during the pandemic. Participant observation helped to increase understanding of how content-related aspects are reflected in conversations between practitioners. Data acquired through participant observation informed the questionnaires for interviews and survey, and fed into answering some of the study questions.

This data collection exercise was not as extensive as originally planned because all of the activities were moved online and were therefore shorter and more concise. Due to the ongoing pandemic, some participants could not attend these online events; thus, their scope was narrower than anticipated, particularly in the Live communities on State Aid and the ERDF. Despite these challenges, participant observation was nevertheless a useful method for the study team.

1.5. Case studies

Five embedded case studies and accompanying factsheets were prepared. The case studies cover four distinct types of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events (study visits, expert missions, workshops and multi-country workshops), as well as Communities of Practitioners. The decision to structure the case studies according to types of event was reinforced by exploratory interviews during the inception phase, which hinted that the reasons for the organisation, content, conduct and outcomes of events tend to differ by type.

Individual events were selected for case studies on the basis of the logic introduced in the Inception Report, in order to cover a representative share of events by type. The case studies aimed to include both more and less active Member States as well as institutions, to identify their reasons for participating in the peer learning schemes more or less frequently. In addition, they aimed to be representative in terms of the types of institutions involved and the topics covered by events. By structuring the case studies around particular TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events rather than countries allowed us to trace the institutional outcomes and impacts of the events more precisely, while national administrations remained the main unit of analysis. This structure also allowed us to cover a broader range of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer participants who were more and less active, as well as to better cover the activities of CoPs that do not revolve around a certain Member State.

Along with desk research and administrative and monitoring data, the main sources of information for case studies were interviews with beneficiaries, hosts, experts and participants in the selected events. Table 3 provides a summary of the interviews conducted by the study team for each case study. In total, we interviewed 42 TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs participants. These included 12 beneficiaries, eight hosts or experts, and 13 participants in 12 distinct TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events, as well as four champions and five participants in the CoPs. The interviewees represent 17 Member States. Detailed lists of interviewees, including their position and role in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events or CoPs, can be found in the annexes relating to the respective case studies.

TABLE 3. INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED FOR THE CASE STUDIES

TYPE OF CASE STUDY	CASE STUDY	FOCUS OF THE CASE STUDIES	PLANNED INTERVIEWS
Case studies on TAIEX-REGIO P2P	CS1	Study visits (5)	5 beneficiaries; 4 hosts/experts; 3 participants
	CS2	Expert missions (3)	5 beneficiaries; 2 hosts/experts; 2 participants
	CS3	Workshops (2)	1 beneficiary; 2 hosts/experts; 1 participant
	CS4	Multi-country workshops (2)	1 beneficiary; 7 participants
Case study on CoPs	CS5	Main working topics of CoPs (state aid, evaluation, public procurement, risk management)	4 champions; 5 participants
Total	5		42 interviews

Source: prepared by PPMI

The main thematic focus of the case studies is on the outcomes and the impact of the events. Also provided are an overview of the reasons why participants engage with the scheme and some organisational aspects, as well as the defining features of each type of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer event. Rather than focusing on individual events, in the manner of the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer case studies, the case study on CoPs covers a broader range of the Communities’ activities. However, its focus remains on the outcomes and impacts of the scheme on the national administrations of the Member States. The case studies are accompanied by factsheets summarising their key findings.

1.6. Workshop with the ACB team at DG REGIO

An online workshop with representatives of the ACB team at DG REGIO (Unit E1) was organised on 15 October 2020, with 11 participants representing DG REGIO. The purpose of the workshop was to explore potential pathways for the further development of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs, in order to increase their coherence, effectiveness and efficiency during the next programming period (2021-2027). The World Café format was used, with participants being split into two groups and two rounds of discussion being organised. Participants discussed four main themes: upscaling the schemes; increasing internal integration; increasing their strategic contribution; and increasing external coordination. The results of this workshop are reflected in the part of this Report containing the prospective analysis ([section 3](#)).

2. Answers to the study questions

This part of the Report provides answers to the study questions. These are based on the synthesised and triangulated results of the data collected. **The study questions are structured under four main headings, as per the Technical Specifications: the functioning of the schemes (section 2.1); their effectiveness (section 2.2); follow-up (section 2.3); and impact (section 2.4).** Conclusions are provided in section 2.5. Answers to the final group of study questions relating to prospective analysis are presented in section 3.

2.1. Use and functioning of the schemes

T A I E X - R E G I O P e e r 2 P e e r	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ With 208 events implemented until the end of 2019, demand for TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer among its beneficiaries has been steady; however, differences in participation rates exist between Member States. Some countries are significantly more active than others; beneficiaries often come from the EU13 and hosts/experts from EU15. ▪ A relatively small group of institutions participates repeatedly in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer. Usually, participation is initiated to address <i>ad-hoc</i> issues, motivated by the individual rather than institutional initiative of beneficiaries and lacking a strategic approach. ▪ Overall user satisfaction with the implementation and administration of the scheme is high. In most cases, it lives up to its guiding principles of providing assistance that is fast, flexible and to-the-point. ▪ Lack of awareness of the opportunities offered by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer is the major issue. The scheme could benefit from targeted promotion, particularly among the EU15 and directly in relation to eligible institutions. ▪ Currently, the synergies between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs are limited. ▪ There is a lack of awareness about TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer within DG REGIO. ▪ Some examples of cooperation were identified between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and other REGIO networks or ACB-related programmes. ▪ No evidence was found of duplication between the activities of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and other REGIO networks and programmes, but some risk of overlaps exists in terms of the themes covered. 	C o P s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The majority of the approximately 80 active CoPs members come from the EU13 and engage with topics relating to state aid. ▪ CoPs is a bottom-up initiative driven by a small number of core members initiating webinars and physical workshops, while the majority only follow its activities via the mailing list, blog and other online communication tools. ▪ The flexible structure of CoPs is both an advantage and a disadvantage of the scheme, meaning that it is inclusive and enabling but also lacks the structure and criteria to identify and manage its key members ('champions'). ▪ The majority of CoPs users are highly satisfied with the implementation of the scheme and the engagement of the Community Manager. ▪ Lack of awareness of opportunities offered by CoPs is the major issue. The scheme could benefit from targeted promotion, especially among the EU15 and directly in relation to eligible institutions. ▪ Currently, the synergies between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs are limited. ▪ CoPs is almost unknown within DG REGIO ▪ No examples of cooperation were identified between CoPs and other REGIO networks or ACB-related programmes. ▪ No evidence was found of duplication between the activities of CoPs and other REGIO networks and programmes, but some risk of overlaps exists in terms of activities and the themes covered.
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2.1.1. Who are the users of the two schemes, and how do they use them?

2.1.1.1 Who are the users of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, and how do they use it?

TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events by type: predominance of smaller events

Between March 2015 and the end of December 2019, 208 TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events were implemented, while applications were submitted for 302. 21 events were still in preparation, and 73 applications were either rejected or cancelled by the applicant.⁵ **Study visits were the most popular type of events**, accounting for 118 –more than half of the total number – as seen in Table 4.

Workshops tend to be the largest events, with an average of more than 50 participants, while study visits are the smallest with three. Since study visits are (with only a few exceptions) limited to a maximum of three participants on the beneficiary side, the average indicates that this opportunity is usually used to its maximum capacity. The difference in the number of participants between workshops and multi-country workshops could be explained by a limitation of two experts per Member State at multi-country workshops, as opposed to a larger number of participants from the beneficiary institution being able to attend a workshop. Expert missions also vary greatly in terms of the number of participants. This could be explained by the scope and aims of the event, ranging from larger lecture-style events to smaller on-site assessments and evaluations.

In Table 4 below, the median numbers of participants displayed in brackets are lower than the mean number for all types of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events except for study visits, indicating that the majority of events are on the small side and the mean number of participants is boosted by a few large events. When compared against the mean and median numbers per event, the width of distribution (indicating the difference in size between the smallest and the largest events) also suggests that the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer **scheme is dominated by smaller events**, while large ones are relatively few.

TABLE 4. TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER EVENTS BY TYPE AND NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

TYPE OF EVENT	NUMBER OF EVENTS	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	MEAN (AND MEDIAN) NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER EVENT	WIDTH OF DISTRIBUTION
Study visit	118	395	3 (3)	1-15
Expert mission	36	740	21 (19,5)	6-54
Workshop	29	1476	51 (46)	5-176
Multi-country workshop	25	621	25 (21)	8-53
Total	208	3232	16 (3)	1-176

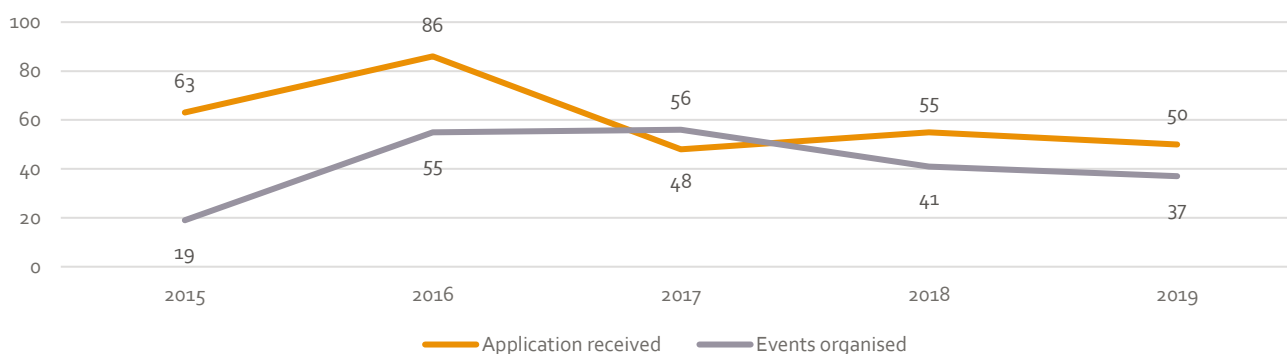
*on average per event type.

Source: PPMI calculations based on TAIEX online library

⁵ Taiex online library/Commission data

Both the number of applications and the number of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events organised have remained steady, with between 37 and 55 events organised each year from 2016 to 2019, as seen in Figure 2. Only 19 events were organised in 2015, which might be influenced by the novelty of the scheme and its “slow start”.⁶ The fluctuations in the number of applications received relate more to the large numbers of applications submitted at the end of a year for events that are only implemented in the following year, rather than to notable changes in demand and supply. Furthermore, while the overall number of applications has decreased, their quality has reportedly improved, resulting in lower rejection rates.⁷ **The demand for TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, while steady, is still below its potential capacity for implementation**, which is between 70 and 80 exchanges annually, according to the coordinator of the scheme.

FIGURE 2. TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER APPLICATIONS AND EVENTS IMPLEMENTED PER YEAR, 2015-2019



Source: PPMI calculations, based on TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer online library

Topic-wise, the majority of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events during the period dealt with the implementation and management of projects funded by the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund (29 events); financial instruments (18); and state aid (16). The **most frequently represented policy areas** were research and development (17 events), transport (16) and urban development (16), while learning about smart specialisation (14) was also common. Cross-tabulations of horizontal issues and policy areas and countries did not reveal any clear trends of some Member States providing expertise in a specific area. Instead, the more actively a Member State engages in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, the broader the spectrum of different topics it covers. A detailed breakdown of events by the horizontal issue they addressed, as well as by policy area, is provided in [Annex 2](#).

TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer users by country: notable differences between EU15 and EU13

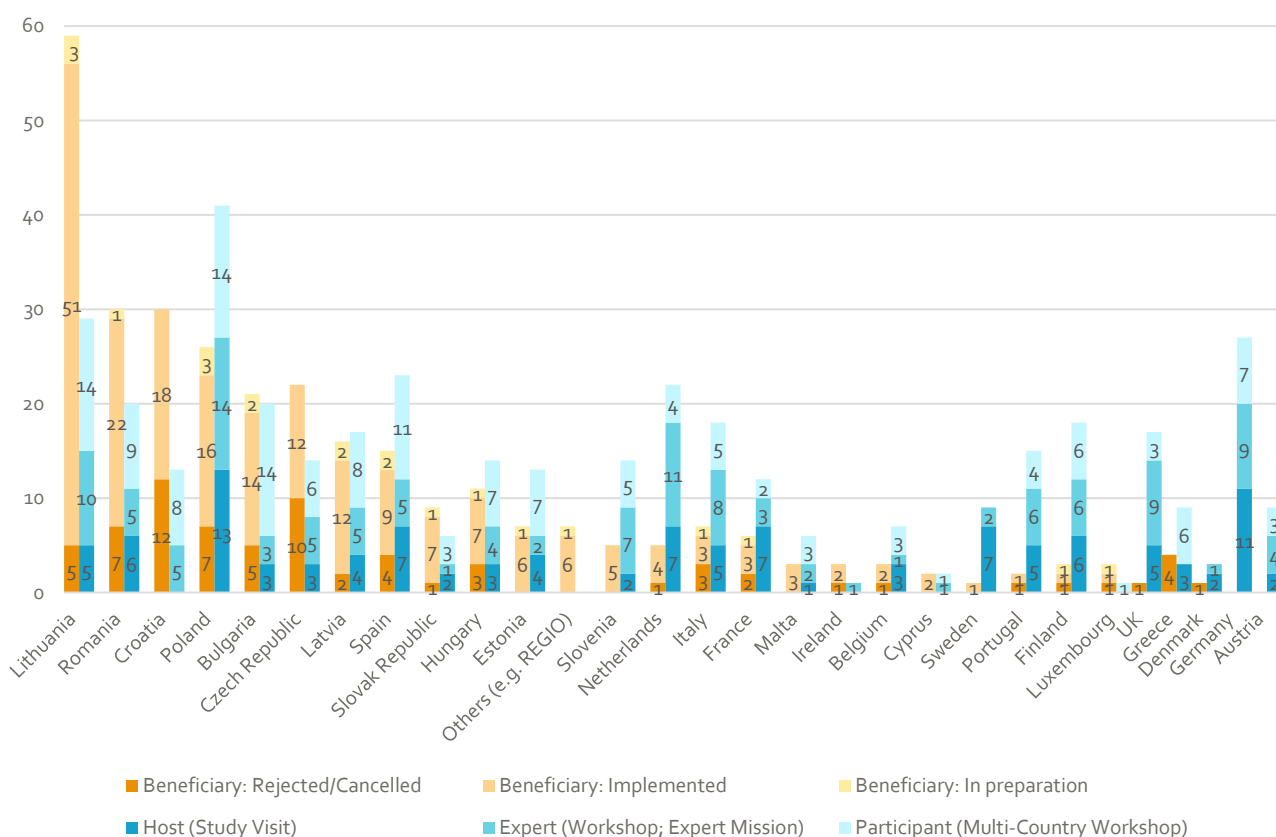
There is a clear difference in the activities of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer users at country level. **Some Member States are significantly more active than others, and some only participate as knowledge providers rather than beneficiaries.** Figure 3 shows the number of applications submitted for TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events by beneficiaries, as well as participation as a host or expert at country level for each EU Member State. **In terms of beneficiaries, Lithuania stands out as the country that has applied for and implemented by far the largest number of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events.** With 51 events implemented, the country organised almost one-quarter of the 208 exchanges between 2015 and 2019. It is followed by Romania, Croatia and

⁶ As also reflected in the Interim Report on the TAIEX REGIO P2P Tool March 2015 – August 2016

⁷ See Interim Report on the TAIEX REGIO P2P Tool March – August 2018

Poland. **Among the countries providing expertise, Poland stands out as the most active, with over 40 experts having participated in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events between 2015 and 2019.** Lithuania is both an active beneficiary and a host, with nearly 30 experts. Germany, which did not apply for a single event as a beneficiary, provided 27 experts, followed by Spain, the Netherlands, Romania and Bulgaria, each of which supplied 20 or more experts participating in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events. Like Germany, four other countries actively provided knowledge but scarcely participated as beneficiaries: UK, Austria, Finland and Portugal. The least active countries overall, both as beneficiaries and as providers of expertise, were Denmark, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Ireland.

FIGURE 3. TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER EVENTS BY COUNTRY, BENEFICIARIES AND HOSTS/EXPERTS



Source: Prepared by PPMI, based on TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer online library.

The trends in participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer at country level may be partly explained by eligibility for funding under the ERDF, ESF and Cohesion Fund. Most of Central and Eastern Europe qualifies as less developed regions under the ERDF.⁸ Furthermore, the only countries eligible for the Cohesion Fund during the period 2014-2020, were those Member States that had joined the EU in 2004 or later (the EU13), as well as Greece and Portugal.⁹ This **territorial focus and the availability of funding instruments** could account for why TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events appear more relevant to beneficiaries from certain Member States. **All of the seven countries that**

⁸ Source: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/what/future/img/eligibility20142020.pdf

⁹ Source: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/what/future/img/eligibility20142020.pdf

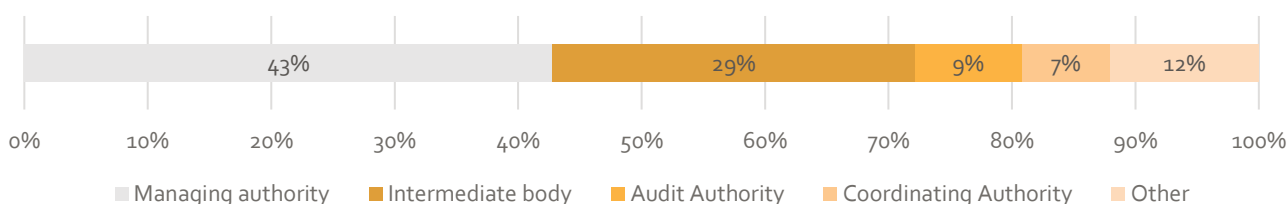
implemented more than 10 TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events between 2015 and 2019 belong to the EU13. In addition, interviews with representatives of DG REGIO, as well as practitioners from the Member States that are less active in the scheme, point towards a **lack of awareness** among potential beneficiaries. Within the EU13, TAIEX is known for having provided technical assistance in preparation for EU membership. Practitioners from EU15 countries, meanwhile, know it as an instrument for candidate and partner countries and would not intuitively seek funding opportunities within TAIEX, as noted by a number of the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer participants interviewed. **Lack of willingness to learn from other Member States, and a preference for national training or peer learning opportunities,** were also identified as reasons in countries that are known to manage ESIF well, such as Finland, Germany or Austria. **Burdensome administrative practices** relating to national EU fund management rules, such as the need for TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events to be approved by central government, discourage Spanish practitioners from using the scheme. Practitioners from more active countries use TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer because it is an attractive and flexible **additional source of funding** for events that might not be covered by national budgets for technical assistance, which are usually agreed in advance and cannot therefore accommodate *ad hoc* needs. However, even active users underlined that the scheme is only well known among a fairly narrow circle of practitioners in their countries who deal with EU funds and international cooperation. Lastly, interview respondents from specialised institutions in smaller Member States indicated that international peer learning is relevant for them because of a **lack of national counterparts to learn from,** which is not the case in larger or federal countries.

Further insights into TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer beneficiaries and hosts at country level can be drawn from the social network analysis presented in [Annex 1](#). This focuses on study visits and reveals Lithuania and Poland as central participants in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer at country level, but does not reveal any strictly distinct clusters of Member States.

TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer users by institution: learning rather than networking and a small group of institutions participating repeatedly

At institutional level, **most beneficiaries of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer are Managing Authorities** (89) and Intermediate Bodies (61) of the Member States, as seen in Figure 4. These are followed by Audit Authorities (18) and Coordinating Authorities (15). Other institutions, including Anti-fraud Coordination Services, Public Procurement Authorities, municipalities and Joint Secretariats for European territorial cooperation programmes, were the beneficiaries of 25 events. The high level of activity among Managing Authorities could be explained by the targeted promotion of the scheme by DG REGIO and by the fact that in some Member States, such as Poland or Bulgaria, Managing Authorities centrally organise expert missions or workshops that invite relevant stakeholders from other institutions.

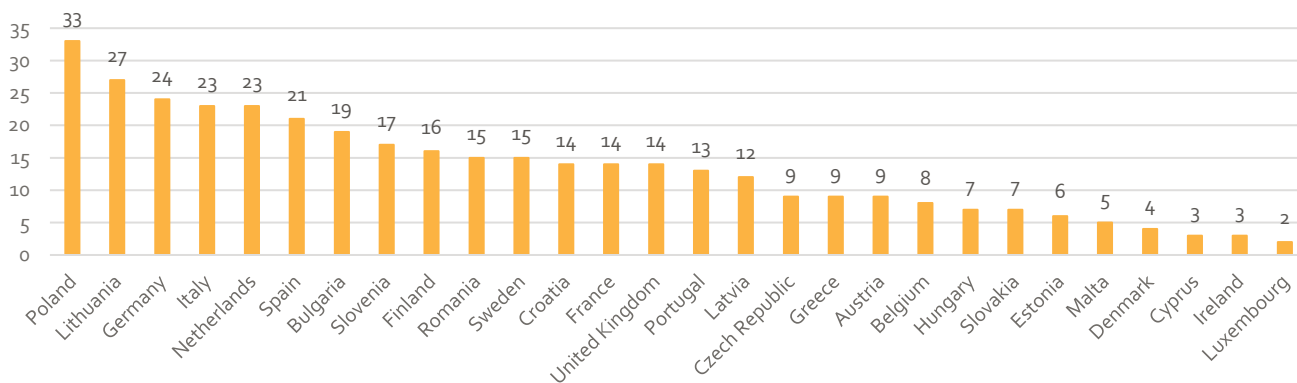
FIGURE 4. TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER BENEFICIARIES BY TYPE OF INSTITUTION (N=208)



Source: Prepared by PPMI, based on TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer online library

A thorough analysis of the 208 events in the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer online library identified 372 unique institutions that participated in exchanges, either as beneficiaries or as hosts/experts. As shown in Figure 5, the **participation of individual institutions reflects, to an extent, overall activity at country level**. Poland and Lithuania are the leaders, followed by German institutions or bodies, which only shared their expertise without initiating any events as beneficiaries. Given that Lithuania implemented 51 TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events (see Figure 3), involving the participation of only 27 individual institutions, and Romania implemented 21 events involving 15 institutions, it would appear common for a single institution to participate in more than one exchange. However, the social network analysis at institutional level presented in [Annex 1](#) shows that this is an exception rather than the rule, and many TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events are *ad hoc* initiatives without any further follow-up. Only around 10% of the institutions taking part in study visits, expert missions or workshops have engaged with five or more other institutions, although repeated interactions become more commonplace when multi-country workshops are added into the picture.

FIGURE 5. NUMBER OF UNIQUE INSTITUTIONS PARTICIPATING IN TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER BY COUNTRY



Source: Prepared by PPMI, based on TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer online library

Table 5 identifies the most active participants in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer by institution, and lists all of the individual institutions that participated in five or more exchanges as a beneficiary or a host/expert. **Only 23 institutions have participated in five or more TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges**. The table therefore hints at the existence of a **small core group of institutions repeatedly exchanging knowledge with each other**. This is further explored and confirmed by the social network analysis presented in [Annex 1](#), which shows that out of all institutions, 80 interacted with 10 or more other institutions, mostly at multi-country workshops. This suggests that most TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges are indeed based on exchanges of relevant expertise rather than personal networks. Some of the interviewees were chosen based on this list of institutions. Surprisingly, in some of the larger and most active institutions, participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events was not coordinated centrally, and participants were not aware of other events that were planned and conducted by their colleagues from other departments. Other outliers, such as the Portuguese Cohesion and Development Agency, indicated that they have long-standing expertise in managing the ERDF and Cohesion Funds – a situation not found in other Member States or institutions.¹⁰ The Polish Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, meanwhile, manages the

¹⁰ Portugal presents an interesting case in this context, as it started managing Cohesion Fund and ERDF investments in 1986 and still continues to do so, while most of the EU15 Member States are not eligible for funds from the Cohesion Fund.

largest share of funds in comparison to other Member States, and is therefore frequently approached with requests to host TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events.

TABLE 5. MOST ACTIVE TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER PARTICIPANTS BY INSTITUTION*

INSTITUTION	COUNTRY	TOTAL EVENTS	AS BENEFICIARY	AS HOST/ EXPERT
Ministry of Infrastructure and Development	PL	20	6	14
Environmental Project Management Agency	LT	14	10	4
Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration	RO	14	7	7
Public Investment Development Agency	LT	12	6	6
Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds	HR	11	7	4
North-East Regional Development Agency	RO	11	5	6
Ministry of Regional Development	CZ	10	6	4
Central Project Management Agency	LT	10	9	1
Ministry of Finance	LT	9	4	5
Ministry of Education and Science	LT	9	9	0
Cohesion and Development Agency	PT	8	0	8
Ministry of Finance	LV	7	3	4
Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications	BG	6	3	3
City of Prague	CZ	6	6	0
Ministry of Finance	EE	6	3	3
The Alliance of the Northern Provinces	NL	6	2	4
Agency for Innovation and Development of Andalusia	ES	6	1	5
Council of Ministers	BG	5	3	2
Environmental Investment Centre	EE	5	2	3
Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism	EL	5	0	5
Prime Minister's Office	HU	5	3	2
Audit Authority	LV	5	4	1
Region of Lubelskie	PL	5	2	3

*Multi-Country Workshop participants are listed as hosts/experts

Source: prepared by PPMI, based on TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer online library

Awareness of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer is lacking

DG REGIO regularly promotes the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer scheme. This includes the setting up and updating of a comprehensive web presence, organising presentations for DG REGIO desk officers, promoting the tool to the Member States at various events and expert groups, and disseminating information about the scheme to the Managing Authorities of the Member States.¹¹

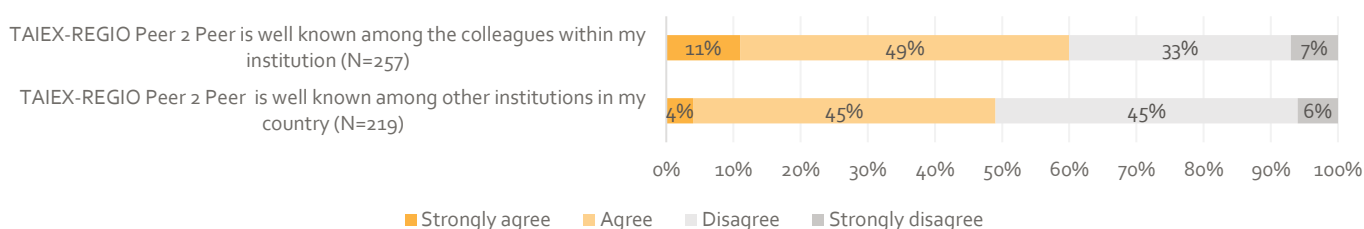
¹¹ Source: Interim Reports on the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer Tool

However, despite this targeted promotion, the tool is still not well known among practitioners within the Member States.

Lack of awareness of the opportunities offered by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer was identified as a major issue by multiple interview respondents representing both participants in the schemes, and the EC. Participants who regularly attend EU-level expert groups and meetings in Brussels tended to have found out about the scheme directly from DG REGIO through targeted promotion at the events they attended. However, TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer is known only by a fairly small group of institutions and practitioners working with EU funds or international cooperation in their countries, and the awareness within larger circles is lacking. Some respondents from larger active institutions were not even aware that other departments within their institution were participating in the scheme. In particular, practitioners in the EU15 are less aware of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, since these countries are not eligible for support through TAIEX and so would not intuitively look for opportunities to fund training and technical assistance through it.

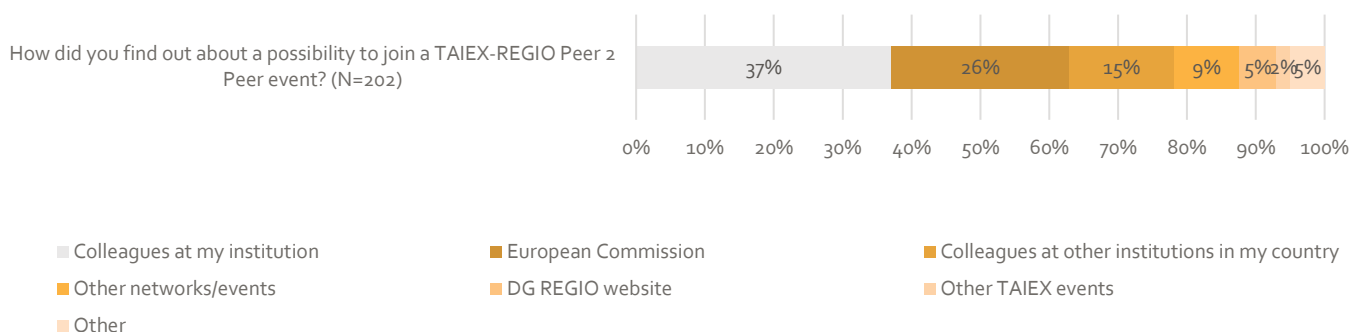
The survey results in relation to awareness of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer are split quite equally, as seen in Figure 6. Almost half of respondents indicated that TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer is well known among other institutions in their country, and 60% stated that the opportunities offered by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer are well known within their institution. In addition, lack of awareness of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer was indicated as an obstacle to participation by 124 of survey respondents – close to half. Indeed, it came second only to lack of time as an obstacle (see also Figure 10). More than half of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer participants surveyed found out about the scheme from colleagues within either their institution or their country, as seen in Figure 7. Only around a quarter found out from the European Commission (through participation in expert group meetings, workshops, etc.), and a mere 5% came across the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer website. Around 10% found out about TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer through participation in other networks and events. Several heard about the scheme from their national Managing or Coordinating Authorities.

FIGURE 6. AWARENESS OF TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER AT INSTITUTIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL



Source: PPMI survey

FIGURE 7. HOW PARTICIPANTS FOUND OUT ABOUT TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER



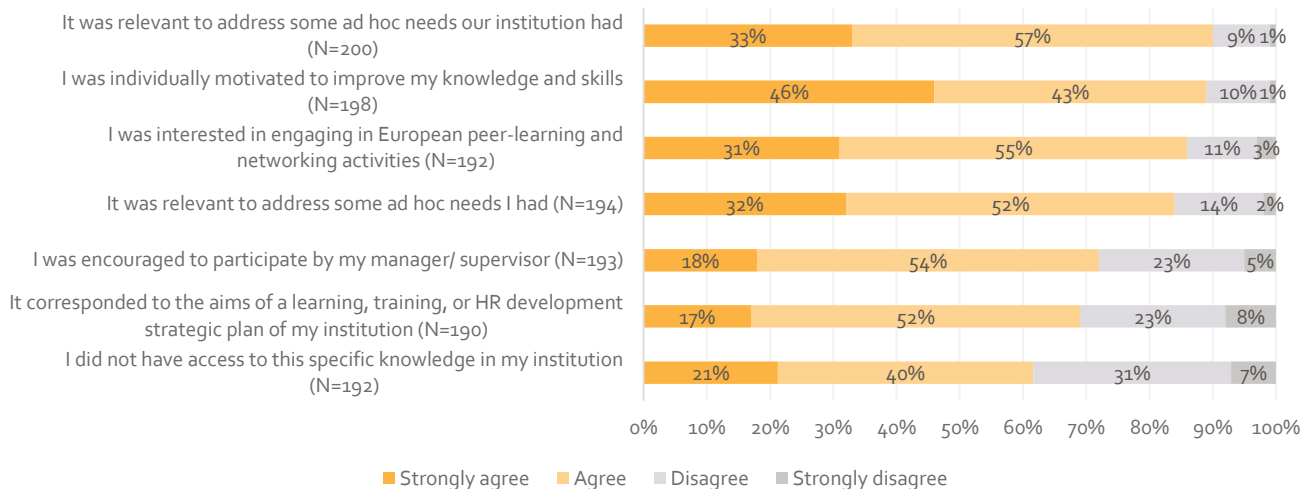
Source: PPMI survey

Interestingly, the survey results contradict the interview findings to an extent. While interview respondents indicated a lack of awareness of the scheme within their institutions, and tended to report finding out about it from the European Commission directly, the survey respondents predominantly said they found out about TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer from their colleagues. Such findings, along with persistent lack of awareness, indicate the continued importance of promoting TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer at EU-level meetings and events. However, **the scheme would also benefit from widening the scope of its promotional campaigns to a broader range of national authorities in the Member States**, given how word about TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer predominantly spreads among practitioners at their respective institutions.

Reasons and strategies to use TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer: *ad hoc* rather than strategic use and individual motivation

TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer is most frequently used to address *ad hoc* needs and issues faced by the beneficiary institutions, and which are driven by the personal initiative of practitioners rather than as a part of a larger institutional training plan or strategy. TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer applications are usually prepared on the basis of a thorough needs analysis (see Figure 9), and most of its events target very specific issues or aspects of management of the ERDF or the Cohesion Fund. **61% of survey respondents indicated that the knowledge they obtained through TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer was not available at their institution**, as shown in Figure 8. This is particularly the case with specialised institutions in smaller Member States that do not have national counterparts facing similar issues. For example, **multiple representatives of Audit Authorities indicated that cooperation with counterparts from other Member States is crucial for them, as they are the only national body managing the auditing of projects funded by the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund.** With regard to specific knowledge, the flexibility of the tool and the possibility of tailoring the agenda of a TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer event precisely to the specific (and occasionally very detailed and technical) needs of the institution was greatly appreciated by the beneficiaries.

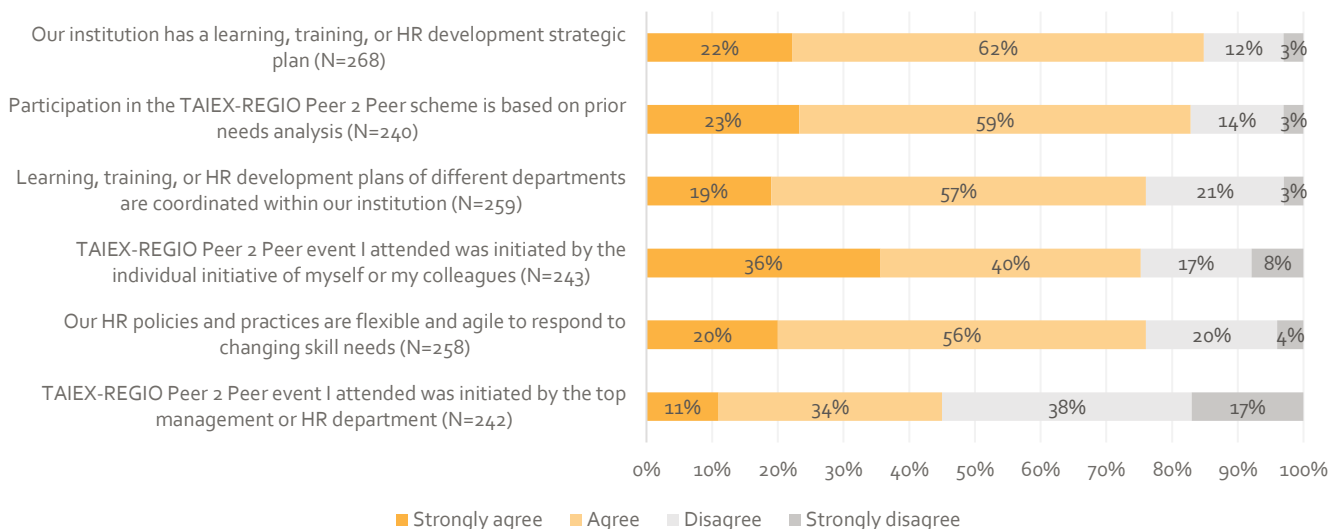
FIGURE 8. REASONS TO USE TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER AS A BENEFICIARY



Source: PPMI survey

As seen in the survey results presented in Figure 7, **personal motivation to participate in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events, such as to improve personal knowledge and skills, as well gaining the opportunity to network, appears to be stronger than institutional encouragement such as the support of a manager or the scheme’s correspondence with an HR development strategy.** This trend is also reflected in the way events are usually organised on the individual initiative of the beneficiaries, rather than as a part of the training or HR development strategies of their institutions, as seen in Figure 9. Most of the survey respondents agree that their institutions have developed training strategies, but participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer event(s) is often not part of them. The findings of our case studies, particularly those relating to study visits, also suggest that TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer is not embedded into the training and HR development plans of most of the institutions covered. Some of the most active Managing Authorities centrally organise TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events for Intermediate Bodies and other relevant authorities in their countries, but this is an exception rather than the rule. **The use of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer is strategic in the sense that it addresses precisely identified needs, but not in the sense that it is part of an institutional training strategy. It is instead an ad hoc learning opportunity with its own budget, stemming from an individual initiative rather than part of the larger learning and development plans of the institutions involved.**

FIGURE 9. STRATEGIC USE OF TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER

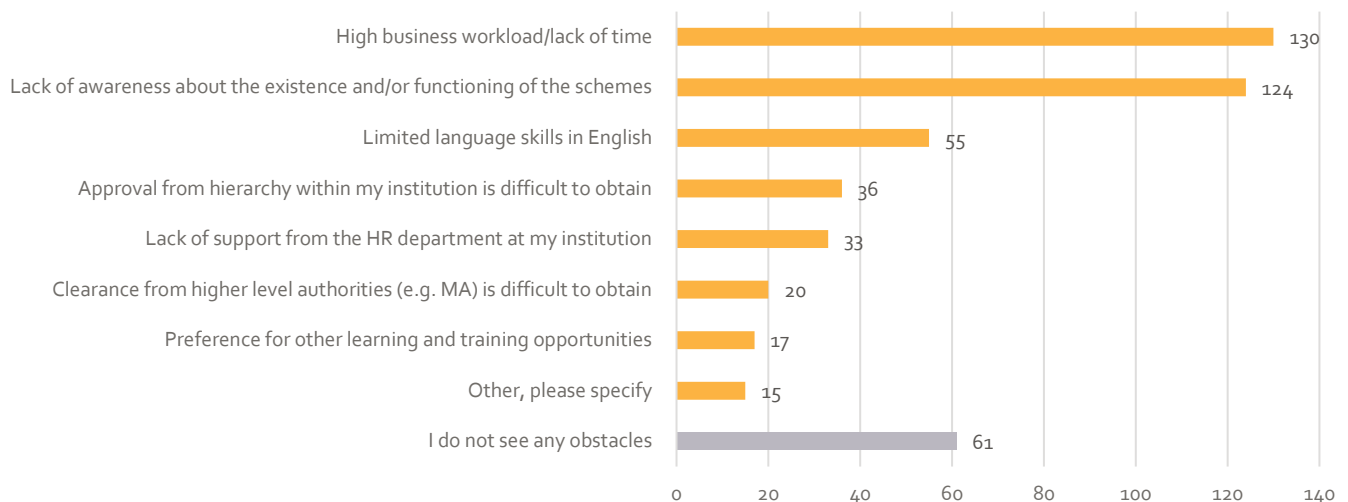


Source: PPMI survey

Main obstacles to using TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer

The main obstacles to participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events also relate to the fairly personal motivations and skills of the beneficiaries, as seen in Figure 10. The survey respondents were asked to select up to three obstacles that prevent individuals and institutions in their country from participating more actively in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer. **By far the most commonly identified problem was a lack of time due to a high workload**, closely followed by a **lack of awareness** of the opportunities that TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer offers (discussed in greater detail in the previous section). More than 50 respondents noted that English language skills also prevent potential beneficiaries from engaging more actively. Domestic barriers at institutional level, such as the difficulty of gaining approval from superiors or higher-level authorities, as well as a lack of support by HR departments, are seen as less important, with just over 30 mentions each. However, where mentioned, these obstacles appear to be significant and include beneficiaries having to take leave from their work to participate in a TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer event, or the need for approval to be granted by a central national authority, as indicated by some interviewees. Lack of approval from a hierarchy was mentioned most commonly by survey respondents from Romania (5), Lithuania (4), Croatia (3), the Netherlands (3) and Slovakia (3), while a lack of support from HR departments was reported by respondents from Croatia (5), Lithuania (4), Romania (4), the Czech Republic (3) and Slovakia (3). Among other factors, survey respondents and interviewees also mentioned limitations on the **number of participants**, particularly in the context of study visits; **limited eligibility of beneficiaries** (ESF managing and local authorities such as municipalities, or institutions that only plan to implement projects or schemes funded by the ERDF and Cohesion Fund); and the **lack of a peer learning tradition** in the public sector.

FIGURE 10. MOST COMMON OBSTACLES TO USING TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER



Source: PPMI survey

2.1.1.2 Who uses Communities of Practitioners, and how?

Key Members: significant differences between the involvement of representatives from EU13 and EU15 countries

The dataset on the key members of the CoPs was compiled using information from the 'Meet your peers' section of the CoPs blog.¹² This information was extracted on 17 March 2020¹³

In total, **CoPs involves 82 key members from 21 EU Member States. The group consists of 70 participants and 12 champions** – the latter recognised for their initiative, additional involvement and being proactive in the community. As seen in Figure 11, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland and Romania have the greatest number of participants, while three countries – Estonia, Finland and Sweden – each have only one key member in the CoPs network. **However, due to a lack of feedback from the least active Member States, the explanations as to why these differences occur are not conclusive.** Nonetheless, the desk research, interview and survey findings suggest a few possible explanations relating to a lack of knowledge, the relevance of the topics, and internal capacity. Because most participants claimed that they learned about the opportunity to join the scheme from colleagues either within their institutions or within other governing bodies at a national level, it follows that in some countries that are less involved, there may be a lack of awareness and information about these opportunities. Moreover, as observed by some participants, EU13 Member States deal more extensively with the Cohesion Fund and the ERDF – during the 2014-2020 period, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia were beneficiaries of support provided under the Cohesion Fund¹⁴. Participants in these countries may therefore be more inclined to seek information on fund management. This view was echoed by a CoPs member from one of the least active EU15 countries, who believed that a lack of activities within institutions that directly involved work and activities using the EU funds, could also help to explain the lower number of participants from their country. In addition, the engaged individuals

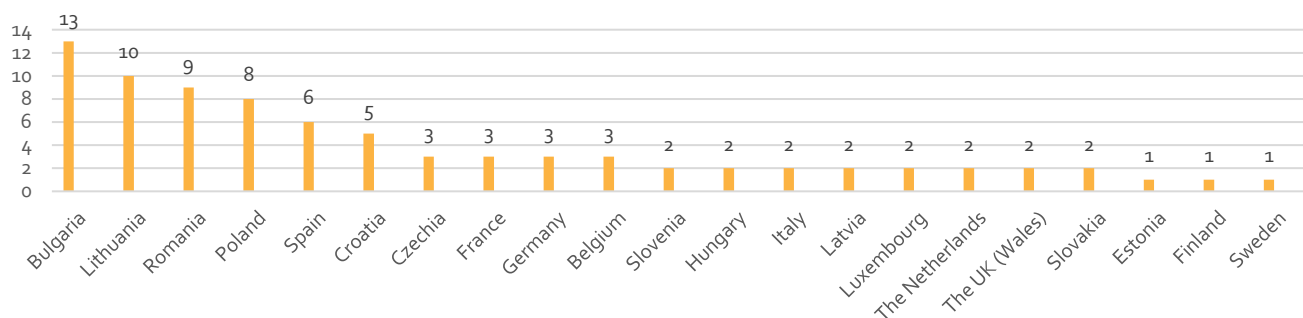
¹² <https://regiopractitioners.wordpress.com/the-communities/>

¹³ Latest data shows that there are now 155 key members in CoPs, however, the study team only monitored the data until March 2020

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/cohesion-fund/

within institutions who actively promoted these opportunities also achieved a higher level of involvement in certain countries. Respondents also mentioned that low or non-existent participation in neighbouring countries with the most similar institutional structure and legal framework is another factor behind lower participation rates in their country. In some cases, EU15 countries were observed to have greater capacity to solve existing issues at a national level, due to a more extensive experience working in the field. However, these explanations are somewhat limited due to a lack of data from countries that are not very actively involved in the activities of CoPs and, therefore, can only partially account for differences in participation between the Member States.

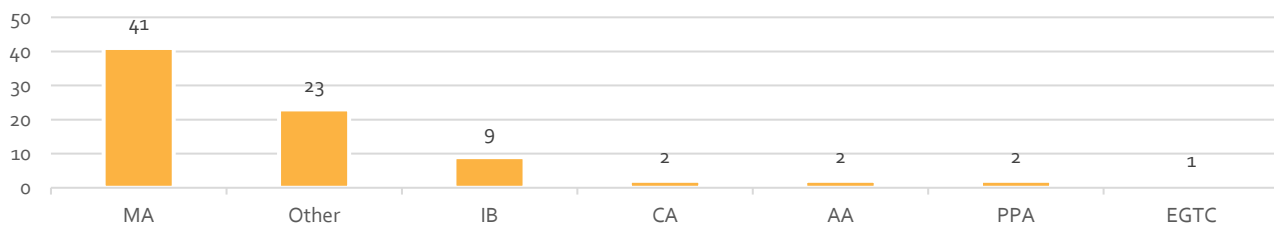
FIGURE 11. KEY MEMBERS OF THE CoPs BY COUNTRY



Source: prepared by PPMI based on CoPs blog

Key members of the CoPs come from a variety of institutions and organisations with different roles in managing ERDF and Cohesion Funds. It is evident that **Managing Authorities are the most frequently represented, with over half of the members coming from MAs**. Slightly less than a third of members, however, come from institutions that do not fall into any of the recognised categories, mostly because their role in the management of ERDF and CF funding is indirect or difficult to determine. **These results are unsurprising, because this tool has been designed to address issues arising primarily at the level of MAs and IBs. Therefore, it explains why the majority of participants come from these two types of institutions.** Figure 12 shows the types of institutions represented by the members of CoPs.

FIGURE 12. CoPs MEMBERS BY TYPE OF INSTITUTION

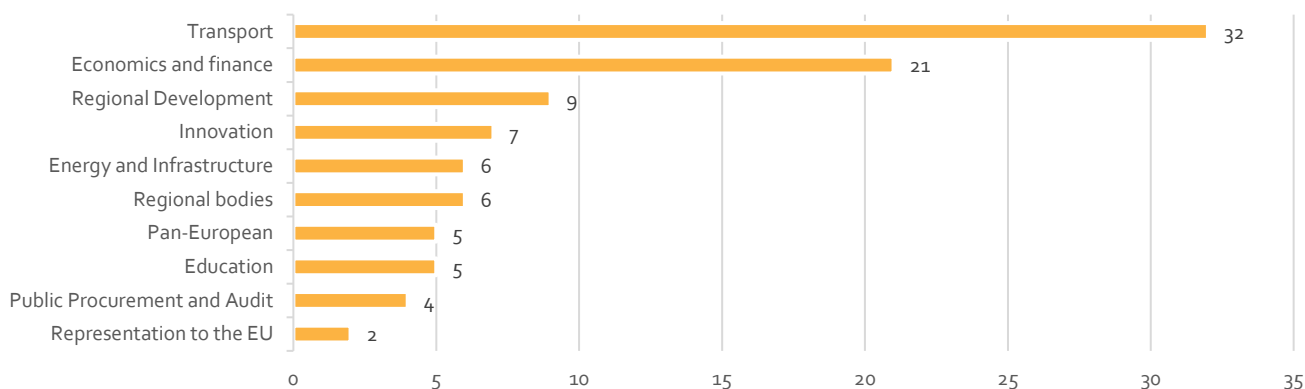


Source: prepared by PPMI based on CoPs blog

The key members of CoPs represent various sectors and thematic activities. Around 40% of all members come from the transport sector and/or are closely affiliated with the field of transport. A quarter of all members represent the field of economics and finance, whereas one in ten members works in regional development. It is important to note that the thematic activities of a participant do not necessarily reflect the thematic field of the institution they represent, but rather their specific activities at work with certain projects and topics. This data has been extracted from the profiles of CoPs key members – the information provided contains the areas of activity outlined by each

member and the institutions/organisations they represent¹⁵. Figure 13 depicts the sectoral distribution of the key CoPs members.

FIGURE 13. KEY CoPs MEMBERS BY SECTOR/AREA



Source: prepared by PPMI, based on CoPs blog

Champions: various countries and institutions are represented, but their role is not completely clear

In theory, champions are CoPs members who demonstrate additional initiative and commitment to its activities. They also provide support in organising these activities by undertaking a variety of assignments and employing their expertise to facilitate and foster the successful functioning of the CoPs community. As well as this, champions also assist with tasks such as improving or creating new tools for **monitoring state aid using state aid maps. Any of the key members may volunteer to become champions. Currently, there are 12 champions from eight countries** – Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom. Seven countries are represented by one champion each, while Poland is represented by four champions.

Nevertheless, **the precise role of champions is not yet clearly defined and established in practice**, because it is not assigned but rather acquired by the initiative of the participants themselves. Some champions actively partake in events organised under CoPs, and also lead various assignments. For example, they may contribute to co-creating the agenda and methodology of workshops, checking the interest of their authorities in taking part or hosting workshops, ensuring compliance with TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer requirements, receiving the necessary approvals, managing logistics and coordination for the event, promoting activities both internally and externally, working closely with the Community Manager to attain the objectives of the scheme, etc. **Other champions do not engage to the same extent, making the title of “champion” somewhat relative.**

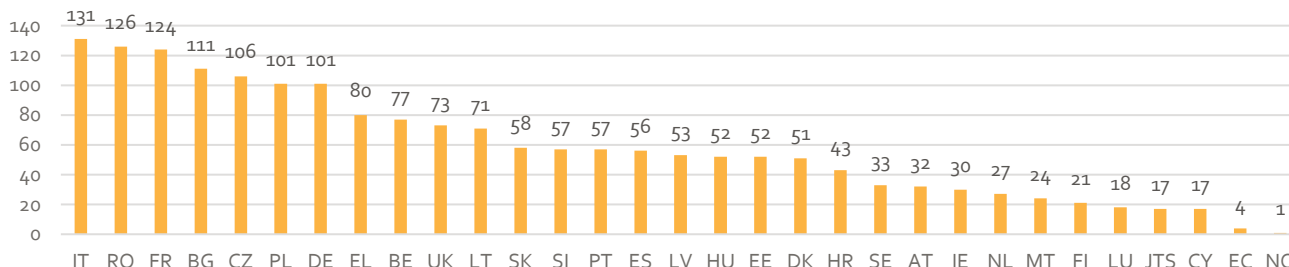
Other CoPs members are involved more passively

As discussed above, the three groups of CoPs users are all included in the mailing list. The **list itself consists of over 1,800 users** – champions and key members, who are the most active participants, make up only a fraction of all members, meaning that the third group of CoPs users is the largest. This group of participants are mostly passive recipients of the newsletter, and typically do not engage with events organised under the scheme. Specific characteristics of their involvement are the most

¹⁵ <https://regiopractitioners.wordpress.com/meet-your-peers/>

difficult to identify, due to a lack of information about the ways in which they engage with the scheme and use the information they receive in their work.

FIGURE 14. CoPs MAILING LIST MEMBERS BY COUNTRY



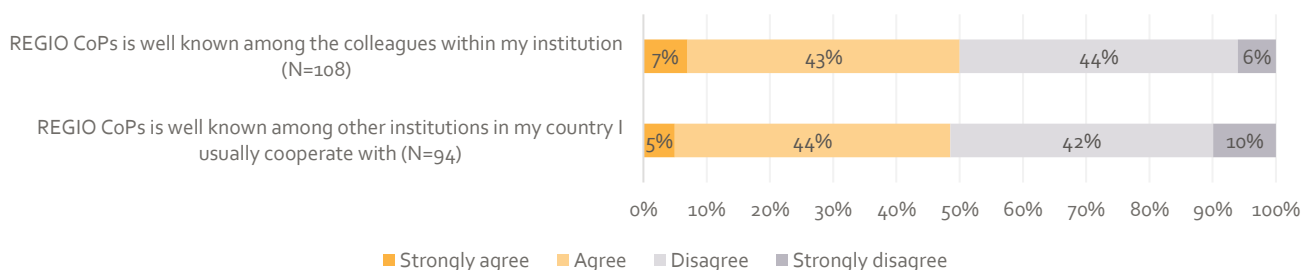
Note: JTS – Joint Technical Secretariat; EC – European Commission

Source: data submitted by DG REGIO

Awareness about the CoPs is lacking

Various platforms and tools used to promote activities under the CoPs and to introduce practitioners to the functioning of the scheme in general. Despite this, **evidence suggests that awareness is still limited** – more than half of survey respondents indicated that CoPs is not well known among colleagues within their institutions and within the other institutions in their countries with which they tend to work. Interview findings also indicate that the awareness is still not as widespread as it could be, and external communication efforts to support more extensive involvement are lacking. Aside from broader dissemination strategies to inform and attract potential users, targeted *ad hoc* dissemination is also carried out to increase participation in specific events and involvement on certain topics that lack sufficient interest. However, these **promotional activities have also been relatively sporadic thus far**. Attempts to foster more active external communication by the practitioners themselves have also been inconsistent. For example, plans have not yet been fully implemented to create unified guidelines for champions to use in advising how to disseminate information about the CoPs. **In addition, over 40% of survey respondents maintained that a lack of awareness about the scheme’s existence in general, and about its functioning specifically, was one of the most substantial barriers preventing individuals and institutions from the respondents’ countries from joining the scheme.**

FIGURE 15. AWARENESS OF CoPs

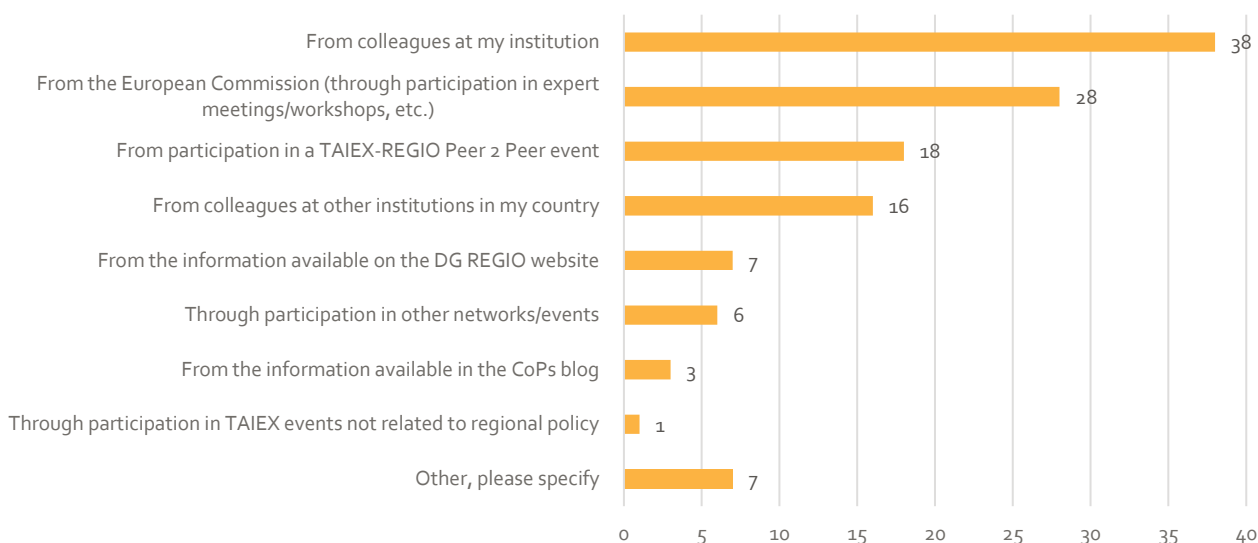


Source: PPMI survey

The majority of current CoPs members reported that they found out about opportunities join the scheme either through colleagues within their institutions, or through other institutions in their country or the European Commission. In countries where awareness of

the scheme was higher, participants were usually invited to join CoPs by colleagues from their own institution or other relevant institutions (Managing Authorities, Audit Authorities, Intermediate Bodies, etc.). Some people, on the other hand, found out about these opportunities from the Commission – whether by receiving the DG REGIO newsletter, being directly invited by the Commission to share their expertise at an event, or taking part in the EU Policy Lab from which the scheme originated. Others found out about the opportunity to join after participating in other events organised under TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, at which they either received information from the Commission or from peers already involved in the scheme. Figure 16 below illustrates the ways of becoming involved in CoPs.

FIGURE 16. WAYS OF BECOMING INVOLVED IN CoPs



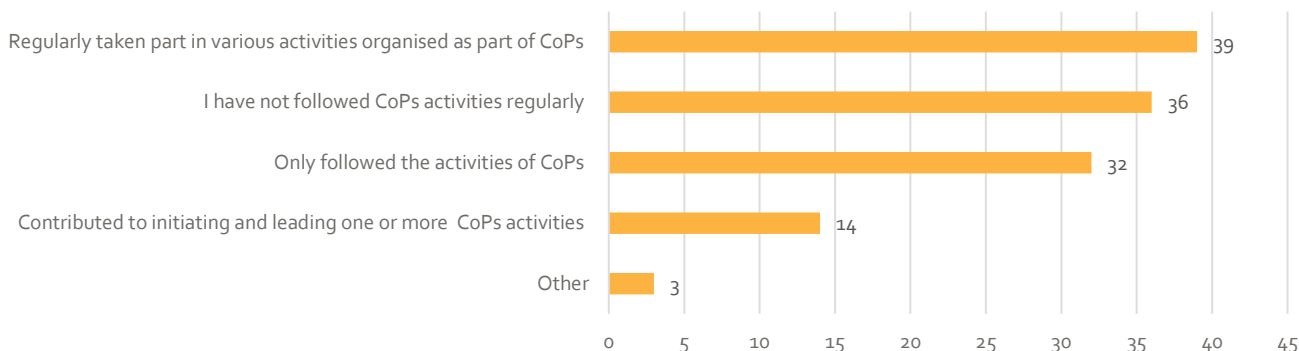
Source: PPMI survey

Involvement of participants

As discussed in the previous paragraphs, the engagement and involvement of CoPs members vary – while the mailing list includes over 1,800 persons, the **majority of them only receive information about the CoPs** via newsletters, rather than by actively participating in activities organised under the CoPs scheme either via physical and online events or by using the digital tools discussed in the upcoming chapters. The main trend in participation is therefore that **most CoPs users are passive receivers of the knowledge and outputs generated under the scheme, rather than being proactive producers of such outputs and knowledge.**

With regard to their involvement in CoPs activities in general, almost a third of CoPs users who responded to the survey reported that they have taken part regularly in various activities over the last two years. One in 10 respondents said they had contributed to leading or initiating one or more CoPs activities. However, almost 30% of respondents said they do not follow activities regularly (see Figure 17). The **differing needs and objectives of participants could partly explain this**; for example, participants with particular *ad hoc* needs may not follow activities regularly, and only pick up on those relevant to their pursuits. Similarly, not all members may wish to initiate activities if they are satisfied with the supply and coverage of existing ones. In addition, a considerable number of members indicated that a lack of time had prevented them from engaging more frequently.

FIGURE 17. INVOLVEMENT IN CoPs ACTIVITIES



Source: PPMI survey.

Note: This figure includes absolute numbers rather than percentages, due to the data being likely to be over-represent active members who initiated and participated in the activities, as these members are also more likely to respond to the survey.

Looking at the survey findings, it is evident that the **majority of members have not been involved in activities organised under this scheme very consistently**. A third of respondents said that they did not attend any physical workshops, and more than half said they has not joined any online webinars, even though interviewees indicated that webinars are more accessible and re less time-consuming. This could be explained by the narrower focus of webinars and the more significant number of in-depth discussions and better networking opportunities available at physical workshops. Nonetheless, when interpreting this data on participation in events, it is crucial to note the number of physical workshops and webinars organised. So far, there have been 10 workshops (another four were postponed due to the ongoing pandemic); 10 preparatory online webinars; two online peer coaching sessions; six online Live Communities sessions; and 18 online webinars. Lastly, three meetings have taken place with the European Commission (both online and physical). Figure 18 below provides an overview of the number of events in which respondents took part, by event type and by the number of events attended.

FIGURE 18. INVOLVEMENT IN CoPs EVENTS



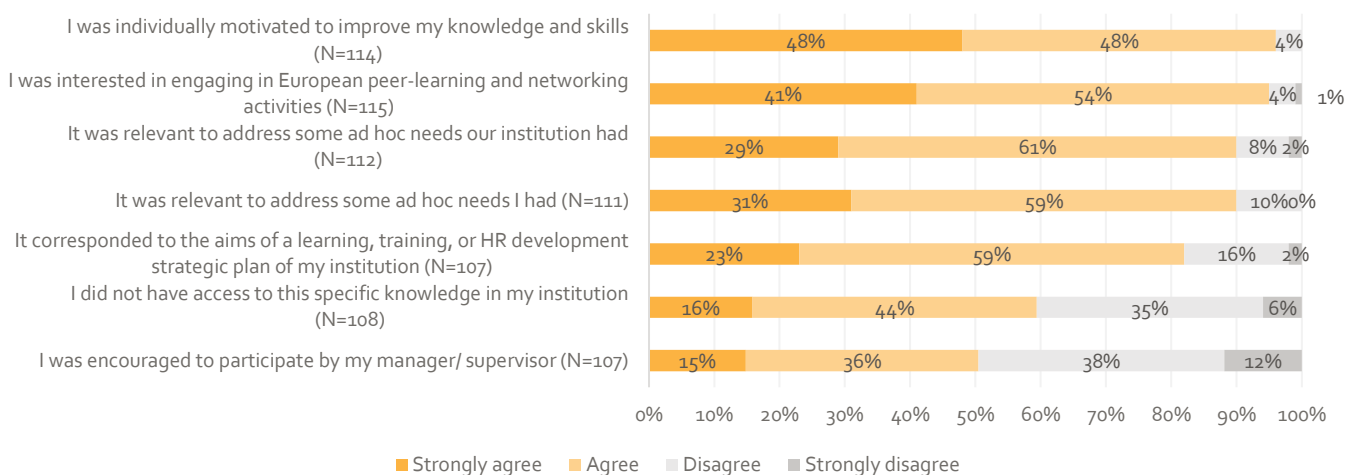
Source: PPMI survey

Participants are motivated to join CoPs to gain knowledge and for networking

In general, members of CoPs indicated numerous reasons why they were motivated to get involved in the activities of CoPs. However, the **survey and interview findings highlight two principal motivations: filling knowledge gaps, and networking opportunities**. First, the majority of participants were seeking to improve and expand their practical knowledge and expertise on topics

relating to their everyday work within their institutions. Almost all survey participants gave this as their primary motivation, with half strongly agreeing that they were individually motivated to improve their knowledge and skills. Second, a significant share of members also identified *ad hoc* needs and challenges in their work with fund management at both an individual and an institutional level, which they felt could be addressed within the framework of CoPs. This was particularly relevant in cases where practitioners were unable to access this information at institutional or even national level. Moreover, many participants were also initially attracted by the networking opportunities available within the scheme – a significant share of members wanted to expand their network and engage with fellow practitioners at a European level. They believed that participating in a European-level initiative allowed them either to share their concerns with other participants, or to receive affirmation and reassurance that they were on the right track in solving specific issues. It is evident from the survey and interview findings that the vast **majority of participants were driven by individual motivation to join CoPs** rather than by external factors – approximately half of participants claimed they were encouraged to participate by their manager/supervisor, as opposed to the 96% who claimed they were motivated individually.

FIGURE 19. MOTIVATION TO JOIN CoPs



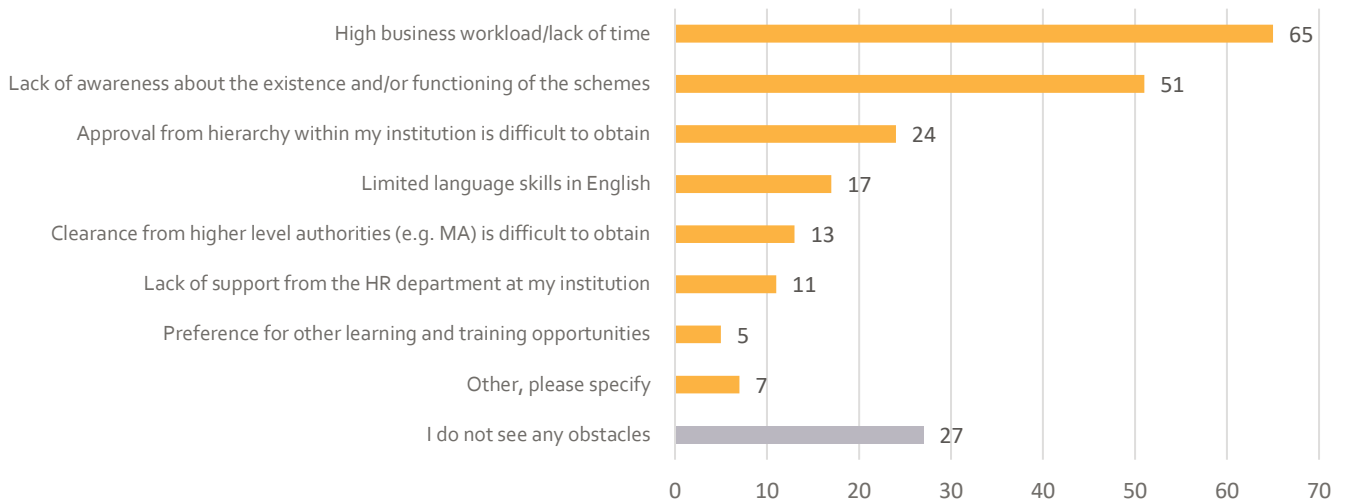
Source: PPMI survey

The primary motivation for practitioners not only to join, but also to continue using the scheme, was to both broaden and deepen knowledge that feeds directly into their daily work and processes. A few members highlighted that activities organised under this scheme allowed them to gain practical and targeted knowledge, which they found accessible and were able to adapt for use in their daily assignments. A few members also added that their participation in CoPs provided more opportunities to interact directly with the Commission, which is essential for legal certainty and validation. It was also emphasised by some participants that the thematic coverage of CoPs is one of their main assets – here, they highlighted the scheme’s bottom-up approach, as well as its flexibility and the variety of topics discussed at CoPs events and online.

Despite identifying many motivating factors that encourage participants to join the scheme, survey respondents also highlighted **some considerable external barriers that, in their opinion, could limit participation**. The main shortcoming identified by respondents was a **high business workload and a lack of time** stemming from it. More than half of respondents indicated this barrier as relevant. Another issue, also discussed above, was a **lack of awareness about the existence and the functioning of the scheme**, which reduced the number of potential participants. Finally, one-fifth of respondents also reported that **approval from the hierarchy within their institution**

was difficult to obtain. According to the case study, this issue stems from both a high business workload in everyday tasks as well as a lack of awareness about the potential benefits of the scheme, which may have an impact in terms of reservations on the part of management.

FIGURE 20. MAIN OPERATIONAL OBSTACLES TO USING CoPs

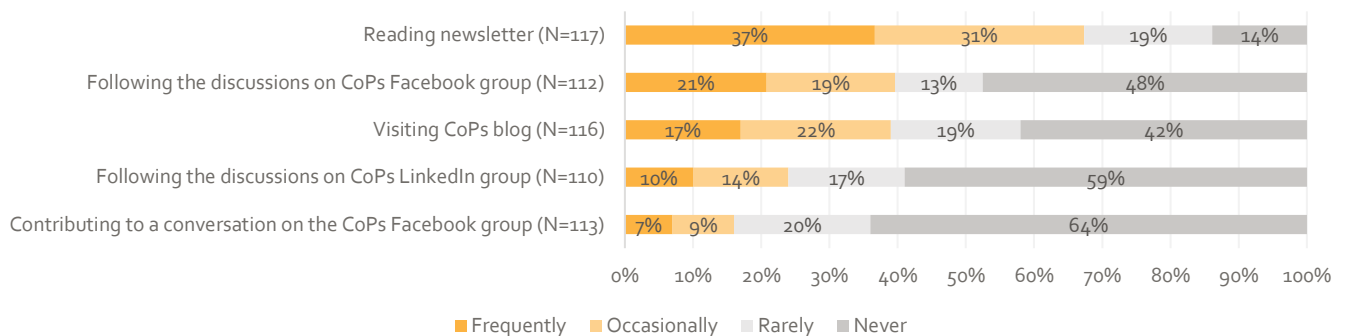


Source: PPMI survey

Significant difference between the CoPs tools used by the participants

Aside from physical and online events, CoPs use a set of tools to help nurture relations during the periods between events, as well as to extend discussions, update information, and arrange organisational matters. These tools include Facebook and LinkedIn groups, a blog and a newsletter. As shown in Figure 21 below, the **most popular tool among members is the newsletter**; the vast majority of participants agreed that the newsletter is an essential tool for attaining the goals of the CoPs. This is unsurprising, given that the newsletter is the most accessible tool for communication, reaches participants directly via email and summarising the most relevant information in one place. The **least popular activity among the tools used was actively contributing to conversations on Facebook**.

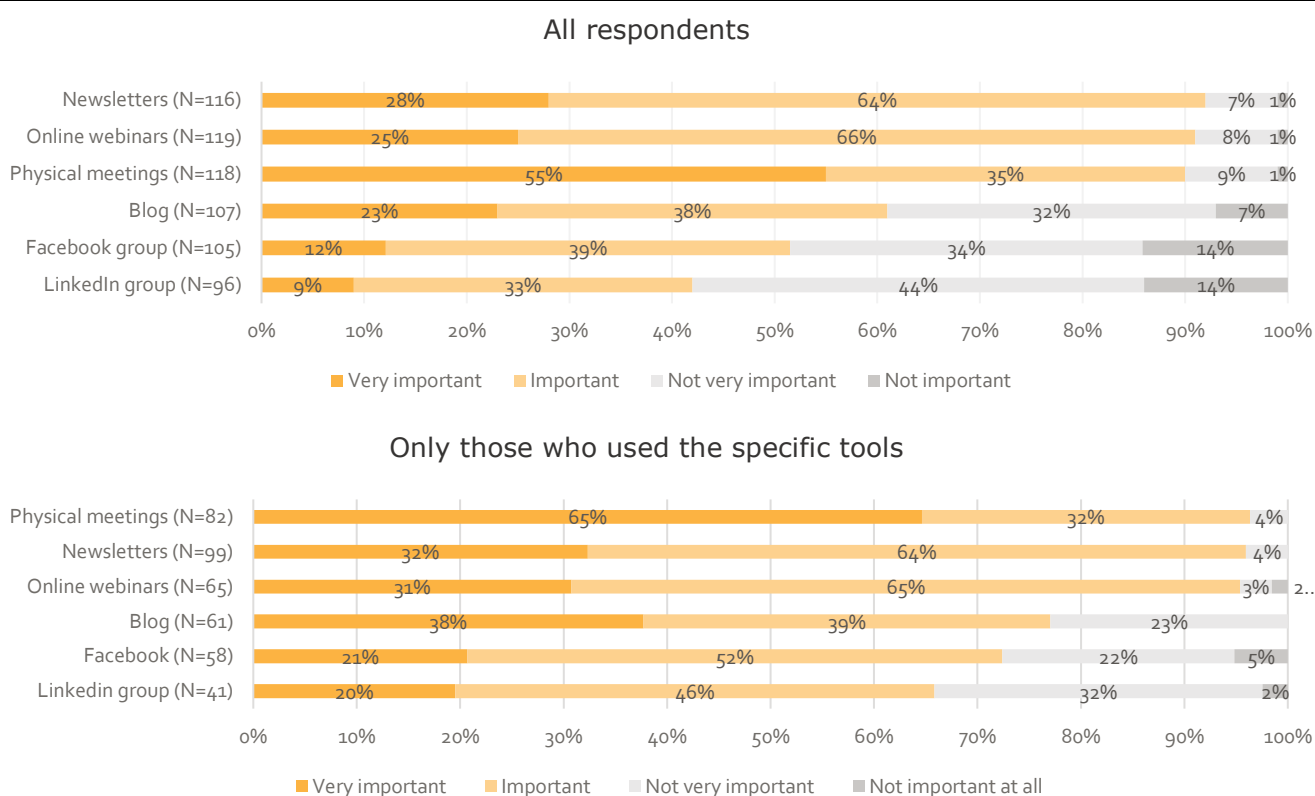
FIGURE 21. USAGE OF TOOLS



Source: PPMI survey

When asked to assess the importance of the various events and communication tools used by the CoPs scheme, users of CoPs evidently perceived **physical meetings and online webinars as either 'very important' or 'important' to the implementation of CoPs**. The **newsletter was reported to be the most useful communication tool**, while LinkedIn was regarded as the least essential tool for conducting CoPs activities. Figure 22 below illustrates the frequency with which each of the tools is used. When the answers of only those survey respondents who actually used the specific tools are aggregated, the prioritisation of tools remains the same, but they are more positive about their importance.

FIGURE 22. IMPORTANCE OF TOOLS



Source: PPMI survey

2.1.1.3 Who are the experts and the host institutions, and what is their link to the scheme?

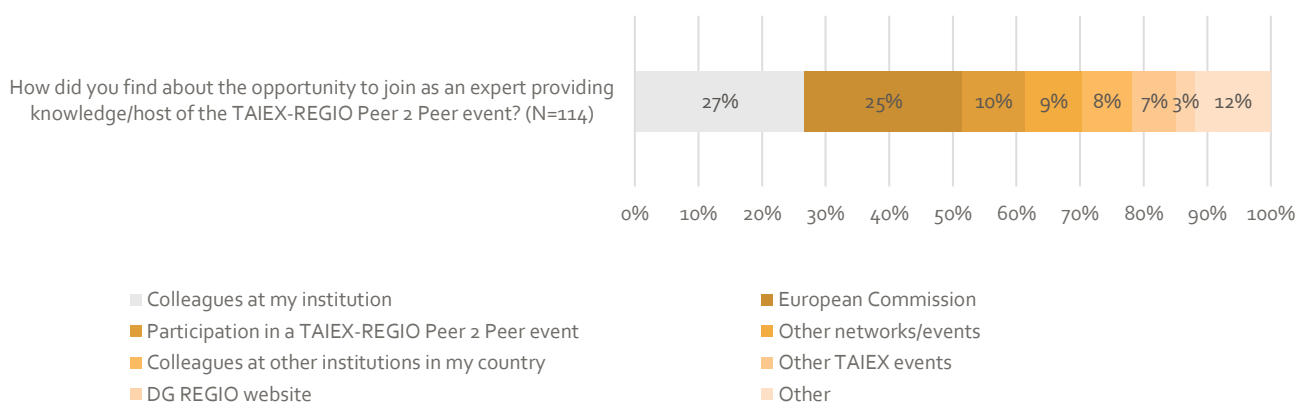
As already discussed in section 2.1.1.1, the **majority of host institutions and experts come from the most active countries in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer (Poland, Romania, Lithuania), as well as from EU15 countries** which have extensive experience in the management of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund but do not frequently participate as beneficiaries, such as Germany, the UK or the Netherlands (see Figure 3 for details). In mid-2019, 319 individual experts were registered on the TAIEX-REGIO Experts Database (EDB). The majority came from Italy (36), Romania (34) and Croatia (33), followed by Slovenia, Poland and Lithuania with 20 or more experts each. Cyprus, Ireland and Estonia were represented by only two experts each.¹⁶ These numbers do not precisely reflect the distribution of the origins of experts in the TAIEX REGIO online library, since not all

¹⁶ Source: Interim Report on TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, September 2019

registered experts are approached by DG REGIO or any beneficiaries, and others participate in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events without being part of the EDB. Furthermore, event evaluations conducted by DG REGIO reveal **high overall satisfaction with the experts on the part of the beneficiaries**. 89% of expert mission participants, and an overwhelming 98% of study visit beneficiaries, were satisfied with the hosts or experts of their respective events.¹⁷

Like the beneficiaries of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events, most **experts and host institutions find out about the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer scheme from colleagues in their institution or from the EC** (see Figure 23 and Figure 7 for comparison). Almost one-fifth of the experts surveyed found out about TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer through participation in another or TAIEX or similar event, indicating that a substantial number of experts engage in peer learning or training activities repeatedly. Only 3% of experts first encountered the opportunity through the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer website.

FIGURE 23. HOW HOSTS/EXPERTS FIND OUT ABOUT TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER

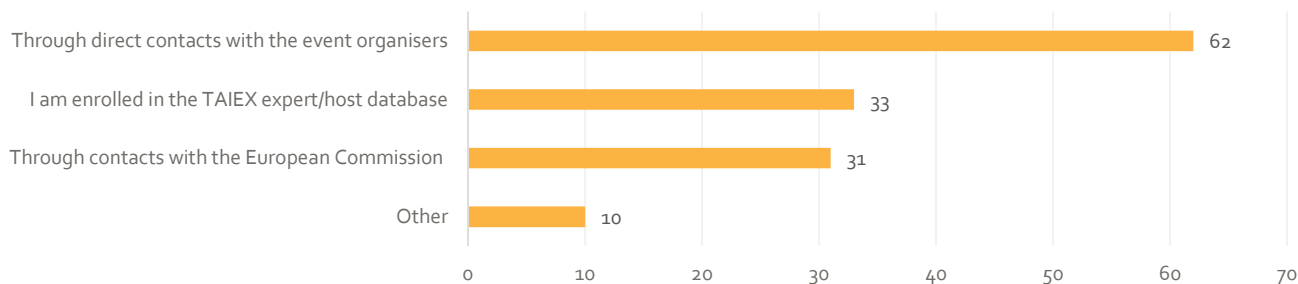


Source: PPMI survey

A large share of experts, both surveyed and interviewed, indicated that they were approached directly by the beneficiaries of the event prior to their participation, rather than by DG REGIO (see Figure 24). Many beneficiaries also indicated that they knew the experts they wanted to invite or visit beforehand, as a result of other meetings or networks. Only in half as many instances were the experts approached by the European Commission, or indicated that they were enrolled in the EDB. These results show that **there is a strong preference by beneficiaries for experts who are personally known from other events or contexts, rather than relying on DG REGIO to conduct matchmaking and assign experts**. The beneficiaries noted that this is mostly due to the fact that it is quicker and easier to approach someone if you know them personally, and know that they will be able to provide exactly the expertise you need, rather than relying on DG REGIO to find and propose options.

¹⁷ Source: online evaluations of expert missions and study visits, 2015-2020

FIGURE 24. HOW EXPERTS WERE INVITED TO JOIN A TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER EVENT

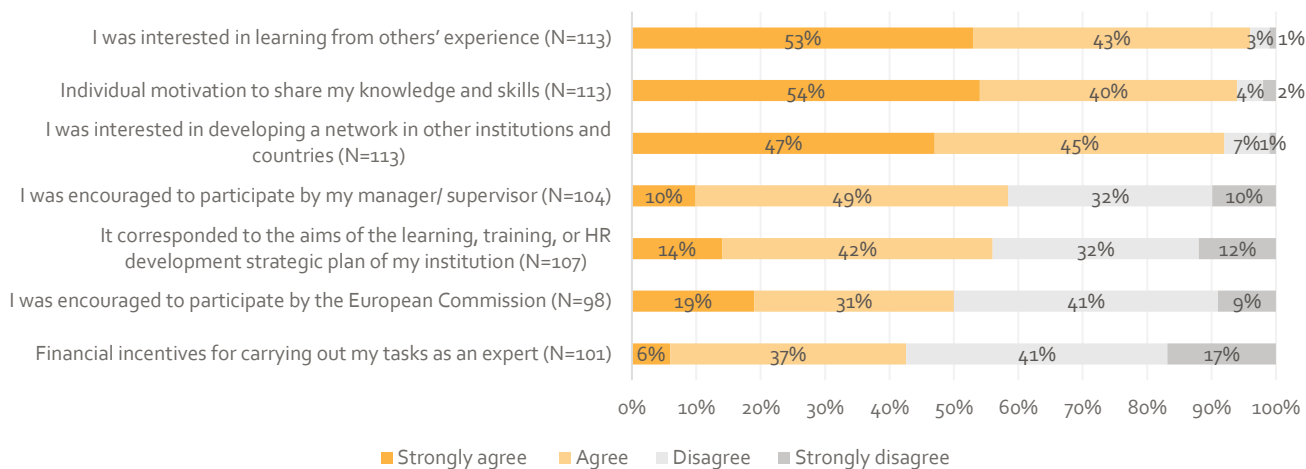


Source: PPMI survey

Based on the survey results, experts enrolled in the EDB on average received 2.6 requests to host or participate in an event. However, experts’ responses range between zero and 10, indicating some level of path-dependency and that personal networks play a major role in the demand for certain experts. The interviews supported this observation, with some interviewees indicating that they had been approached by potential beneficiaries and the EC repeatedly since the first event in which they took part, while others had not received any personal requests aside from the regular newsletters, despite being enrolled in the EDB. These observations indicate that **the functionality and the usefulness of the EDB could be increased**. Ensuring that a wider circle of experts receive regular personal approaches, or creating an open database that is accessible to potential beneficiaries, could potentially improve its functionality.

As is the case with beneficiaries, **experts are mostly drawn to participate in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events by personal motivation** (see Figure 25). They wish to share their knowledge and are interested in learning from others and in networking opportunities, rather than being motivated by their institution, the EC or financial incentives. These responses are largely in line with the opinions of the experts interviewed. The majority stated that they were only approached initially by the EC, if at all, and otherwise received requests to host or act as an expert at an event through personal contacts with the beneficiaries. While some institutions encourage the participation of their employees as experts in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events as a means of networking and image-building, both among the other Member States and with the EC, other experts indicated that they had to take holidays to attend such engagements, purely out of their personal interest. **The experts mostly identify professional acknowledgement, the opportunity to stay up to date and structure their knowledge and – most importantly – a learning opportunity, as the main incentives to participate in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events.**

FIGURE 25. MOTIVATION TO JOIN TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER AS A HOST OR EXPERT



Source: PPMI survey

2.1.2. Are the schemes implemented in line with their guiding principles?

2.1.2.1 Is TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer implemented in line with its guiding principles?

The guiding principles behind TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer are that the scheme should be **rapid, light, flexible, tailor-made and quality controlled**, providing quick, to-the-point and practical solutions to the problems faced by beneficiary institutions. The findings of both the survey and the interviews indicate that, **with a few exceptions and common issues, the scheme is implemented in line with these principles.**

Survey respondents were asked to freely indicate three keywords they associate with the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer scheme. Based on the keywords that were mentioned three times or more, the users tend to describe TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer using positive adjectives that either directly overlap or are largely in line with the guiding principles of the scheme. The larger the keyword appears in Figure 26, the more frequently it was mentioned by the participants. For instance, 'interesting' came up 11 times; 'knowledge' was mentioned nine times; and 'flexible', 'professional', 'sharing' and 'useful' were each used to describe TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer in seven instances. While terms such as 'badly communicated' or 'disappointing' also appeared in the list of adjectives, all keywords that were repeated more than twice had a positive connotation, potentially indicating a high level of user satisfaction.

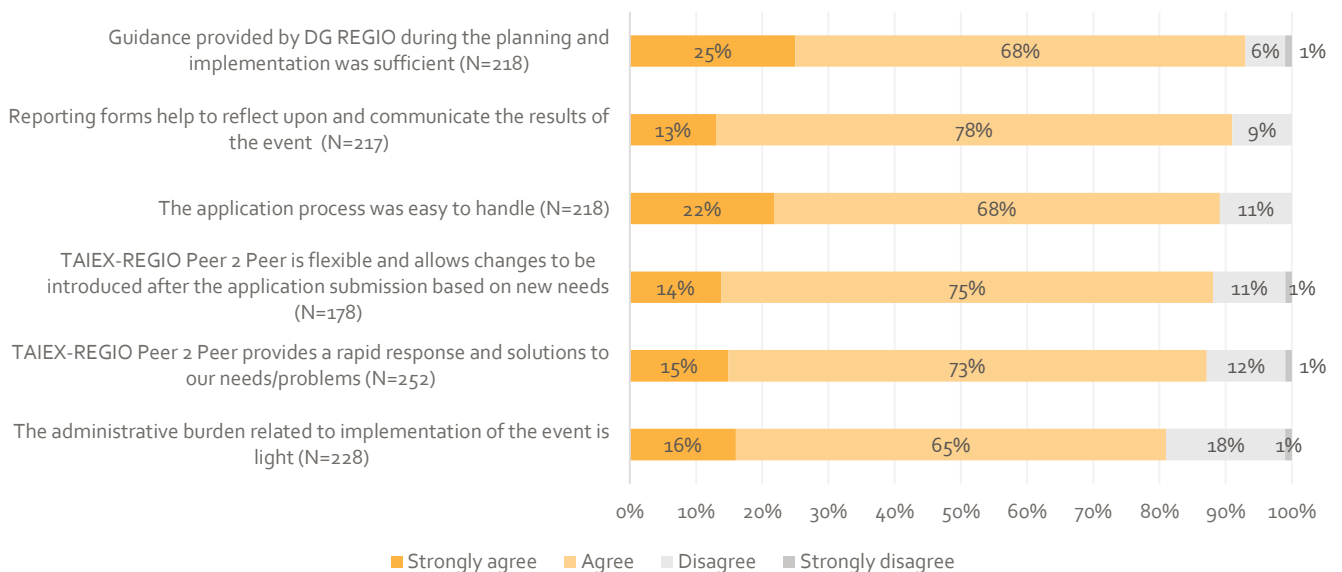
FIGURE 26. KEYWORDS MOST COMMONLY USED TO DESCRIBE TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER



Source: PPMI survey

Overall, most TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer users are satisfied with the implementation and functioning of the schemes. A large share of survey respondents agreed that the scheme functions according to its guiding principles (see Figure 27), and did not perceive any difficulties in relation to the implementation of the schemes (see Figure 28).

FIGURE 27. FUNCTIONING OF TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER ACCORDING TO ITS GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Source: PPMI survey

The vast majority of survey respondents agreed that TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer provided a **rapid response and solutions to their needs** and problems (see Figure 27). The participants

interviewed also underlined that **communication with DG REGIO and TAIEX officials on organisational matters was swift and uncomplicated**. Only some of the events took a long time to organise due the beneficiary requesting expertise on a specific topic, or not indicating a specific expert who then had to be identified by DG REGIO. **Difficulties in finding qualified experts** were also reported by 71 survey respondents, and rank as the second most pressing problem in the implementation of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events (see Figure 28). In addition to the issues shown in the figure, several interviewees indicated that finding a timeslot to organise the exchange that suits both beneficiary and host institution or expert was noted to have taken months on some occasions.

The majority of survey respondents regarded the administrative burden relating to the implementation of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events as light, the application process easy to handle, and the reporting forms helpful for reflecting upon the results of the event. However, several participants felt that the two evaluation forms, which have to be filled out immediately after the event and after six months, combined with the paperwork relating to preparing the application, were burdensome. The hosts indicated that preparing a study visit agenda of good quality took considerable effort, which was not sufficiently remunerated in their opinion. Moreover, several representatives of host institutions suggested better screening of applications, as in some cases it appeared that the beneficiaries were more interested in the opportunity to travel and spend time abroad rather than in learning about the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund.

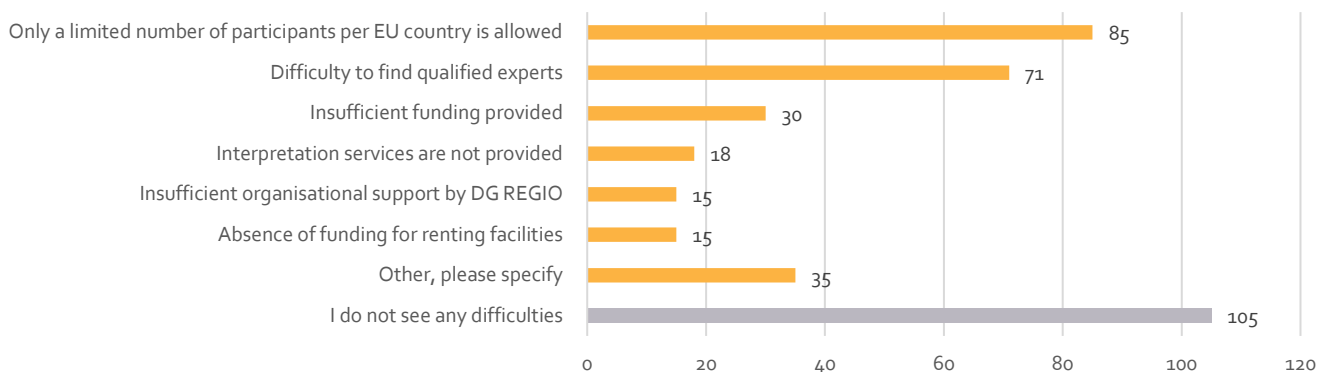
With regard to the flexibility of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, most survey respondents and interviewees agreed that the scheme allowed, where necessary, numerous and even last-minute adjustments to the agenda, to better tailor the event to the needs of the beneficiary and the expertise of the host. However, several respondents, particularly experts and hosts of events, noted that the timelines set by the EC for preparation were rigid and short. Multiple beneficiaries criticised the inflexibility regarding the maximum number of three participants per study visit, which was also identified by survey respondents as the main difficulty in implementing TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events (see Figure 28). It was argued that increasing the number of participants slightly would still allow the beneficiaries and the hosts to actively interact with each other, but that the beneficiary institution could take away more knowledge, and the efforts put into the preparation by the host institution would pay off better. The duration of events was occasionally considered too short, especially in the case of shorter expert missions, which last one or two days.

Along with obstacles to participation, the participants surveyed and interviewed indicated a number of needs that remain unmet by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer. Several respondents identified a lack of involvement by representatives of DG REGIO or the EC, both in matchmaking between beneficiaries and potential experts, as well as during the events themselves or the preparation of the agenda. With regard to matchmaking, several beneficiaries indicated that this process occasionally takes a long time, or that they were not entirely satisfied with the expert proposed by the EC. Regarding the EC's involvement in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events, participants acknowledged that this would go against the purpose of peer to peer exchanges, but noted that in some exceptional cases, greater involvement by the EC would be desirable, either in developing the agenda or at the event itself. Such cases mostly concerned events dealing with novel schemes or instruments, about which neither the hosts nor the beneficiaries possess in-depth expertise. Concerns were expressed that instead of learning from best practice, participants might actually reinforce each other's faulty practices. Targeted guidance from EC experts could mitigate this issue.

From an organisational point of view, lack of financial support and assistance from DG REGIO over organisational matters, such as funding for renting facilities or providing

interpretation services, were not widely seen as issues by the survey respondents (see Figure 28). Several hosts and experts noted that remuneration could be higher for the efforts they put into preparing and delivering a study visit or an expert mission. Furthermore, some beneficiaries noted that greater flexibility could be given to the host and the beneficiary institutions in arranging the practicalities of an event such as travel, accommodation or venues. Allowing the local participating institutions greater freedom to make these arrangements could help to cut costs and result in more convenient arrangements than those centrally planned from Brussels by the TAIEX office.

FIGURE 28. MAIN DIFFICULTIES RELATING TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER EXCHANGES



Source: PPMI survey

2.1.2.2 Are CoPs implemented in line with their guiding principles?

The fundamental principles that guide the implementation of CoPs are autonomy, a horizontal structure and the co-creation of tools and solutions. To assess whether the perceptions of users match these key principles, survey respondents were asked to indicate three adjectives that they associate with the scheme in an open question (they were given no pre-selected adjectives to refer to). The results are presented in Figure 29, which contains all the keywords that were mentioned three times or more. The larger a keyword appears in the figure, the more frequently it was mentioned by participants. **The results indicate that the impressions of users largely correspond with the guiding principles behind the scheme.** While the main words that participants associated the scheme with were mostly related to the content and operational aspects of the scheme - 'useful', 'knowledge', 'interesting', 'flexible', 'open', 'cooperative', 'tailored', 'sharing' and 'network' were also among the most popular keywords chosen by the participants. These sentiments were also echoed by interviewees who generally tended to describe CoPs as 'helpful', 'interactive' and as a 'place for problem solving'.

FIGURE 29. ADJECTIVES MOST COMMONLY USED TO DESCRIBE CoPs

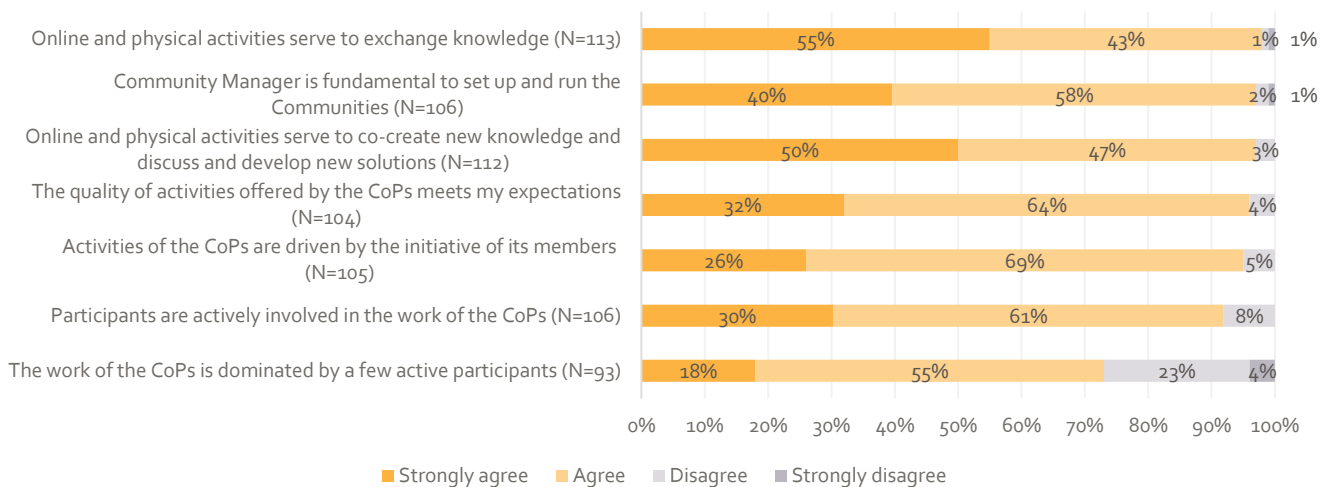


Source: PPMI survey

Horizontal structure. Findings from the case study and the survey indicate that **CoPs members tend to agree that participation is relatively well balanced**, with all participants given equal opportunities and being encouraged both to share their experience and to seek expertise from other members within the scheme. Many participants noticed that by design, CoPs operates under such conditions that allow every participant to make valuable contributions, regardless of their prior involvement in the activities and their experience with fund management. Some participants observed that because everyone had to make presentations at the events they attended, it levelled the playing field for all participants. As well as this, no significant differences were perceived by members between champions and other participants – while most champions were heavily engaged in leading and organising activities, that did not automatically mean that they dominated or overshadowed the discussions. This was also fairly evident during the participant observation.

Autonomy. An overwhelming majority claimed that the **initiative of members is what drives the activities of the CoPs** –interviewees also reiterated the prevalence of this feature of the scheme. Moreover, it was also highlighted as one of the scheme’s main advantages, making it stand out from other training or administrative capacity building efforts. While the **Community Manager fosters and facilitates the functioning of the communities, it was highlighted that the bottom-up approach encourages participants to shape the activities themselves**. Despite this generally positive outlook, however, it is crucial to consider certain other findings from the case study and survey. First, it was mentioned that the **thematic coverage is somewhat too narrow**, which may contradict the notion that the CoPs is to some extent shaped by the members themselves. While these two aspects seemingly contradict each other, one possible explanation is that while participants believe the existing activities of the communities are shaped by the participants, they feel that their influence on larger-scale aspects (such as deciding on the thematic coverage) is not as significant. Second, while **peer learning was identified as one of the main advantages of the scheme, many users simultaneously maintained that the scheme would benefit from greater involvement by the European Commission** to provide direct answers and contributions to the EU policy process.

FIGURE 30. CoPs GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Source: PPMI survey

Co-creation of tools and solutions. This guiding principle is perceived as more multifaceted by the participants. While a significant number of participants agreed that online and physical activities help not only to exchange but also to co-create new knowledge and develop new tools and solutions to the issues and challenges participants face in their work, not everyone echoed this opinion. In general, the **co-creation of tools and solutions has not yet developed into a fully-fledged practice in every community**. For example, it was mentioned during the interviews that CoPs might be considered a platform for transmitting knowledge and experience, rather than generating new solutions. Another member observed that their community had not yet reached the stage of producing specific tools and solutions – it was still developing and forming; thus, discussions are a priority at this stage. In addition, participants noted that while the main output of the communities is the state aid maps, they are not relevant to all practitioners.

Assessment of arrangements to ensure the quality of CoPs activities, their monitoring and evaluation. The Community Manager is responsible for conducting a qualitative evaluation after each workshop and producing a detailed workshop report outlining the main details, activities and results of the event. As well as this, types of formative evaluation are used to help improve the functioning of the communities. The feedback received from participants is incorporated into the annual report (also prepared by the Community Manager), which has been created in order to improve future activities by referring to the suggestions and limitations highlighted by participants. This output also helps to increase accountability as well as ensuring continuity in the assessment of the quality of activities, alongside the Policy Lab organised in 2019. In addition to these activities for reporting and collecting feedback, an evaluation survey was conducted in 2019 that focused on the specific activities as well as the overall functioning of the scheme from the perspectives of the practitioners and outcomes. However, the scope of this survey was very small as it only received 18 responses.

2.1.3. How do the schemes fit together with each other and with other administrative capacity building tools?

Before proceeding to the analysis, we define the key terms used when discussing internal coherence (between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs) and external coherence (between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer/CoPs and other networks and tools).

Coherence – how well (or not) different actions work together.

Internal coherence – how TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs operate together to achieve their objectives.

External coherence – how TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer/CoPs operates with other DG REGIO networks, programmes and tools to achieve their objectives.

Overlaps – A neutral term in this context, since it is quite likely that mandates and objectives, in particular, will overlap and that this might have both advantages and disadvantages.

Duplication – where activities are replicated, leading to inefficiencies from the perspective of DG REGIO.

Complementarity – where activities are carried out that are distinct but complementary to one another (either by accident or design).

Synergies – where networks and schemes and tools cooperate to use mutually complementary activities that deliver results that are greater than the sum of their parts (maximum efficiency).

Source: prepared by PPMI; based on Better Regulation Guidelines, Tool 47: evaluation criteria and questions

2.1.3.1 How do the schemes fit together?

Aims and objectives

In terms of overall aims, both **TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs share the aim** of encouraging and enabling the sharing of knowledge and good practice between peers, with the goal of upgrading the administrative capacity of the participants and improving EU investment outcomes. On the other hand, each **scheme has its own clear logic and slightly distinct characteristics** that define it. TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, as per its guiding principles, focuses on *ad hoc*, short-term exchanges, tailored to the specific needs of beneficiaries. The idea behind the CoPs, meanwhile, is to gather Cohesion Policy practitioners to work continuously on selected topic(s), creating a network and community of practitioners. **Longer-term networking is a central aim of the CoPs, compared with the *ad hoc* nature of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer.**

Activities and topics covered

Different aims and objectives are reflected in the various activities of the schemes. Whereas TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer is implemented only through physical events (study visits, expert missions and workshops), CoPs is implemented through a much wider pool of activities that includes webinars, as well as the dissemination of information through its newsletter, blog, Facebook and LinkedIn groups. At the end of 2017, CoPs started using TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer to organise physical workshops for its members. Since then, **physical meetings, together with the webinars, have been at the centre of CoPs activities**, until the COVID-19 interruption changed the functioning of the network, placing much more importance on online meetings.

In terms of working topics, both schemes share some similarities, but TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer has a much broader focus. One of the **main topics on which the CoPs focuses is state aid**. Up to 2020, total of nine workshops have been organised, seven of which concerned state aid in various sectors, one was on evaluations, and one was on risk management. Similarly, 11 webinars were organised, nine of which focused on state aid in various sectors, one on support to beneficiaries, and one on financial instruments. Aside from the workshops and webinars organised on this topic,

state aid maps are being developed by the members of the CoPs as a specific outcome of the scheme’s activities. Our survey results indicate that almost one-third of respondents (39 respondents) have used these; more than one third (48 respondents) have not used them, but are aware that they exist; but almost one third (36 respondents) were unaware that these tools exist.

Our analysis of topics covered by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events (presented in [Annex 2](#)) reveals that among the variety of topics covered by exchanges, the implementation and management of projects funded by the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund; financial instruments; and state aid related topics are the ones most frequently covered by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events.

Target groups and participants

Both of the schemes target similar types of users. TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer facilitates exchanges between national and regional bodies managing and administering the ERDF and Cohesion funds. All public bodies that are part of the management and control system are eligible, namely: Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies, Audit Authorities, certifying authorities, national coordinating bodies, Joint Technical Secretariats. Other bodies that are directly involved in performing certain tasks associated with the management and control of ERDF/CF may also be eligible (e.g. public procurement offices).¹⁸ CoPs can also be joined by administrators dealing with the ERDF or the Cohesion Fund. **The official guidelines outline that only administrators working within the Managing Authorities or Intermediate Bodies are eligible¹⁹, but in practice, the same target groups as per TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer are admitted** if the participation of these other types of institutions brings added value and corresponds with the interest of participating MAs and IBs. **Even though the target groups of these two schemes overlap, the CoPs, due to the specificity of its activities, focuses on more experienced practitioners compared with TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer.**

In terms of the actual users of the schemes, a detailed analysis is presented in section 2.1. To enable the analysis of CoPs users on the basis of their country, two slightly different sources were used: the CoPs mailing list, which includes all CoPs users, including those who are less active and only signed up for the newsletter; and list of key CoPs members provided on the CoPs blog. The mailing list data shows that the majority of CoPs members come from Italy, Romania, France, Bulgaria and Czechia. The composition of the list of key CoPs members is quite different, with key members coming from Bulgaria, Lithuania, Romania, Poland and Spain; thus, only Romania and Bulgaria overlap. Of the top TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer beneficiary countries, the most active ones are Lithuania, Romania, Croatia, Poland and Bulgaria. **Thus, when comparing TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs by looking at the mailing list, the most active countries appear quite different; however, when comparing the composition of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer with the key members of CoPs, they are basically the same.**

¹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/how/improving-investment/taieux-regio-peer-2-peer/faq/#5

¹⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/how/improving-investment/regio-communities-practitioners/

TABLE 6. TOP 5 COUNTRIES WITH THE MOST TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER BENEFICIARIES AND CoPs USERS

RANK	TAIEX-REGIO P2P BENEFICIARIES	COPS (MAILING LIST)	COPS (KEY MEMBERS)
1	Lithuania	Italy	Bulgaria
2	Romania	Romania	Lithuania
3	Croatia	France	Romania
4	Poland	Bulgaria	Poland
5	Bulgaria	Czechia	Spain

Note: CoPs mailing analysed included over 1,800 users (see Figure 14); analysis of CoPs key members was based on the information provided on CoPs blog as per 17 March 2020 and included 82 key members (see Figure 11).

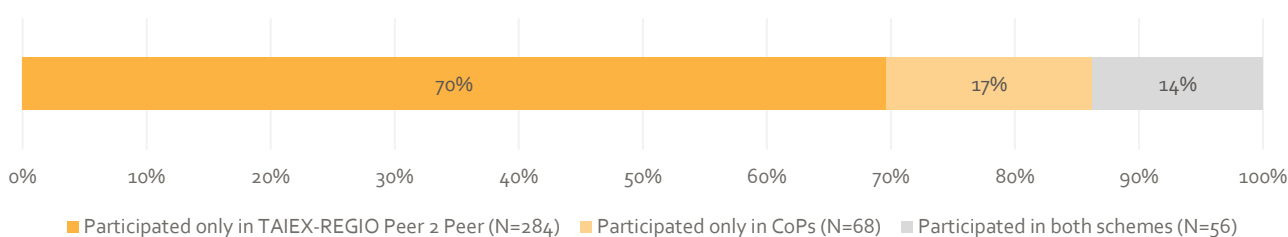
Source: prepared by PPMI, based on administrative data

Complementarities and synergies

Currently, the **synergies between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs are limited**. The study team identified examples of two types of synergies. First, CoPs workshops are organised through TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer. Second, experts who could provide their knowledge to the CoPs are identified by consulting the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer expert database. *Vice versa*, missing experts required for TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges are sought through collaboration with the CoPs. Aside from these examples, no other synergies were identified.

The lack of synergies is illustrated by the fact that even though the schemes’ overall aims and target groups are the same, and the topics covered by two schemes also overlap slightly, **TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer participants are not systematically invited to continue working on the topic by joining the CoPs**. Our survey results illustrate a similar finding: out of the 408 respondents included in the dataset for analysis, only 14% indicated that they were users of both schemes.

FIGURE 31. SURVEY RESPONDENTS’ PARTICIPATION IN TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER AND CoPs



Source: PPMI survey

2.1.3.2 What other administrative capacity building actions or tools have the users experienced?

DG REGIO actively invests in capacity-building tools targeted at experts and practitioners of the Member States. These tools include various initiatives that support the sharing of knowledge and encourage learning, as well as various expert groups and networks. Various DG REGIO networks, and their relationships to TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs (in terms of coherence, existing cooperation) are discussed in the following section. In this section, we provide a general overview

of the other learning opportunities with which TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs users indicated they had experience.

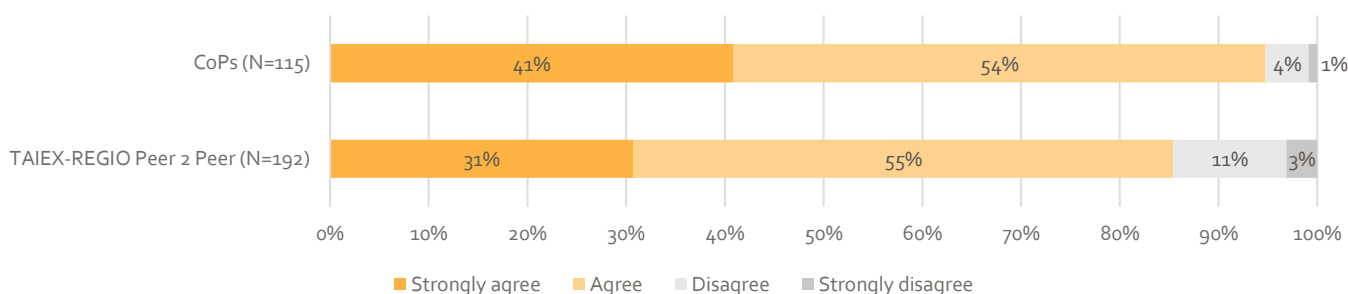
BOX 1. VARIOUS ACB INITIATIVES DEVELOPED BY DG REGIO ACB UNIT (E1)

- **Competency framework and web-based self-assessment tool:** Provides an easily accessible tool to assess the competences of individual civil servants and administrative bodies; provide individual and aggregate-level information helping to identify gaps in skills and competences to be addressed.
- **Strategic Training Programme:** Familiarises practitioners from the Member States with new funding regulations and specific issues relating to ERDF and Cohesion Fund management.
- **Action Plan on Public Procurement:** Evaluates the administrative capacity of Member States, and provides targeted recommendations on applying public procurement to EU investments.
- **Catching Up initiative:** Pilot project to build capacity and unlock growth potential in the least developed regions of the EU through targeted recommendations and assistance.
- **Integrity Pacts:** Initiative to prevent corruption and increase transparency, accountability and good governance in public contracting across 11 Member States, including training to boost capacity building.
- **Frontloading administrative capacity building for Post-2020:** Pilot project to provide support for the preparation and execution of roadmaps for administrative capacity building in cooperation with the OECD, currently implemented in five Member States.

Source: prepared by PPMI, based on desk research

The analysis provided in the previous chapters on the **motivation of users to join the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs revealed that the users are highly motivated to engage in the European peer-learning and networking activities** (95% of CoPs and 85% of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer survey respondents agreed with this statement). This corresponds with the analysis of the experience of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs users with other ACB and training opportunities: because these individuals are highly motivated to engage in European peer-learning activities, they can provide quite a few examples of their participation at various learning activities at EU level, ranging from general descriptions of such actions to specific examples. However, out of the 160 survey respondents who answered this question, almost one fifth commented that they had not participated in any schemes other than TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs.

FIGURE 32. INTEREST IN ENGAGING IN EUROPEAN PEER LEARNING AND NETWORKING ACTIVITIES



Answer to the statement: "I was interested in engaging in European peer-learning and networking activities"

Source: Survey of the users of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs

Many **survey respondents provided only very general descriptions of their experiences with other training schemes, both at national and EU level, without indicating specific**

titles. Such general descriptions included: “Webinars organised by the European Commission”, “Various trainings on public procurement and eligibility of costs”, “Workshops, conferences”. However, some respondents identified more specific learning opportunities they had taken advantage of, the **most popular of being the twinning programme²⁰ (nine respondents) various activities offered by Interreg/Interact programmes (eight respondents); training courses offered by the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) (seven respondents); and FI Compass (five respondents).** A few respondents also indicated **participating in the SCO network and the pilot action on Frontloading ACB.** The table below provides examples given by the survey respondents that relate to various activities offered by the European Commission. It can be seen that while respondents make use of various initiatives offered by the European Commission, **no respondents directly mentioned such tools and initiatives as the Competency Framework and web-based self-assessment tool, Strategic Training Programme, Action Plan on Public Procurement, Catching Up initiative, Integrity Pacts or Evaluation helpdesk.** Only **Frontloading administrative capacity building for Post-2020 was mentioned by a few respondents.** It should, however, be noted that this survey question asked respondents to provide examples off the top of their heads, and did not ask specifically whether they knew any of these DG REGIO initiatives.

TABLE 7. LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES RELATING TO THE EC REPORTED BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS

CATEGORY	SPECIFIC EXAMPLE
<p>EC in general</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ “EIP-AGRI Focus Groups.” ■ “Webinars organised by the European Commission.” ■ “I participated in the project under Hercule III programme for strengthening the capacity of the institutions involved in the AFCOS network.” ■ “Participated in several capacity building actions - within the SAM initiative, a general state aid training held by DG COMP for the national granting authorities and specific GBER training, RDI Trainings, TAM training and a dedicated SA Training, also held by DG COMP teams for the national granting authorities.” ■ “FP7 supported project Era Net Transport III which was about enabling the collaboration in transport research.” ■ “I’ve taken part, twice, in workshops during European days of Regions and cities. Twice I’ve been on training in European Commission (programming of cohesion policy and state aid). I’ve taken part in trainings as a member of OP IE Monitoring Committee.” ■ “Concerted action on energy efficiency directive organised by the European Commission.” ■ “Workshops organized by the Commission.” ■ “Innosup peer-learning project.”
<p>Twinning Programme</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ “Short- term expert in Twinning light project.” ■ “Twinning, Study visits, ENEA-MA.” ■ “Our institution participated in the Twinning projects as the beneficiary country.” ■ “A long time ago in a very successful Twinning programme / internships.” ■ “Twinning Programme - Georgia and Albania Strengthening citizen engagement in cohesion policy.” ■ “Twinning co-operation in the early 2000s.” ■ “Twinning programme in cooperation with Italy for Croatia (preparation for EU access).” ■ “Twinning Projects.” ■ “Yes, different study visits within Twinning projects and some other programmes.”

²⁰ The survey respondents are most probably referring to the twinning programme under TAIEX, which is available to candidate countries. Survey respondents did not provide any further details to elaborate on this training opportunity.

CATEGORY	SPECIFIC EXAMPLE
Interreg/Interact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "TESIM, Interact organised events." ▪ "Interact networks and training, peer to peer both officially and on own initiative." ▪ "Trainings regarding state aid organized by DG Regio, Interact." ▪ "Interact activities." ▪ "Yes; Included in Interreg Europe projects and Innosup H2020." ▪ "Different Interact workshops, learning courses on national rules and legislation." ▪ "Yes, I have participated in peer review on Centres of Excellence and Centres of Competence projects under the Science and Education for Smart Growth Operational Programme, organised by the Interreg-Europe Programme." ▪ "Interreg projects and Smart Specialisation Platform (EC-JRC) events."
SCOs network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "ERDF/CF TN Network on SCO." ▪ "Transnational Network on Simplified Cost Options for ERDF/CF." ▪ "SCO, January 29-30, 2020, Warsaw." ▪ "ERDF/CF SCO TN and ESF Thematic Network on Simplification." ▪ "Simplified costs options Meeting with Bulgaria AFCOS to share experiences." ▪ "TN SCO working group."
ACB Roadmap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "I represent my MA in the ACB pilot action of the EC and the OECD." ▪ "I am a team member or the pilot project for administrative capacity building that was launched by DG REGIO (E1) with the support of OECD." ▪ "Pilot programme with OECD." ▪ "Pilot action on frontloading administrative capacity building to prepare for the post-2020 programming period."
FI Compass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "FI Compass." ▪ "Many seminars and other events organised by FI-Compass." ▪ "FI Compass." ▪ "FI Compass workshops on FI." ▪ FI Compass Events."
DG REGIO more generally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "I attended seminars held by DG Regio related to Verifications (KR4) and also on sampling methodology held by DG Mare." ▪ "I have taken part to 5 over 6 DG REGIO Training modules for national experts in ESIF which I found extremely interesting and useful for my daily job and also as an evaluator of H2020 proposals." ▪ "Just started participation in citizens participation in Cohesion policy: pilot projects with authorities from MS, OECD and REGIO." ▪ "I am a member of the INFORM-network of DG Regio."
JRC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "I participated within JRC program on enabling condition on priority objective 1 and within the World Bank project on building capacity for ROP in realizing pilot calls for priority axis 1 on ROP in Romania." ▪ "I participated in JRC horizontal working group on aspects related to governance, monitoring, internationalization in smart specialization context."

Source: prepared by PPMI, based on the survey of users of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs

The experience of interviewees are very similar to those of the survey respondents, mentioning the same training schemes indicated above. However, interviewees also **emphasised that even though they had experience with other ACB tools and initiatives, there are not many equivalents to TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs, particularly with regard to peer learning**. Interviewees also emphasised that in comparison to their other experiences, **TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs were much more flexible and less formal than the usual seminars and training**; more focused, specific and practical. They also appreciated the exchange of lessons learnt among colleagues, which is not the case in the majority of training opportunities.

"CoPs - informal exchange of information, spreading practical experience, freely talking about issues and not expecting answers for everything but grateful if you receive one. And seminars are not so much for debate but gaining knowledge. Both systems are needed because it is easier to work when you know there are other people from MSs dealing with same issues and meeting with them is really positive experience and I am sure everyone has taken home enough of good knowledge or solutions how to manage public funds or state aid."²¹

One specific example identified during the interviews that is of interest with regard to its peer learning component is the Nordic-Baltic Mobility Programme for Public Administration. This funds group visits, network activities and individual study trips, and is thus somewhat similar to the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer. For more information about this scheme, please see Box 2 below.

BOX 2. NORDIC-BALTIC MOBILITY PROGRAMME FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The Nordic-Baltic Mobility and Network Programme for Public Administration provides financial support to civil servants and other staff with similar functions from the Nordic and Baltic countries to carry out study visits, internships, or network activities in Baltic or Nordic countries, as appropriate. Eligible countries include Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, as well as the autonomous territories of Åland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Civil servants and other staff at all administrative levels in the public sector are eligible to receive a grant for knowledge and experience transfer of best practices, networking, the harmonisation of working standards, and raising the competitiveness of the Baltic Sea Region in the globalising world. Three types of activities can be organised: study visits (3-10 working days in one country); internships (up to 20 working days in one country); and network activities. One round of applications takes place each year. The annual budget of the programme is approximately EUR 300,000. In 2019, 54 exchanges were supported by the programme.

Source: <https://www.norden.ee/en/about-us/funding/mobility-programme-for-public-administration>;
<https://www.nb8grants.org/guidelines>;
https://www.norden.ee/images/failid/PA2019_decisions_21.05.2019_table_for_web.pdf

2.1.4. How do the schemes relate to other networks and peer learning opportunities offered to the same type of users by DG REGIO and other services?

In line with the technical specifications, when analysing the coherence of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer/CoPs with networks and ACB-related programmes managed by DG REGIO, the study team looked closely at the activities of EGESIF, the Evaluation network, the INFORM network, the Transnational Network of ERDF/CF SCO practitioners, and Urban Innovative Actions. In addition, Interact, which is managed indirectly by the dedicated Slovak Management Authority, and URBACT, managed by French Management Authority (ANCT), were analysed as sources for inspiration. More detailed analysis is presented in tables below and in the subsequent chapters.

²¹ PPMI interviews with users of the schemes.

TABLE 8. OVERVIEW OF KEY NETWORKS ANALYSED

NETWORKS	SHORT DESCRIPTION / AIM	MANAGEMENT	PARTICIPANTS (TARGET GROUP)	KEY ACTIVITIES AND PEER LEARNING COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL FOR OVERLAPS AND DUPLICATION
EGESIF	EGESIF is a formal expert group established by a Commission Decision in 2014, ²² with which the Commission consults on issues in relation to the implementation of programmes, to ensure coordination and establish cooperation between the Member State authorities and the Commission on implementation issues, and to bring about the exchange of experience and encourage good practice in the implementation of co-financed programmes or EGTCs. EGESIF is the key horizontal body for consultation with the Member States.	EGESIF is managed directly by the Commission, DG REGIO DDG 02.	Representatives of the Member States' authorities responsible for the implementation of ESIF programmes. The members are the Member States themselves; thus, the composition might differ during each meeting.	The main working arrangement is the plenary session. No direct ACB and peer learning components.	Low risk of overlaps and especially of duplication, as activities are rather different; no bilateral exchanges between MS. The target group is also slightly different since EGESIF does not directly target practitioners, but rather representatives of MS. Regional authorities are not represented in EGESIF, as most people from national representations or coordination authorities are delegated to EGESIF meetings.
Evaluation Network	The Evaluation Network was established to provide analysis on the performance of Cohesion Policy 2007-2013. The Evaluation Network is a forum for discussions between the European Commission and the Member States on issues concerning the	The evaluation network is chaired by the Evaluation Unit of DG REGIO B2.	Representatives of the Member States who are responsible for the evaluation of cohesion policy (Mas, ministries, coordination units, etc.).	While is the Evaluation Network contains no direct peer learning component, it facilitates the exchange of experience and good practice between the Member States. The Network has access to the Evaluation Helpdesk, which provides dedicated	Risk of overlaps exists in terms of themes covered, as a limited number of exchanges on the topic of evaluation took place through TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, and some activities were implemented as part of CoPs.

²² European commission, Commission Decision C(2014) 1875 of 25.3.2014

NETWORKS	SHORT DESCRIPTION / AIM	MANAGEMENT	PARTICIPANTS (TARGET GROUP)	KEY ACTIVITIES AND PEER LEARNING COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL FOR OVERLAPS AND DUPLICATION
	<p>evaluation of cohesion policy, including methodological guidance, indicators, evaluation plans, progress in relation to evaluations being undertaken for the European Commission and the Member States, as well as evaluation results and their use. The mission of the Network is also to facilitate the exchange of experience and good practice between the Member States in order to strengthen evaluation capacity throughout the European Union.²³</p>			<p>methodological support on evaluation issues to the Member States.</p>	
<p>INFORM network</p>	<p>INFORM is an EU-wide network of communication officers responsible for communicating about ERDF and Cohesion Fund investments in the Member States. Its main objectives are:²⁴ to ensure the exchange of information about the results of communication strategies; to exchange experiences and good practices in the implementation the information and communication</p>	<p>Managed by the European Commission, DG REGIO A2.</p>	<p>Staff working on information and publicity issues in a Managing Authority or Joint Technical Secretariat (European Territorial Co-operation programmes)</p>	<p>ACB and peer learning is an important part of the activities of the network. Besides the exchange of knowledge and experience during the plenary meetings, technical seminars are organised on specific topics (e.g. visibility measures, how to use EC logo, digital marketing, etc.). Between plenary sessions, experts collaborate through Yammer, webinars and email exchanges, and organise various types of</p>	<p>Risk of overlaps exists, but TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs do not currently cover communication topics. In addition, The INFORM network does not organise bilateral exchanges.</p>

²³ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/evaluations/network/

²⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/communication/inform-network/

NETWORKS	SHORT DESCRIPTION / AIM	MANAGEMENT	PARTICIPANTS (TARGET GROUP)	KEY ACTIVITIES AND PEER LEARNING COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL FOR OVERLAPS AND DUPLICATION
	<p>measures; to coordinate communication activities between the Member States and the Commission; to debate and assess the effectiveness of the information and communication measures; to propose recommendations to enhance the outreach and impact of communication activities and to raise awareness about the results and added value of those activities.²⁵ It currently consists of around 300 communication officers.</p>			<p>training. Some activities include external expertise (e.g. training on digital marketing).</p>	
<p>Transnational network of ERDF/CF SCO practitioners</p>	<p>The network engages ERDF/CF SCO experts from the Member States in regular discussions to facilitate the use of SCOs in the domain of ERDF/CF.²⁶ It is one of the key forums for discussing the use of SCOs and simplifications in general. Some activities also take place between the physical meetings, e.g. various mapping exercises, surveys. Discussions take</p>	<p>Managed by the European Commission, DG REGIO DDG F1, with the help of a subcontracted external facilitator.</p>	<p>ERDF/CF SCOs experts, mostly at the level of management, delegated by the Member States.</p>	<p>The whole network is dedicated to ACB. Peer learning takes place through discussions of good and bad practices and learning from each other. Network members work together to create solutions to increase ACB.</p>	<p>Risk of overlaps exists, as TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs also cover the topic of simplification, but activities so far have been coordinated within DG REGIO.</p>

²⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/communication/inform-network/

²⁶ Transnational Network of ERDF/CF SCO practitioners, 1st meeting of the Transnational Network (TN) of ERDF/CF SCO practitioners, Background document for the discussion of ERDF/CF SCO practitioners

NETWORKS	SHORT DESCRIPTION / AIM	MANAGEMENT	PARTICIPANTS (TARGET GROUP)	KEY ACTIVITIES AND PEER LEARNING COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL FOR OVERLAPS AND DUPLICATION
	place at a more strategic level.				

Source: prepared by PPMI, based on desk research and interviews

TABLE 9. OVERVIEW OF ACB PROGRAMMES ANALYSED

PROGRAMME	SHORT DESCRIPTION / AIM	MANAGEMENT	PARTICIPANTS (TARGET GROUP)	KEY ACTIVITIES AND PEER LEARNING COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL FOR OVERLAPS AND DUPLICATION
Interact	Interact is the European programme created specifically to assist European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes (Interreg). Interact helps Managing Authorities, Audit Authorities and the administrators of cooperation programmes and first-level controllers to understand the EU rules defined for 2014-2020, in order to improve the management of these programmes. The Interact programme, while enhancing institutional capacity and promoting efficient public administration, focuses on three specific	Management of Interact is shared, with the Slovakian Management Authority acting as its Secretariat, coordinating and overseeing the activities of four offices in different MS, which organise activities for all MS.	Managing Authorities, Audit Authorities and administrators of cooperation programmes, as well as first-level controllers responsible for the implementation of ETC programmes.	The Interact team offers training and tools, and encourages networking within the territorial cooperation community and beyond. ²⁷ For example, in 2018, 98 events (from tailor-made advisory services on specific issues through to training, seminars, workshops and network meetings) were organised and 66 tools created (such as handbooks, studies, document and calculation spreadsheet templates, online information, databases, monitoring system software, training videos, EU-wide promotional campaigns,	The risk of overlaps exists in terms of target groups and themes, as the target groups overlap somewhat; some TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges also cover topics relating to territorial investments. However, bilateral exchanges are not supported by the Interact programme.

²⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/interregional/

PROGRAMME	SHORT DESCRIPTION / AIM	MANAGEMENT	PARTICIPANTS (TARGET GROUP)	KEY ACTIVITIES AND PEER LEARNING COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL FOR OVERLAPS AND DUPLICATION
	<p>objectives: to improve the management and control capacity of ETC programmes, and to improve ETC capacity for capturing and communicating programme results, to improve cooperation management capacity to implement innovative approaches.</p>			<p>etc.). The team also operates a number of online communities in which Interreg programme managers can seek answers to their operational or strategic issues, as well as sharing experiences and good practises²⁸. All the ACB activities could be broadly grouped under training and networking events, with the online learning tool, Interreg highlights blog, European Cooperation Day and keep.eu platform being used for the promotion of the results of the projects.</p>	
<p>Urban Innovative Actions</p>	<p>Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) is an initiative (funding programme) that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and as yet unproven solutions to address urban challenges.²⁹ UIA provides funding for projects and co-finances 80% of projects' activities. In total, UIA can provide up to EUR 5</p>	<p>UIA is managed indirectly. The European Commission ensures its overall policy direction and supervision (DG REGIO DDG 03), while the UIA's operations are ensured by the entrusted entity, Hauts-de-France region in France. It is supported by a permanent secretariat, located in Lille (FR).</p>	<p>The beneficiaries of the UIA initiative are urban authorities (e.g. municipalities, city councils, districts, organised agglomerations)</p>	<p>No direct ACB or peer learning, only through the dissemination of information about the projects implemented (UIA Knowledge Lab). In addition, methodological support is provided to each project, through the allocation of an external expert to each project. However, networking and capacity building for this target group is available</p>	<p>Low risk of overlaps, as activities are rather different. UIA's target group is only partly eligible to participate in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs.</p>

²⁸ Interact, Interact III annual implementation report 2018, Annex 8 – Citizen's summary

²⁹ <https://uia-initiative.eu/en/about-us/what-urban-innovative-actions>

PROGRAMME	SHORT DESCRIPTION / AIM	MANAGEMENT	PARTICIPANTS (TARGET GROUP)	KEY ACTIVITIES AND PEER LEARNING COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL FOR OVERLAPS AND DUPLICATION
	<p>million ERDF to implement an innovative project. In addition, UIA aims to disseminate information about the implemented projects and draw lessons, capture the knowledge and share it with other urban policymakers and practitioners across Europe.</p>			<p>through the Urban Development Network, which offers regular European networking conferences, workshops and study visits.</p>	
<p>URBACT</p>	<p>URBACT is a European Territorial Cooperation (ECT) programme supporting networks for urban authorities. URBACT's mission is to enable cities to work together and develop integrated solutions to common urban challenges through networking, learning from one another's experiences, drawing lessons and identifying good practices to improve urban policies.³⁰</p>	<p>The European Commission defines and coordinates URBACT's overall activities linked to the use of structural funds in European regions. The Commission (DG REGIO) also plays a consulting role in the URBACT Monitoring Committee. The Monitoring Committee, which consists of two representatives from each MS, and sets URBACT's strategic direction. The French Managing Authority (the National Agency for Territorial Equality – ANCT) is responsible for implementing the programme, making sure that it is managed in</p>	<p>Cities are the main beneficiaries of the URBACT programme.</p>	<p>One of four objectives of URBACT is Building and Sharing Knowledge: to ensure that practitioners and decision-makers at all levels have access to knowledge and share know-how on all aspects of sustainable urban development, in order to improve urban development policies. To achieve its objectives, URBACT organises transnational exchanges (action planning, implementation and transfer networks), capacity-building (National Seminars [Campus], URBACT Universities, other <i>ad-hoc</i> ACB actions), as well as capitalisation and</p>	<p>Low risk of overlaps, as the target group of URBACT is only partly eligible to participate in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs.</p>

³⁰ <https://urbact.eu/urbact-gance>

PROGRAMME	SHORT DESCRIPTION / AIM	MANAGEMENT	PARTICIPANTS (TARGET GROUP)	KEY ACTIVITIES AND PEER LEARNING COMPONENTS	POTENTIAL FOR OVERLAPS AND DUPLICATION
		<p>compliance with the law and with European financial procedures. The URBACT Secretariat implements and monitors URBACT's main activities. In doing so, it is supported by national URBACT Points and external subcontracted programme experts (currently numbering five).³¹</p>		<p>dissemination (through the website, thematic publications, events, URBACT National Points, cooperation with other organisations).</p>	

Source: prepared by PPMI based on desk research and interviews

³¹ <https://urbact.eu/secretariat#>

No duplication of activities between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs and other REGIO networks and programmes, but the risk of overlaps exists in terms of the themes covered

The study team identified no duplications in existing activities between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs and other REGIO networks, and the other ACB programmes analysed.

Possible overlaps, or even duplications, are limited by the fact that not all networks contains direct ACB and peer learning components. For example, ACB and peer learning is not the primary purpose of Urban Innovative Actions, EGESIF or the Evaluation Network (see Table 8 and Table 9). The risk of overlaps is low between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs and Interact and URBACT, which differ in either their activities or their target groups. Conversely, the INFORM network and SCOs network place great importance on peer learning, and there is a larger risk of possible overlaps between the activities of these networks and TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs. Thus, these two examples are discussed in the paragraphs below.

The INFORM network addresses the needs of the communication officers responsible for communicating ERDF and Cohesion Fund investments in the Member States. Aside from its other activities, the network organises specialised seminars in which only some members of the network are invited to participate, depending on their interests. Thus, there is a risk that TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs activities could also cover the same topics as those organised by the INFORM network. We identified only one TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchange that targeted communication officers through a study visit on Communicating Cohesion Policy.³² No activities dedicated specifically to the topic of communication were identified as part of the CoPs. Possible overlaps could also arise in the future in terms of themes covered, due to a lack of cooperation and coordination within DG REGIO between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs and the INFORM network. This indicates that despite the current absence of thematic overlaps besides the one example identified, there is a risk that without further coordination, more activities on similar topics could emerge. If possible duplications and overlaps are examined not in terms of the topics covered, but in terms *how* these topics are addressed (via which activities), no risk of overlaps exists, as the INFORM network does not organise bilateral exchanges. If the topics to be covered are coordinated more closely, TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and the INFORM network could develop complementarities, with the INFORM network being supported to some extent by the bilateral exchanges that are possible under TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs.

As for overlaps with the SCOs network, close coordination was identified between the network and TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer when approving the topics of exchanges focusing on SCOs and simplifications. This coordination is especially important, as a number of exchanges on topics relating to SCOs have been implemented through TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer. This illustrates the high probability that overlaps could exist in terms for thematic coverage, but that these can be effectively managed through coordination within DG REGIO. TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges can in fact become a natural continuation of the activities of the SCOs network. As for the CoPs, no cooperation and coordination arrangements were identified between the network and the CoPs. So far, the CoPs has not worked on the topic of SCOs. In principle, it might, and without any coordination, there is a risk that overlaps will occur. However, in a similar way to the INFORM network, if possible duplications and overlaps are examined not in terms of the topics covered, but how these topics are addressed (via which activities), no risk of overlaps exists, as the SCO network does not organise bilateral exchanges.

³² TAIEX-REGIO Study Visit on Communicating Cohesion Policy, Lisbon, Porto - Portugal - 15 - 18 October 2019, event number 69276.

More information on the examples of cooperation and coordination identified can be found in the subsequent chapters.

Lack of awareness about TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs within DG REGIO

One key issue identified that might prevent more extensive cooperation and greater synergies is the **lack of awareness about TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer – and especially the CoPs – within DG REGIO**. Most interviewees (coordinators of other networks) reported knowing about TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, or at least having heard something about it, but more detailed information is still lacking. Any familiarity that currently exists comes either from existing cooperation, through previous experience while working in the authorities of Member States, or via other information channels. Familiarity with the CoPs scheme among the DG REGIO colleagues interviewed is more limited, or even non-existent.

In [number of years] in DG REGIO, I came across them only once. I know very little. I know REGIO P2P from the fact that a few members from our network did a P2P exchange. I know very little about it. I would even not know where to find information about the schemes.³³

One of the tools available to address this lack of awareness and coordination is the administrative capacity matrix. REGIO E1, as the competence centre for ACB, is responsible for the animation and coordination of the ACB matrix.³⁴ Because the membership of the matrix includes at least one representative from each unit within DG REGIO, it is a relevant tool for disseminating further information about TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs and the ways in which they could be used and promoted by other units within DG REGIO. This is especially important, bearing in mind that ACB Matrix members are expected to disseminate information exchanged within the matrix and REGIO E1 staff/senior specialists to their own units and to their counterparts in the MS.³⁵ In addition, a more direct and active approach towards the dissemination of knowledge about schemes within DG REGIO has recently begun to take place, with the geographical desks being better informed about the opportunities offered by schemes. The ultimate aim of this approach is to make the geographical desks the ambassadors for the schemes, as they have a direct link with the authorities responsible for the implementation of ERDF/CF.

Examples of existing cooperation and plans

Despite some issues relating to awareness of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs within DG REGIO, **some examples were identified of cooperation between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and other REGIO networks or ACB-related programmes. No such cooperation was identified with the CoPs**. Such cooperation takes place either using the networks analysed as being platforms for the dissemination of information about TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer opportunities to their network members, or via more elaborate means of cooperation, e.g. the coordinated organisation of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges on topics relevant to specific networks.

³³ Interview with representative of one of DG REGIO networks.

³⁴ DG REGIO, Administrative Capacity Matrix Work Programme 2020.

³⁵ DG REGIO, Administrative Capacity Matrix Work Programme 2020.

TABLE 10. EXAMPLES OF COOPERATION IDENTIFIED BETWEEN TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER AND OTHER NETWORKS OR ACB-RELATED PROGRAMMES

CAPACITY BUILDING TOOL	COOPERATION
Urban Innovative Actions	No examples of cooperation identified, but possibilities are already being discussed
EGESIF	Cooperation takes place through the dissemination of information about the schemes
Evaluation Network	Cooperation takes place through the dissemination of information about the schemes
INFORM network	No examples of cooperation identified
Transnational network of ERDF/CF SCO practitioners	Cooperation takes place through the coordination of TAIEX-REGIO P2P exchanges and the dissemination of information about the schemes
Interact	No examples of cooperation identified
URBACT	No examples of cooperation identified

Source: prepared by PPMI, based on interviews

The most extensive example of cooperation identified between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and other DG REGIO networks is that with the SCOs network, both through the dissemination of information about opportunities, and by coordinating the exchanges themselves. TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer was presented to members of the network during their third and fifth meetings. Aside from these presentations, during the fourth meeting of the SCOs network, a real-time matching exercise was launched, followed by an invitation to submit initial ideas for possible exchanges that could be organised. Continuous consultations take place between the ACB unit responsible for P2P and the SCOs network on the proposals received by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer in relation to SCOs, as this network is the main owner of the topic.

Information about opportunities to organise peer exchanges were also disseminated via the Evaluation Network. TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer was presented during a past meeting of the Evaluation Network, and discussions are currently taking place about doing so again in the future.

Urban Innovative Actions plans to start implementing capacity building activities for the urban actors it targets, under the wider umbrella of the European Urban Initiative. These aspirations are reflected in their newly published Knowledge Management Strategy 2020-2023³⁶. The strategy envisages that TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges could be used to discuss the innovative projects implemented and to test the transferability of implemented solutions to other cities and countries. In relation to the current use of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges by UIA stakeholders, the eligibility rules only allow them to be used by Article 7 cities³⁷ because only these can be considered Intermediate Bodies.

When exploring areas for possible future collaboration, **all representatives of other DG REGIO networks expressed a strong willingness to cooperate more with the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs, but emphasised that they need to get to know the schemes better**, particularly in terms of clearly identifying how the schemes could benefit members of their own networks. Representatives of the networks with whom cooperation has not yet taken place are willing to at least disseminate information about the peer learning possibilities offered by TAIEX-REGIO

³⁶ Urban Innovative Actions, Knowledge Management Strategy 2020-2023. https://www.uia-initiative.eu/sites/default/files/2020-07/UIA_knowledge_management_strategy_0.pdf

³⁷ Urban areas where integrated actions for sustainable urban development are to be implemented

Peer 2 Peer and CoPs. In relation to more extensive cooperation, interviewees felt that they lacked enough information to express a more informed opinion, and **emphasised strongly that they did think that the activities of their networks and those of the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs have their own specific logic and place within the current pool of DG REGIO tools.**

2.2. Effectiveness

TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual outcomes including the improvement of the professional knowledge and expertise, networking and soft skills of participants are evident and very positive. ▪ Institutional outcomes are more visible in the case of events with a narrow and well-defined scope, precisely identified prior needs and which aim to introduce new instruments, tools or practices rather than adjusting existing ones. ▪ The most common obstacles preventing the institutional outcomes of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events from being achieved include rigid administrative structures and lack of cooperation with the other institutions needed to implement any change, as well as staff turnover and differences between the national contexts of host and beneficiary institutions, leading to the knowledge gained not being directly applicable. 	CoPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual outcomes including the improvement of the professional knowledge and expertise, networking and soft skills of participants are evident and very positive. ▪ Institutional outcomes of participation in the CoPs are intertwined with individual outcomes, and focus on the level of organisational systems, tools and structures as well as human resources. ▪ In the case of the CoPs, the main obstacles that prevent the achievement of its larger outcomes relate primarily to a lack of involvement on the part of other institutions necessary to achieve such outcomes, as well as rigid procedures within home institutions and knowledge or solutions gained through participation not being relevant to the national context.
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2.2.1. What are the outcomes for applicants, both for individuals and their institutions?

2.2.1.1 Individual and institutional outcomes of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer

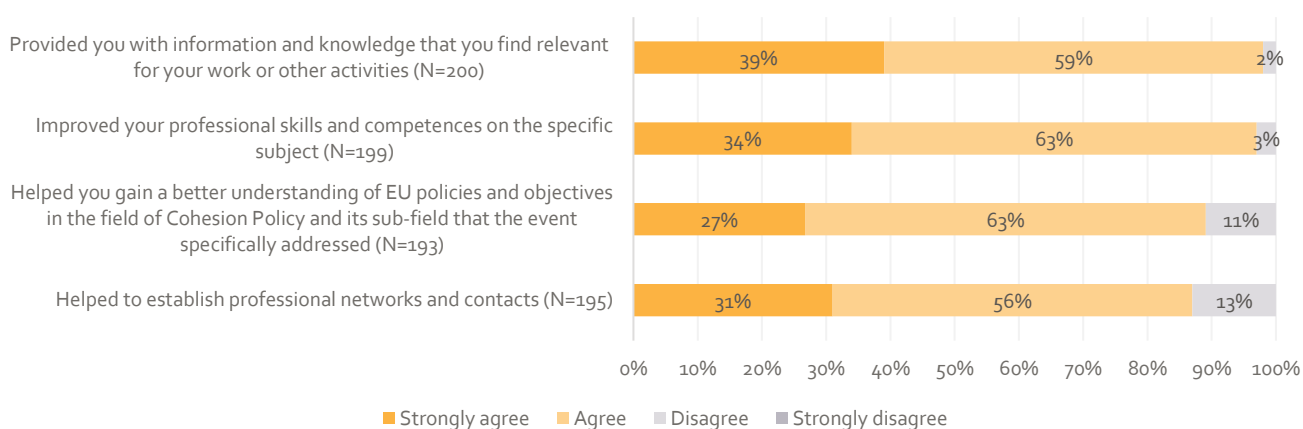
Prevalent outcomes at individual level

The majority of participants surveyed or interviewed acknowledged the positive individual outcomes of participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events. The evaluation questionnaires filled out by participants in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events indicate that almost 90% of participants in expert missions or workshops, and as many as 94% of participants in study visits (including both hosts and beneficiaries) agreed that the **aims of their respective events were achieved.**³⁸ Going into further detail, Figure 33 shows that no survey respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events produced individual outcomes for beneficiaries and participants. The majority of respondents agreed that **participation in the events improved their professional skills and competences, and provided them with information and knowledge relevant to their work.** Only around one in 10 respondents claimed that TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer had not contributed to them establishing professional networks or gaining a better understanding of EU policies and objectives in the field of cohesion policy. Data from the interviews strongly support

³⁸ Source: online evaluation questionnaires 2015-2020

these survey findings. **Even when the knowledge gained through TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events did not lead to notable institutional outcomes or impacts, the participants still reported high levels of satisfaction with their outcomes at an individual level.** In some cases, the learning objectives of the events were not achieved, mostly because national contexts were too different, resulting in the knowledge gained being inapplicable. For example, beneficiaries of study visits occasionally found that the practice they were already using fit their national and institutional context better than the good practice demonstrated by the host institution, but the opportunity to get to know a different national context was still regarded as an eye-opening and beneficial outcome at an individual level.

FIGURE 33. INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES FROM PARTICIPATION IN TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER EVENTS



Source: PPMI survey

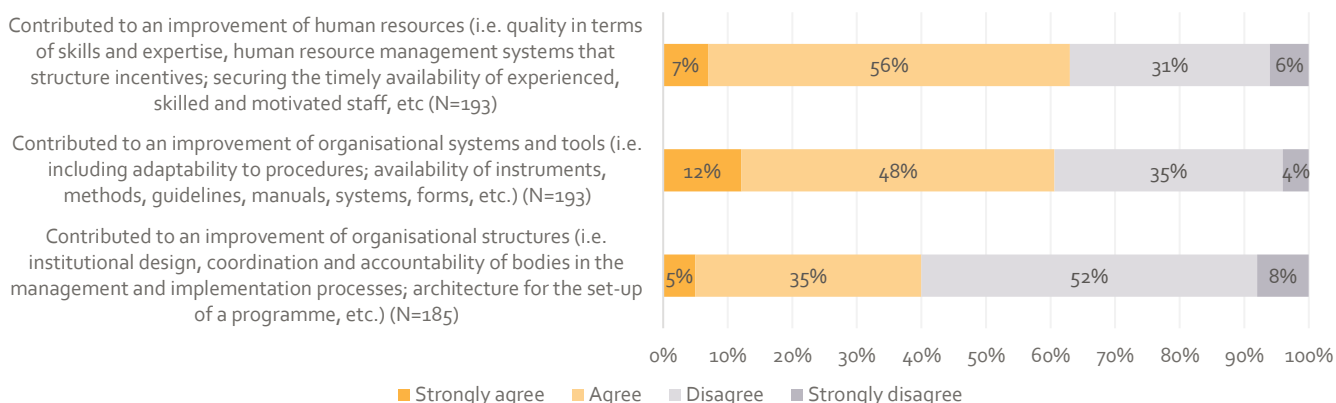
Participants in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events also repeatedly identified a series of mostly positive yet **unexpected individual outcomes. The quality and endurance of the networks established through participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events surprised some participants.** These beneficiaries would stay in touch with the hosts or experts and initiate similar meetings and exchanges, either through TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer or using their own Technical Assistance budgets, to further exchange experiences on the same topic or on other common issues that arose during their discussions at the initial event. Some participants reported **getting to know and becoming interested in new topics and subject areas** that were not on the initial agenda, but which came up during their TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events. For several beneficiaries, the format of their study visit and the space it provided for discussions and debates was an eye-opening insight into how to organise similar types of events. Furthermore, the motivation and inspiration gained through getting to know other national contexts and seeing other institutions facing similar issues were identified as important but unexpected individual outcomes. For some practitioners, participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events led to an improvement in their English language skills. Several beneficiaries reported that the events raised further questions instead of providing answers; however, this was also regarded as a positive unintended outcome, encouraging further learning.

Tangible institutional outcomes are more difficult to achieve

The picture is somewhat different when the focus shifts from the individual outcomes of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events to institutional ones. Unlike outcomes at an individual level, where no survey respondents reported not having achieved any individual outcomes, more than a half of

respondents tended to disagree with the statement that participation in a TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer event contributed to the improvement of organisational structures within their home institution. Over one-third disagreed that it contributed to an improvement in organisational systems and tools (see Figure 34). Respondents instead agreed that participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events had contributed to an improvement in human resources at their institution – a finding that is in line with the positive individual outcomes discussed in the previous section. **Overall, institutional outcomes are evaluated positively, but the survey respondents are less optimistic about these than they are about individual outcomes.**

FIGURE 34. INSTITUTIONAL OUTCOMES OF PARTICIPATION IN TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER



Source: PPMI survey

To mention just a few institutional outcomes of participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events, some beneficiaries gained the knowledge necessary to set up new funding schemes or financial instruments in their own countries; others adjusted existing working practices, such as the auditing of EU funds or public procurement procedures.³⁹ They noted that learning from the experience of a host or an expert with years of experience in using the same tool or instrument is very constructive, even if the knowledge gained needed to be adjusted to a different national context. Learning from others’ good practices and mistakes rather than “re-inventing the wheel” was regarded as saving a lot of time and resources.

Synergising the insights obtained from multiple interviews with TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer users, we can conclude that **institutional outcomes are particularly notable in the case of events that targeted narrow and precisely defined needs, with the aim of setting up a new scheme or instrument so that the beneficiaries were less constrained by existing national regulations.** For example, this tends to be the case when implementing specific practices, such as adjustments to the auditing methods used for EU-funded projects or public procurement procedures on a relatively small scale, affecting only one institution and providing the beneficiaries greater autonomy to act without constraints being imposed by the wider administrative context. TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events with a broad scope – dealing with, for example, the restructuring of a regional economy or the establishment of a broad network of specific institutions – tend to serve as an inspiration and motivation rather than leading to tangible, immediate changes in national structures or practices. This is because the process at hand is broader in scope, longer in duration,

³⁹ More detailed information on specific schemes, instruments or working practices implemented as a result of participation in REGIO P2P events can be found in the case studies.

and requires the involvement of multiple actors. However, even in such cases, participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer still contributed to the generation of ideas for the next funding period or to the development of roadmaps for administrative capacity building.

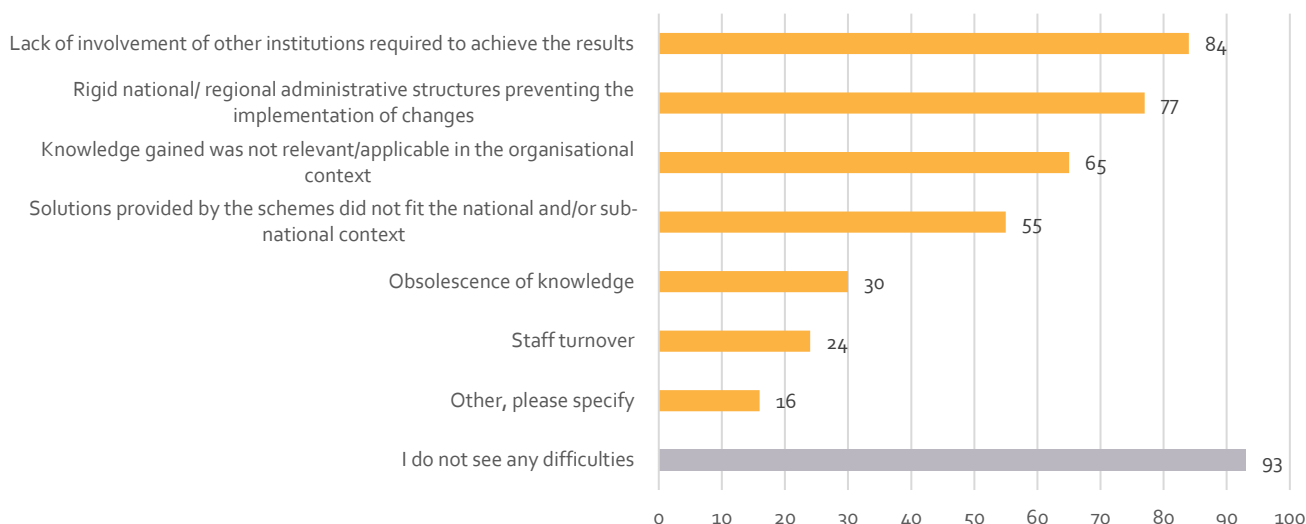
"We do not have to reinvent the wheel if we see how other countries do something. The national contexts are too different to apply the knowledge directly, but you still bring ideas for improvements within your organisation, and some of them are implemented".⁴⁰

As the survey and case study findings indicate, most changes that can be related directly to participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events relate to the auditing of EU funds and the introduction of new auditing procedures; the application of simplified cost options; public procurement, including e- and green procurement; various state aid procedures; changes to fund management in the new funding period (2021-2027); as well as the optimisation of HR and working practices within participating institutions.

Obstacles to achieving outcomes

The most pressing obstacles to the achievement of institutional and individual outcomes, identified by more than 50 survey respondents, largely correspond with the findings of the interviews and case studies. They include **rigid national administrative structures** that prevent change; a **lack of cooperation from other national institutions** that would be required to implement any changes; **staff turnover** resulting in people with relevant knowledge and expertise leaving their jobs; and a mismatch between the national contexts of hosts and beneficiaries (see Figure 35). However, the **largest share of survey respondents stated that they did not perceive any difficulties**.

FIGURE 35. MOST COMMON OBSTACLES TO TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER EVENTS ACHIEVING BIGGER RESULTS



Source: PPMI survey

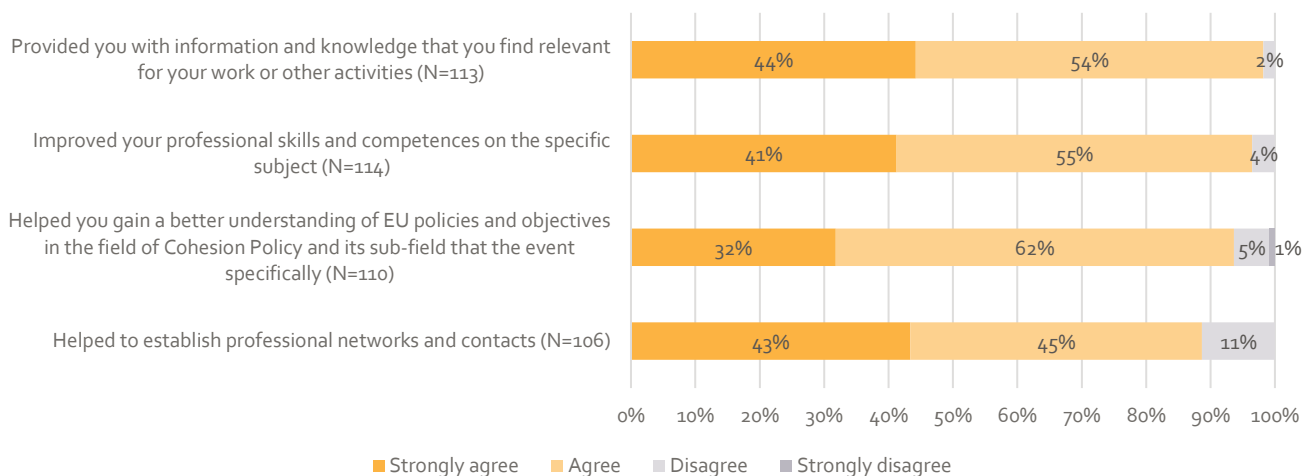
⁴⁰ Interview with beneficiary of a study visit

2.2.1.2 Individual and institutional outcomes of Communities of Practitioners

Individual-level outcomes of CoPs are the most prevalent

An overwhelming majority of CoPs participants reported achieving various individual-level outcomes. One of the primary outcomes for practitioners personally was expanding their knowledge and incorporating this newfound knowledge into their daily work. Most members agreed that participation had improved their knowledge about various topics within their fields of work, primarily through good practices already implemented in other countries. This experience translated directly into more advanced individual skills and the achievement of a better understanding of current activities, procedures and legislation. Some knowledge acquired by participants was broader – for example, a better understanding of how the Commission operates, what processes are involved, and how to access relevant resources. In addition, experience and participation in CoPs also resulted in a better understanding of the mechanism of operation in public procurement at the level of European institutions and other Member States (as opposed to the systems used at a national level in their own countries) and raising awareness of tools for risk management and improving the technical specifications developed by institutions. Most respondents indicated that their involvement had resulted in a better understanding of EU policies and objectives in the field of cohesion policy and its sub-fields. The prevalence of this particular outcome is also in line with the guiding principles behind CoPs, which include sharing and co-creating knowledge.

FIGURE 36. INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES OF PARTICIPATION IN CoPs



Source: PPMI survey

Furthermore, much of the knowledge gained by members was specific and relatively easy to transfer to the institutional context. Based on our interview findings, meetings organised under the scheme helped attendees to tackle problems in the areas of public procurement and fraud. Users also explained that they had benefited from discussions taking place during CoPs events and online because these discussions were not only helpful in acquainting them with various novelties in their own area of work (e.g. preliminary consultations with the market) and solving or mitigating related issues, but also in becoming more aware of potential difficulties and gaining better insights into the system in general.

*"I incorporated the knowledge from meetings <...> and **I can perform my official duties better**, e.g. verify documents in the area of public procurement. Also, my opinions and documents are better informed and prepared as a result of involvement in CoPs."⁴¹*

*"I was responsible for the assessment of railway projects <...>, **it was really important to gather more knowledge, prepare myself on some standards of assessment**, so [participation in the scheme] was useful."⁴²*

Networking was also identified as one of the essential individual-level outcomes, valuable both within and outside the framework of the CoPs. Almost nine out every 10 participants claimed that participation in CoPs had helped them to establish professional networks and contacts. This not only helped to make activities more efficient and fruitful, but also contributed to having better discussions, more accessible communication, and smoother collaboration processes. In addition, groups of practitioners identified opportunities to work together in the future. The effects of networking exceeded those of the activities organised under the CoPs – most participants felt that they could contact other practitioners directly to either continue the discussions or consult on specific issues, because networking allowed them to identify the members with the most relevant expertise.

"I was able to establish personal contacts with practitioners from other countries, which is very important for the future collaboration for any other topics; and to exchange information. We managed to establish some very good personal contacts, and we are now only one call away from each other <...> which was not available before my participation in CoPs."⁴³

"I am searching for a network of risk management experts so we can exchange our experiences in solving problems."⁴⁴

*"**Networking is one of the largest achievements of the CoPs.** Not only practitioner but institutional networking also."⁴⁵*

Institutional-level outcomes of CoPs are harder to achieve

As indicated above, the institutional level outcomes of CoPs were less prevalent than those at an individual level. This is due to more complicated procedures and efforts being required to achieve them, and results from differences in national and European laws as well as different interpretations of regulations and a lack of uniform guidelines. Nonetheless, some notable outcomes have been achieved at organisation level in relation to improvements in organisational systems and tools, human resources and organisational structures. More than half of participants reported that their participation in CoPs had helped to improve organisational systems and tools. These could include the adaptability of procedures, and the availability of instruments, methods, guidelines, manuals, systems and forms. In addition, three-quarters of users indicated that they had observed an improvement in organisational culture. This could be in terms of openness and willingness to engage in transnational exchange and peer learning activities, improving cooperation between units and, in general, developing competencies

⁴¹ PPMI interviews with users of the schemes.

⁴² PPMI interviews with users of the schemes.

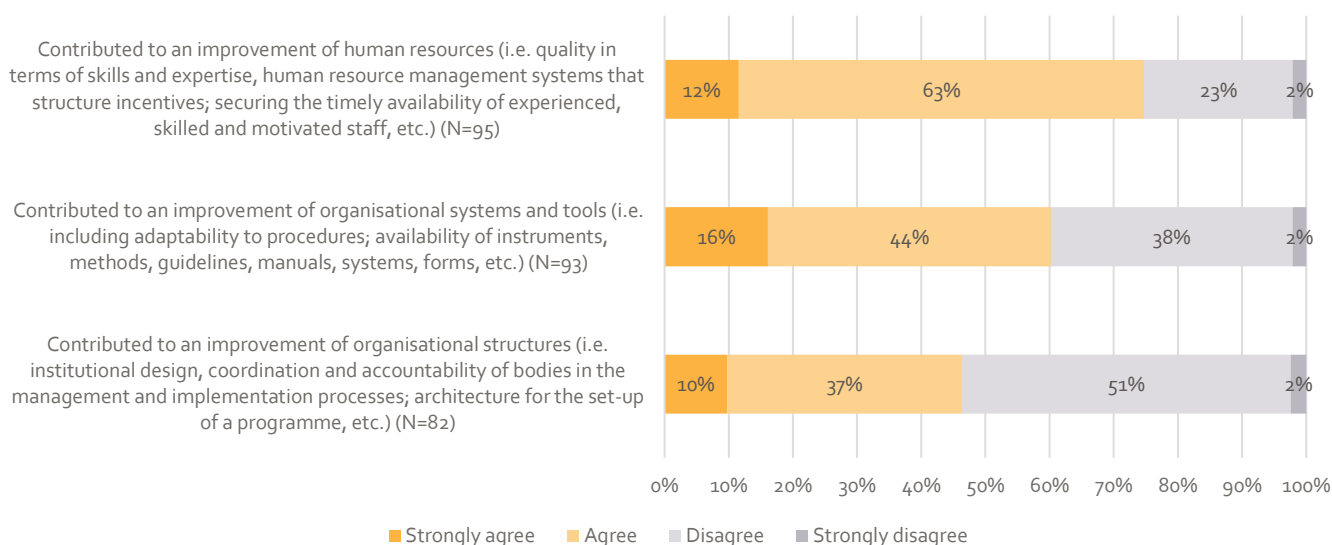
⁴³ PPMI interviews with users of the schemes.

⁴⁴ PPMI interviews with users of the schemes.

⁴⁵ PPMI interviews with users of the schemes.

through more effective training. However, it is essential to note that even though a majority of participants reported these positive improvements at institutional level, a quarter of respondents did not think that participation in the scheme had helped in the field of human resources, and almost 40% of participants did not report experiencing improvements in relation to systems and tools. Lastly, most respondents did not experience improvements in organisational structures in relation to institutional design, the coordination and accountability of bodies within the management and implementation process, and in the architecture for the setup of programmes. This could be explained by the wider scope of this particular area – for example, institutional design can be fairly rigorous and hard to change.

FIGURE 37. INSTITUTIONAL-LEVEL OUTCOMES OF PARTICIPATION IN CoPs



Source: PPMI survey

Several main positive trends can be seen in the institutional-level outcomes reported by the majority of participants. The majority of these outcomes are closely connected and reinforce each other rather than existing separately. Participating in the scheme had helped some practitioners to gain knowledge (respondents as an individual-level outcome above). This, in turn, allowed them to change their general approach and perspectives towards the procedures currently used by their institutions. This resulted in either the improvement or adjustment of existing institutional procedures, or the introduction new ones (or the making of plans to implement either of these changes). Furthermore, some secondary or unexpected outcomes at the level of institutional networking occurred as a result of participation in the scheme.

One institution is currently assessing its existing procedures for the new programming period, and is considering improvements to the procedure for risk identification, which is part of the risk management cycle included in the procedures manual. After participating in CoPs, this institution discovered that managing bodies in Poland collect information from the beneficiaries about various risks and take note of the beneficiaries’ assessment of the level of risk – but also make their own assessment. For this, they have developed a method involving different weights in order to report this risk within the framework of the implementation body. Employing two points of view appeared very useful to this institution, because it has different units within the MA, and knowledge of risk management was thus far relatively fragmented. The main benefit of this updated procedure would be increased accuracy in the identification of risks. Nevertheless, it is still not clear how easy or complicated this implementation process will be in practice, because the regulations to implement it have still not been approved.

Source: Interview data

In some cases, participants reported that the **CoPs was instrumental in helping them to change their approach to various areas relating to their work**. These included the organisations of meetings about financial corrections to consult with other practitioners; the design of improved operational procedures; simplification methods, and simplified cost options. In addition, new knowledge and changes in approach were also instrumental in validating the existing procedures. Based on the case study, improved procedures and systems were one of the most prominent institutional-level outcomes stemming from participation in CoPs. These improvements varied depending on the goals, structure and design of the institution. They were most evident in the area of risk management, specifically in implementing red flags, enterprise risk management and on-the-spot risk assessment checks, as well as public procurement, where procedure manuals were updated to improve the checklists and include competitive dialogues. Moreover, institutions managed to implement some new procedures as a result of their engagement with CoPs, such as a new type of state aid scheme. Lastly, some participants reported achieving certain institutional level outcomes by using the main output of CoPs – the state aid maps – which relate to both widened knowledge and improved procedures.

"State aid maps (helped with) connection of specific questions from our daily work <...> to find answers. Following the flow chart of the procedural manuals, after we develop state aid maps, we introduced some specific documents and steps in our procedures we missed before. Before there were gaps, barriers, we did not know how to connect the steps. Our knowledge has expanded."⁴⁶

In addition to the outcomes directly related to the work of participating peers, **some users observed a number of secondary and unexpected consequences**. These outcomes were less specific and more closely connected with increased implicit knowledge – an awareness that the issues pertaining to state aid are similar across all European countries. Gaining different perspectives on such issues allowed users to acquire a more multifaceted understanding of challenges and thereby employ a more systemic approach during the next programming period. Moreover, some participants said these benefits encouraged them to continue pursuing further knowledge in the field. Other, secondary outcomes were seen in relation to internal and external communication – for example, one participant noted that one unexpected outcome was that participation had made it possible to improve internal communication about structural funds to other departments within their organisation. Another institution said that local politicians in their country experienced difficulties in accessing information about pan-European level initiatives such as CRII (Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative) and CRII Plus (Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus). Practitioners who had participated in CoPs were able to help facilitate information exchange between European and local institutions in order to communicate these initiatives more effectively.

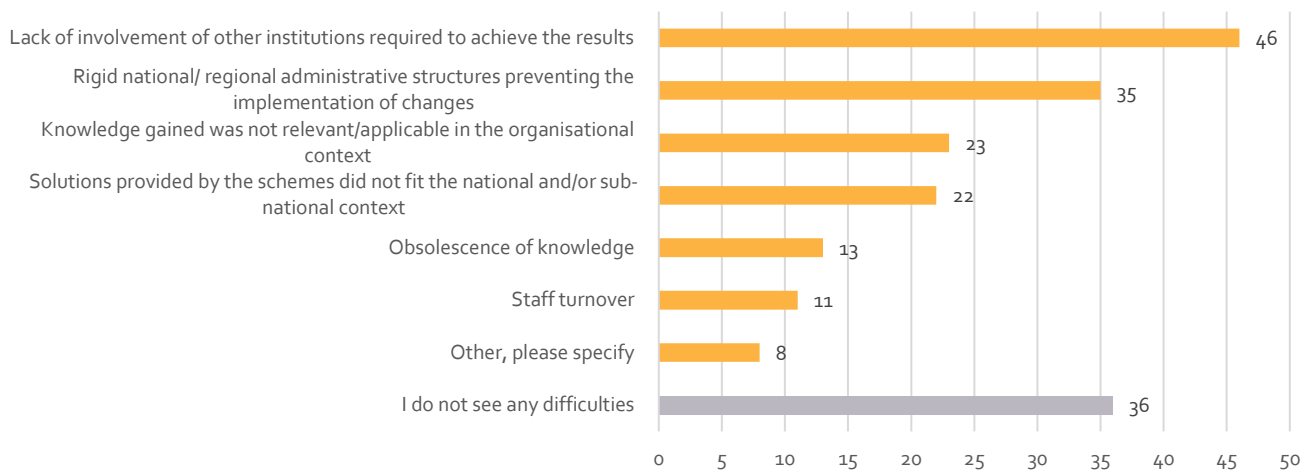
Obstacles to achieving individual and institutional level outcomes

While survey respondents were asked to identify barriers to the achievement of both individual and institutional-level outcomes, it is evident that the most considerable barriers existed in relation to institutional-level outcomes. The main obstacle reported by participants was the **lack of involvement of other institutions** required to achieve the necessary results. In addition, a considerable share of participants indicated that **rigid national/ regional administrative structures** prevent changes from being implemented. Having said that, three out of every 10

⁴⁶ PPMI interviews with users of the schemes.

respondents claimed that they **did not have any difficulties** in achieving their desired outcomes at both individual and organisational levels.

FIGURE 38. BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING OUTCOMES FROM CoPs

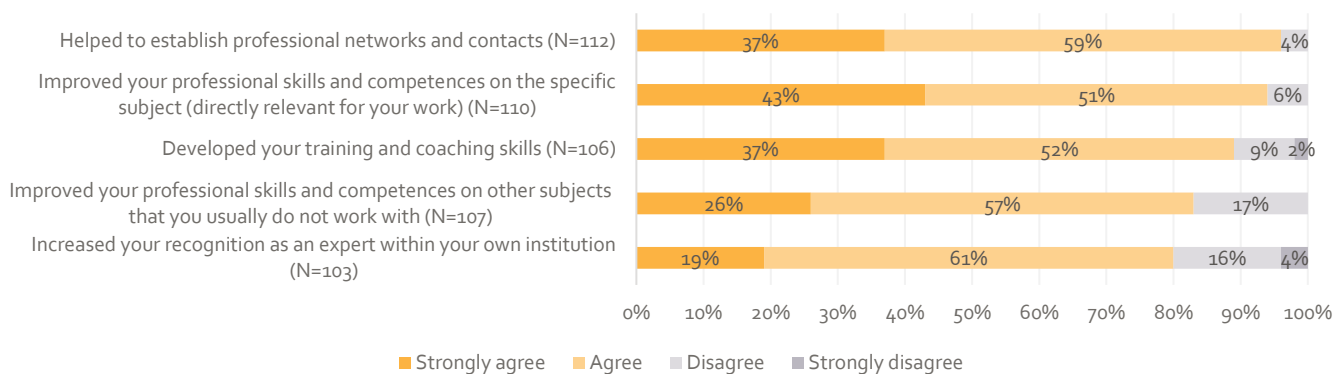


Source: PPMI survey

2.2.2. Outcomes for experts and hosts

The hosts and experts of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events, like the beneficiaries, **evaluate the individual outcomes of participation in the exchanges largely positively**. While the outcomes are mostly individual, some experts even noted introducing changes in their respective institutions as a result of peer-to-peer exchanges with their counterparts. As Figure 39 shows, at least four out of five experts surveyed **improved their professional skills and competences both within their own specific subject area and in relation to other topics – broadening their horizons, establishing professional networks and contacts, gaining professional recognition and developing their training and coaching skills**. Overall, out of 307 experts or host institutions that participated in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events, only four indicated that they would not be ready to host an event in the future.⁴⁷

FIGURE 39. INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES FROM HOSTING/PARTICIPATING IN A TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER EVENT AS AN EXPERT



Source: PPMI Survey

⁴⁷ Source: online evaluations questionnaires, 2015-2020

The representatives of host institutions who were interviewed indicated that TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer **study visits are a mutual exchange of experience, rather than one institution learning from another**. Some events produced both individual and institutional outcomes for hosts. The institutional outcomes included getting to know the national context of other Member States and the challenges they face, keeping up to date with recent developments in their respective field, changing the way they interpret certain EU legislation based on discussions with beneficiaries, as well as gaining ideas on how to improve their own institutional structures and working practices. One host claimed that knowledge exchange during study visits is split at least 70-30%, with the beneficiary learning more – but the host institution also gains useful knowledge. By sharing their experiences of participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events, the experts also motivate their colleagues to become actively engaged in the scheme. Lastly, active participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer as an expert or host presents an **image-building opportunity** to present oneself as a reliable partner to the European Commission and the other Member States, both at an individual and an institutional level.

2.3. Follow-up

The key question assessed in this section of the Report is what follow-up is given to the exchanges organised under the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and the CoPs schemes. As indicated in our intervention logic, disseminating and exploiting the results of these schemes can lead to the uptake of new or improved practices through the sharing of specific results by participants within and across institutions, maintaining and further developing the contacts made with the experts/hosts (mainly for TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer), triggering new applications and initiatives, etc.

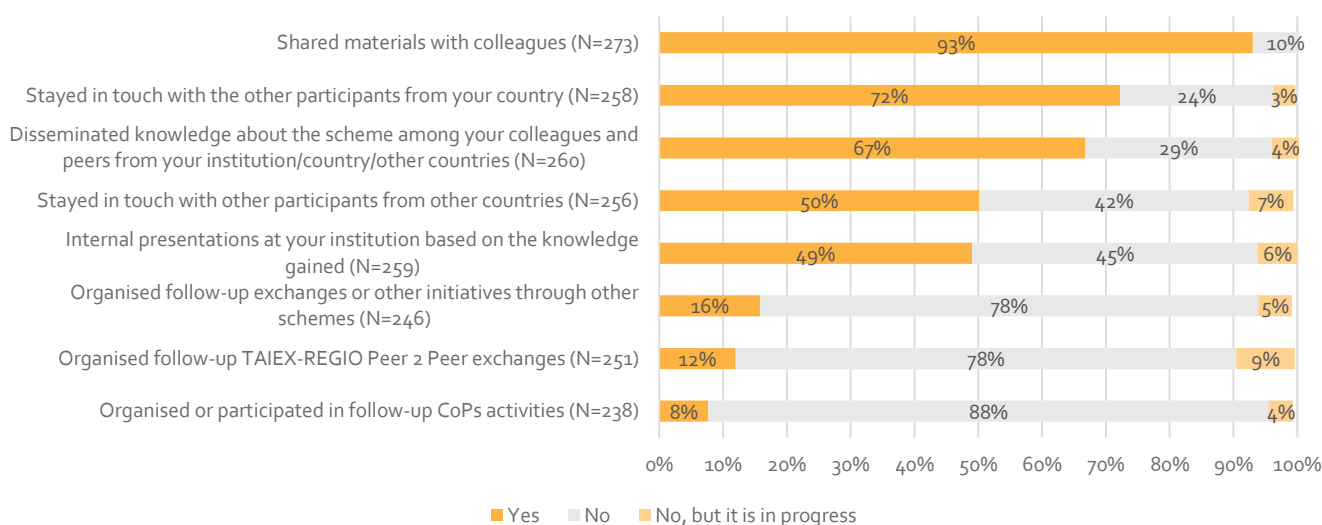
TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs

- The most common follow-up activities undertaken by participants in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs include the sharing of information and materials with colleagues from their respective institutions, as well as the dissemination of information about these peer learning schemes.
- About half of participants stay in touch with the hosts/beneficiaries of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events or other CoPs members after engaging in the schemes. In the case of CoPs, many also organise further CoPs initiatives or events.
- Organising follow-up TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges after participating in one is uncommon, just as it is uncommon for TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer participants to engage in CoPs activities. This indicates a lack of strategic use and coherence of these schemes.

2.3.1. Follow-up under TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer

Intra-institutional or national-level follow-up activities such as **sharing information and materials or staying in touch with colleagues from other national institutions in one’s own country after TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events** are very common (see Figure 40). The findings of the case studies indicate that such sharing includes disseminating presentations and other materials from the event to relevant practitioners by email or uploading them to the intranet or website of the institution, along with an announcement that the event took place. In the case of events involving representatives of several national institutions on the beneficiary side, respondents reported developing lasting and useful networks and contacts with their national counterparts and colleagues. Participants also often remain in contact with counterparts from other Member States, which is helpful in the event that follow-up questions and issues arise.

FIGURE 40. FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES AFTER PARTICIPATING IN A TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER EVENT



Source: PPMI survey

However, while networks at national level have lasting value, **only one in five participants said they have organised, or are planning to organise, a follow-up P2P exchange using TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer or other schemes – and fewer than one in 10 participated in follow-up CoPs activity.** These survey results are in line with the social network analysis of individual institutions (see [Annex 1](#)), which reveals that the majority of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events are one-off exchanges that do not result in further activities either between the same or different institutions. The results are also in line with the intervention logic of the study, which predicted that active follow-up and spillover effects such as the organisation of further events and continuous engagement with TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer might be limited, as it is a scheme that aims to address the *ad hoc* needs of individual institutions.

The follow-up events that have taken place include multi-country workshops or workshops involving a group of experts who tend to meet routinely, partly as a result of engagement with CoPs. Based on the interview data, expert missions usually did not lead to follow-up events, although they provided beneficiaries with ideas about what topics to focus on in future peer learning and training activities. Several study visits resulted in reciprocal visits between the same institutions to discuss either a more specific, related topic or a different one. Others resulted in the organisation of a different type of event such as an expert mission or a workshop involving a wider audience at the beneficiary institution, or inviting more experts to cover a wider thematic scope.

With regard to obstacles to the organisation of follow-up events, the **current COVID-19 crisis was identified as a major issue by beneficiaries of recent events, who had to postpone any follow-up activities or move them online.** Furthermore, some hosts and beneficiaries of study visits clearly saw the added value of organising a reciprocal follow-up event to tackle further common problems or issues that had arisen during the initial study visit but were not part of the agenda. However, they were **unsure about their eligibility to apply for a follow-up event**, and felt that DG REGIO could promote such an opportunity in a targeted manner after a study visit had been completed.

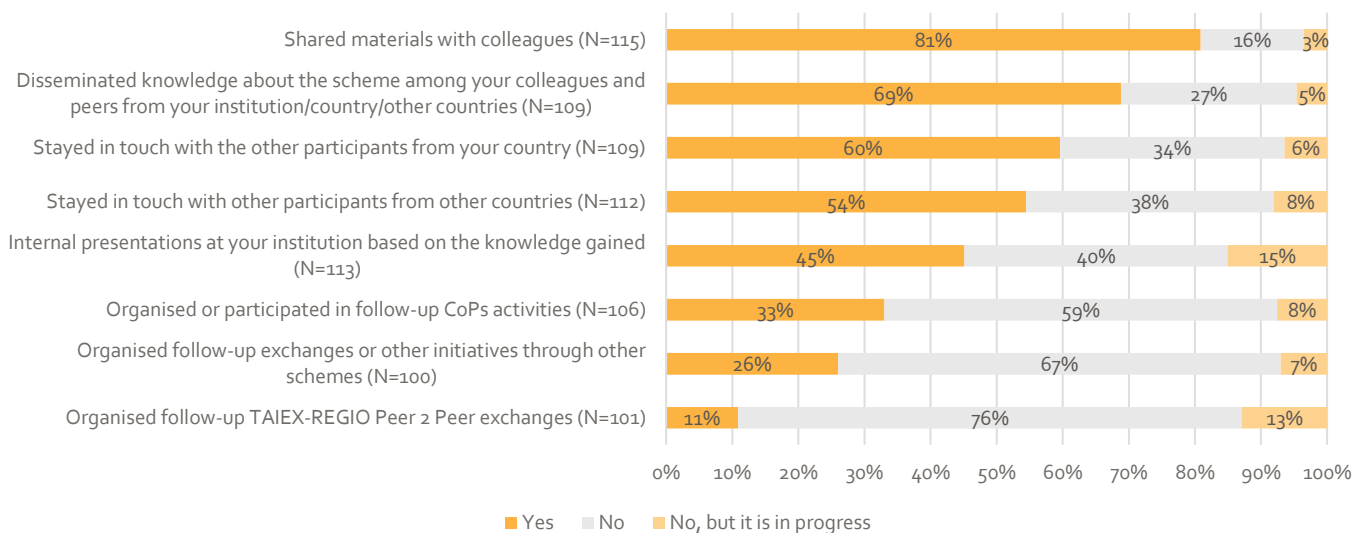
2.3.2. Follow-up by Communities of Practitioners

Follow-up efforts were generally instrumental in transferring the knowledge acquired during CoPs activities and/or through the use of various CoPs tools. They were also central to the subsequent translating and elevating of individual benefits into institutional-level outcomes. Survey and interview findings demonstrate that **while the majority of CoPs participants share the information they acquire during various activities organised under the scheme, follow-up activities differ vastly between countries and institutions.** The format that these efforts take depends largely on the perceived relevance of the topics discussed during events and the overall engagement of the participants with the scheme. It is also **influenced by institutional readiness and flexibility to engage with and implement specific changes.** Follow-up activities are also partly shaped by existing training and learning strategies – in some cases, follow-up activities were incorporated or adapted into readily available practices organised at an institutional or national level, and this impacted the format that the follow-up took.

The survey findings presented in Figure 41 below demonstrate that **sharing materials and disseminating knowledge** is the most popular follow-up activity. These findings were mirrored in the data obtained during interviews. The second most popular activity – disseminating knowledge about the scheme among peers and colleagues – was closely related to **networking with participants from their own and other countries**, which was highlighted as one of the most prominent individual-level outcomes. Lastly, **organising or participating in exchanges and activities through P2P was the least prevalent follow-up effort.** While a third of all

respondents reported that they had organised or participated in follow-up activities under CoPs, and a quarter said that they had organised follow-up exchanges via other schemes, only one in 10 respondents reported organising follow-up P2P exchanges (although some said that this activity was in progress –efforts may have been impeded by the ongoing pandemic). Nonetheless, this suggests a potential lack of synergy between the schemes.

FIGURE 41. FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES AFTER PARTICIPATING IN CoPs



Source: PPMI survey

The interview findings largely corresponded with the survey data: most CoPs members tend to disseminate information to colleagues within and outside their institutions. Materials were often adapted to be more suitable to the specific institutional context – for example, by translating the presentations, lessons learned, conclusions and other outputs to make them more accessible, as well as organising discussions to explore the materials within the institutional framework and national legal landscape, as well as making internal presentations. Sometimes, existing tools were employed for the purposes of dissemination (e.g. an institutional newsletter). Alternatively, the information was incorporated into regular institutional practices (e.g. monthly meetings, a biannual seminar for state aid grantors) in order to spread it to all levels of the organisation, so that colleagues would both become aware of the activities in general and the content and products of the activities specifically. Some participants created reports to disseminate the knowledge outside their institution. These processes generally tended to translate into improvements and adjustments to certain practices, or helped to inform fund-related guidelines and legislation at both national and European levels, as well as increasing the direct or indirect involvement of practitioners in activities carried out under the scheme.

Most interviewees also said they kept in touch with peers from their own country or practitioners representing other Member States. The participants highlighted networking as one of the most prominent outcomes at an individual level, and this process was reinforced by follow-up activities that involved staying in contact with fellow practitioners. The majority of users of the scheme said that they were able to maintain contact both within and outside the framework of the CoPs. Some reported having plans for future collaborations and follow-up events under other DG REGIO schemes using the new contacts they had made; in addition, some members felt able to contact people directly once they had become acquainted with them and knew which area of expertise they specialised in, or identified the people with the most relevant expertise and contacted them directly

to discuss specific questions or issues that arose. The participants viewed physical workshops as the best environments for networking and getting to know their peers, which helps to explain why physical workshops are regarded as one of the best tools to achieve the objectives of CoPs.

Lastly, some participants organised follow-up activities within CoPs or TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer. Members reported organising CoPs and TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer workshops after attending webinars to address specific *ad hoc* needs that were identified during their engagement with activities organised under CoPs. However, as with the survey findings, this was one of the follow-up options least often explored.

Overall, the interview findings suggest that follow-up efforts are **dependent on both personal initiative and institutional structures and processes**. Some participants (particularly champions) were more engaged in activities and therefore allocated time towards organising follow-up in the various forms discussed above. Flexible procedures and HR strategies within the institutions also facilitated such follow-up efforts, although the data are insufficient to establish a direct correlation. The **largest obstacles to organising follow-up activities relate to high business workload and lack of time, as well as rigorous procedures within an institution or the country in general**.

2.4. Impact

While the questions addressing the effectiveness of the schemes focus on outcomes at individual and organisation level, the impact questions examine changes in management systems and organisational performance (i.e. have the users experienced changes in programme implementation and results as a direct or indirect result of the exchanges?)

TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs

- The impacts of both TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs are difficult to pinpoint directly to participation in the schemes, due to their novelty and the fact that large-scale impacts might take time, as well as a number of external factors.
- The impacts of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs are notable on a smaller scale – for example, when it comes to the adoption or adjustment of tools or practices within one institution rather than across a larger administration; the improvement of practitioners’ skills and knowledge rather than fund implementation rates; or the setting up of new instruments or schemes rather than the adjustment of existing ones.

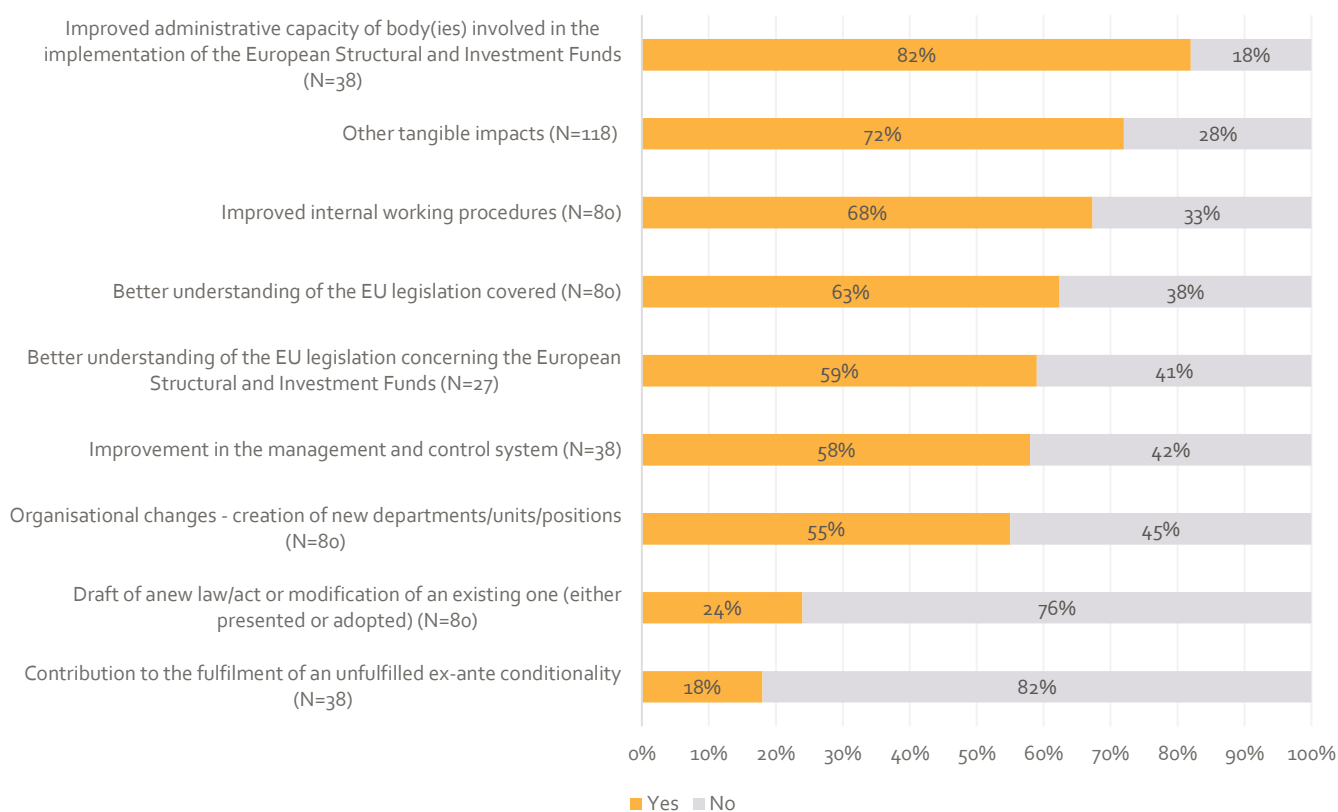
2.4.1. Impacts of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer

The study’s findings combine insights from event evaluation reports, survey and case studies to reveal that **participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events has impacts on national administrations on a fairly small scale. These are generally limited to a single institution that participated in an event, and relate to soft skills and working practices rather than institutional adjustments or changes in the national administration as a whole**. These findings are largely **in line with the intervention logic** of the study, which underlines that large-scale outcomes of a relatively new peer learning scheme aimed at addressing the *ad hoc* needs of individual institutions might not – or at least, not yet – be considerable, due to both the time component and the nature of the issues addressed.

The majority of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer event participants (86% for study visits, 84% for workshops and 80% for expert missions) expected that participation in the event would lead to the

adoption of new legislation or a change in administrative practices, based on evaluation forms they filled out immediately after events. However, the evaluation forms completed six months after these events to assess their impact show a mixed picture. The **majority of participants noted improvements in understanding of the subject matter of the event, as well as EU legislation relating to ESIF, after participating in a TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer event.** In addition, 82% said that exchanges had **contributed to administrative capacity building**, while 68% saw an **improvement in internal working procedures**. However, the rate of positive responses regarding the impacts of participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer decreases when respondents are asked about more objectively measurable changes. For instance, 55% of participants said that participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer had contributed to organisational changes within their institution; 58% witnessed improvements in the institution’s management and control system. Only 24% reported legal changes in the form of a new or modified law on a larger scale. These findings indicate that the **impacts of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer on administrative capacity building are mostly institutional, rather than changing the broader national legal or administrative contexts.** Data from the evaluation reports are largely supported by the survey data and case study findings.

FIGURE 42. IMPACTS OF PARTICIPATING IN TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER EXCHANGES SIX MONTHS AFTER THE EVENT

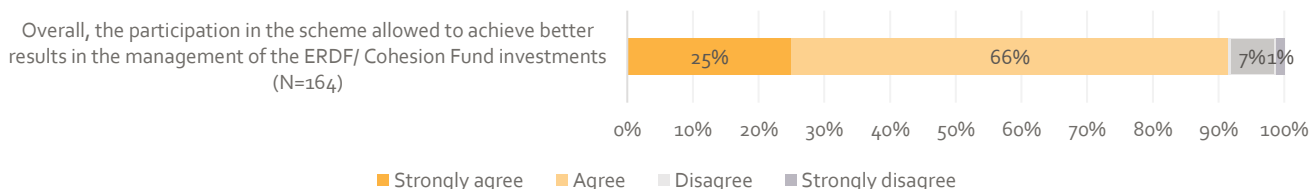


Source: Online evaluation questionnaires (study visits, expert missions, workshops) 2015-2020

The survey results reveal that **TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer has a positive impact on national administrations in general terms, but that respondents were more sceptical when asked about specific changes that resulted from participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events.** As an overall evaluation, as seen in Figure 43, over a quarter of survey respondents strongly agreed that participation in the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer scheme allowed beneficiaries to achieve

better results in the management of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund investments in their institutions and the Member States. In addition, almost two-thirds agreed with the statement, leaving only one in 10 respondents either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the benefits of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer.

FIGURE 43. OVERALL CONTRIBUTION OF TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER

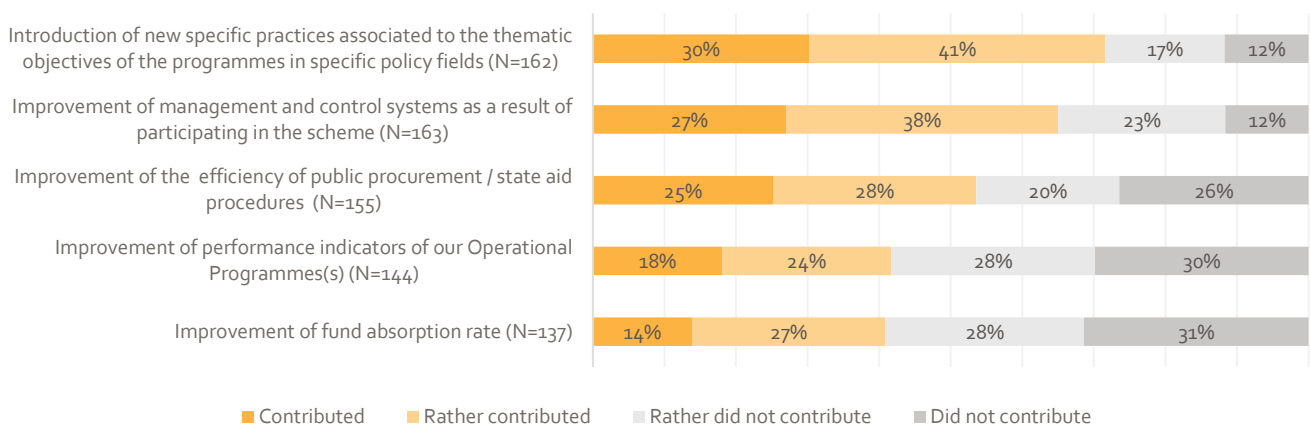


Source: PPMI survey

In terms of the more detailed potential impacts of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, the survey results are mixed. Responses are fairly positive with regard to shorter-term impacts that relate to the functioning of management and control systems and the implementation of horizontal enabling conditions in the participating institutions. However, the survey results are less positive when it comes to longer-term impacts associated with the achievement of technical and financial performance results in the implementation of EU cohesion policy, as seen in Figure 44.

The difference between the two types of impacts is not surprising based on our intervention logic, which predicts that **long-term impacts might be difficult to trace due to the novelty of the scheme**. TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer was launched in 2015, and it might take more time for its long-term impacts to materialise. As shown by our findings on the outcomes of participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer (see Section 2.2 above), the scheme contributes to the introduction of new practices and procedures at institutional level, but it is more difficult to achieve change on a larger scale and at a higher level. This is largely due to different national legal and administrative contexts and rigid administrative procedures, resulting in the knowledge gained through TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer not being directly applicable, or taking time to apply. These external factors cannot be easily modified by a small and specific group of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer participants without the involvement of governmental institutions or favourable decisions at a political level.

FIGURE 44. IMPACTS OF PARTICIPATION IN TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER EVENTS



Source: PPMI survey

The findings of the case studies are in line with the survey in the sense that TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events which aim to enable learning about **precise practices** at institutional level – such as methods of auditing EU funds or the development and application of new financial instruments – have had a considerably greater impact, with the new tools and practices being implemented soon after the event in many instances. Similar impacts can be seen in the case of events that aim to spread information about the **introduction of new schemes** that were not yet in place in the beneficiary Member States. On the other hand, TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events with a broader scope and more general goals (such as regional restructuring or the setting up of new institutions or networks) were seen as beneficial, but the knowledge gained was more difficult to apply. This was mostly due to the constraints of national legislation or the need for cooperation with other bodies and political institutions to implement changes. In line with the intervention logic, such changes also tend to require more time to materialise. It is not uncommon for TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events with a broader thematic scope or ambitious goals, such as setting up a new network of institutions or preparing a sustainable development strategy for a region, to first serve as a motivational boost for participants, and for their impacts to show only later if at all, especially if adjustments in national legislation are needed for them to be implemented. For example, one expert mission beneficiary interviewed more than six months after the event indicated that, while it was very motivating to see a similar network of institutions functioning in another Member State, the national legislation was adjusted only very recently to enable any implementation of methods and practices learned during the expert mission.

Finally, the **compatibility of national contexts of the host or an expert and the beneficiary Member States** plays an important role in how much of the knowledge and information can be implemented. A few interviewed beneficiaries noted that the contexts were too different from taking anything home, or that they saw a worse rather than a better practice and questioned the choice of the hosts of the event if it was made by DG REGIO rather than the beneficiaries themselves. Some examples of impacts of participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer identified in the case studies are listed in Box 3 below.⁴⁸

BOX 3. EXAMPLES OF IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION IN TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER ON THE INSTITUTIONS AND ADMINISTRATIONS

Implementation of new instruments:

- “We launched a whole new support scheme after the event. Before this exchange we did not have any repayable assistance projects, and we used the experience to set them up” (Study visit participant)

Adjustment of working methods and practices within the institution:

- “Some audit procedures were updated according to the list of recommendation received after the expert mission immediately. We also updated and shortened procurement checklists directly based on the recommendations this year to make our work more effective. We are implementing 18 out of 21 recommendations and will review the remaining three” (Expert mission beneficiary)
- “We implemented their approach regarding the audit of accounts and performance auditing and integrated the approach in our audit system. We also adopted the same software they are using in our work” (Study visit beneficiary)

⁴⁸ See the case studies for more examples of practices and instruments implemented as a result of participation in different types of REGIO P2P exchanges.

- “We included more SCOs in the calls prepared after the Expert mission, and we are more confident about correctly justifying their use” (Expert mission beneficiary)

No (immediate) impact due to difference in national contexts, constraints on the national level, timeline or scope of the event:

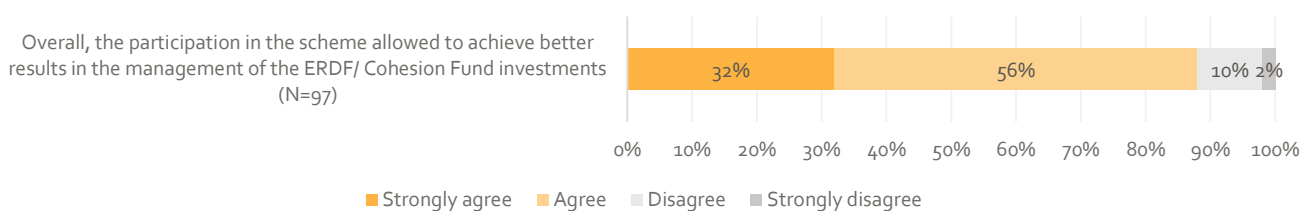
- “We implemented zero, but it was still a useful experience and knowledge. <...> but it did not relate to us specifically, and our national legal context did not allow the implementation of such structures” (Expert mission participant)
- “We are at the beginning of the process of restructuring the region and just designing a strategy. We had a lot of theoretical but no practical knowledge, so it was useful to visit another country and see how they handle the matters there. <...> We saw some useful examples, and we hope that we can copy-paste some ideas in the future” (Study visit beneficiary)
- “We knew we were going in a different direction than the host institution but knowing how and why not to do something like the others is still important knowledge that helps us set our direction and explain our choices. <...> We are still harbouring the knowledge gained for when we want to set up a new equity instrument.” (Study visit beneficiary)

Source: Interview data/case studies

2.4.2. Impacts of Communities of Practitioners

Concerning the impact of CoPs, the majority of survey respondents who had participated in CoPs reported largely positive results, with the majority of them claiming that their involvement had allowed them to achieve better results in the management of ERDF/Cohesion Fund investments. Only a small number of respondents maintained that their participation did not positively influence fund management. **However, while participants could easily identify individual-level outcomes and recognise some significant institutional-level outcomes, fewer members were able to pinpoint specific impacts of their participation in the scheme and in subsequent initiatives that resulted from it.**

FIGURE 45. OVERALL CONTRIBUTION OF CoPs

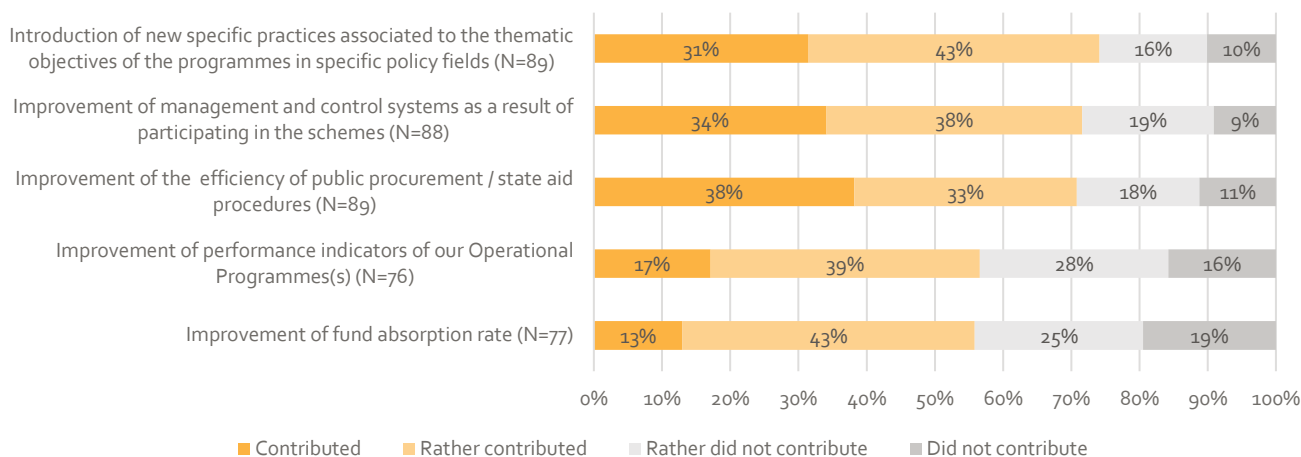


Source: PPMI survey

With regard to specific impacts, which include improvements to the efficiency of procedures, management and control systems the introduction of new practices relating to thematic objectives, performance indicators and fund absorption, the evidence of impacts reported by survey respondents and interviewees is mixed. Survey respondents generally agreed that the impacts of participation were mostly short-term, such as the improvement of procedures, management and control systems, or the introduction of new practices. The majority of respondents maintained that participation in CoPs had contributed to improvements in the efficiency of public procurement and/or state aid procedures, the improvement of management and controls systems, and the introduction of specific new practices associated with the thematic objectives of the programmes. Conversely, even though more than half of all participants claimed that involvement in CoPs had helped to improve the performance indicators of their Operational

Programmes as well as their fund absorption rate, 44% of survey respondents thought that participation in CoPs has not yet produced any significant – or, indeed, any- longer-term impacts.

FIGURE 46. IMPACTS OF PARTICIPATION IN CoPs



Source: PPMI survey

In terms of more specific examples of impact stemming from participation in CoPs, **there were some individual cases in which participants identified specific improvements that had been undertaken.** Certain changes and improvements had been introduced in the tools used for fund management as a direct result of involvement in CoPs. These tools involved the IMS (Irregularity Management System) database and tools; information sharing tools on warning signals and potential variations; technical tools for monitoring through the use of data; Arachne, and red flags in audits for the procurement system. Participants reported learning from the good practices of other countries that had been introduced during workshops. This resulted in them either implementing or making plans to introduce changes to programme management practices and procedures to make them more efficient. Moreover, some impacts related to the interpretation of national and local laws, prompting discussions about potential changes to national legislation (e.g. with regard to public procurement and conflicts of interest for public officials), or at least changes in the interpretation of laws. For more specific examples, please see the CoPs case study annexed to this Report.

BOX 4. RED FLAGS AND ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT

Implementation of changes is a gradual process

In one institution, the discussions that took place at CoPs events about red flags in audits for procurement system were taken into account, because the institution itself was trying to implement a red flag system. Implementing a red flag system within the organisation provides every project team with a clear and transparent set of conditions at the beginning of every project, to guide their activities. This set of conditions, or ‘risk appetite’, must be determined by the management of the organisation, as opposed to every project team setting its own conditions independently. When a project team runs into trouble in terms of its conditions, it sends a signal for the project team to escalate the issue or inform the management. Conditions may relate to health and safety risks, accessibility or the availability of roads and waterways as well as environmental issues. At the present time, project teams mainly focus on finishing projects and their deliverables within

scope, time and budget. It is expected that these changes will ensure that the bottom layer of the organisation works with organisational objectives in mind, rather than just their own project-specific objectives.

Source: Interview data

*"On an organisational level, our participation inevitably improved implicit knowledge which impacts all decisions and our vision on how to organise procedures in the future. **I would not be able to trace all exact changes in procedures that happened or are planned to specific input of CoPs. But I would say there is such a link because it widens your horizons, helps obtain new knowledge which is not readily available from other sources.** EU regulation and some other acts are normative – they tell you what you should do and how to achieve compliance, but when you exchange information with peers, you are able to get an idea how this works in practice, what issues they face in their countries and just take this into account in your procedures and practices. Hard to trace the link, however, it is possible that impacted – a new collaboration on an international level is introduced."*⁴⁹

⁴⁹ PPMI interviews with users of the schemes.

2.5. Conclusions

Individual and institutional-level outcomes

Despite the specificities of both schemes – with TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer aiming to provide targeted short-term solutions and expertise and CoPs aiming to facilitate long-term cooperation – their individual and institutional-level outcomes are fairly similar. Nearly all participants in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs experience notable **positive individual outcomes**, the key ones being the improvement of professional skills and competences and international networking. **At an institutional level, however, outcomes are more difficult to achieve** due to the intervention of various external factors and the specificities of the schemes, such as a focus on *ad hoc* needs, short-term participation and small scope. Furthermore, there is a risk that staff turnover, obsolescence of knowledge or inadequate organisational procedures will reduce the benefits of the schemes to individuals and institutions. The findings of the study indicate that some of these factors do indeed prevent the achievement of certain institutional outcomes.

Knowledge gained through participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events does lead to the introduction of new financial instruments, tools or working practices – but changes to existing practices are often hampered by rigid administrative structures or a lack of cooperation from other higher-level bodies and institutions. Furthermore, the differences between the national contexts and legislation of hosts and beneficiaries often limits the applicability of knowledge and the expertise exchanged. The study found that events with a narrow, well-defined scope and carefully selected experts, which aim to achieve small-scale institutional changes rather than those at national level, or to introduce an entirely new instrument, tend to have more considerable and positive institutional outcomes than those aiming at broader reforms or strategies. The latter take a long time to implement and require adjustments to current legislation, cooperation from other institutions, or approval by the political level.

The same trend was observed in the case of CoPs: some individual-level benefits translated into institutional-level outcomes when combined with effective follow-up efforts. Institutional-level outcomes were less prevalent due to the more complex procedures and efforts required to achieve them. This again hints that institutional design might be too difficult to change via a bottom-up initiative. Nevertheless, around two-thirds of survey respondents identified positive outcomes at an institutional level in relation to improvements in organisational systems, tools and structures as well as human resources.

Follow-up activities

Dissemination and exploitation of the results of the schemes, achieved through the sharing of specific outcomes by the participants within and across institutions maintaining and further developing contacts made with the experts/hosts, and triggering new applications and initiatives, is instrumental in achieving outcomes and impacts at an institutional level.

Most TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs participants undertake various follow-up activities; however, these usually involve sharing and disseminating information rather than proactively organising follow-up events. Most TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs participants share the knowledge they have gained during events within their respective institutions by disseminating presentations and other materials from the event to relevant practitioners. Members of the schemes tend to stay in touch with their counterparts in case any further questions or issues arise after the event. However, the organisation of actual follow-up events such as exchanges funded by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer or other sources on the same or related topics and involving the same or different institutions is uncommon, indicating a lack of strategic approach to participation in the schemes.

Impact of the schemes

The study identified various examples of improvements within participating administrations. However, the impacts of the schemes in the Member States are mostly on a small scale, limited to a single institution and relating to soft skills and working practices rather than institutional adjustments or changes in the overall national system that manages the funds. This corresponds with our expectations, based on the features of the schemes and their novelty. Given that both schemes were launched only a few years ago (2015 in the case of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, and 2016 for the CoPs), and are on a relatively small scale, it is likely that the actual impacts of these schemes have not (yet) materialised at an institutional level. The **impacts of the two schemes instead follow non-linear or indirect impact pathways**, e.g. through the spread of knowledge within professional communities and networks, leading to ideational or programmatic shifts that could influence policy development or institution building in the future when a new window of opportunity arises in the policy and institutional agendas of specific EU Member States.

TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events do have some impact on administrations in the participating Member States, and contribute to improvements in the management of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund. However, as with the institutional outcomes, these impacts are limited. While most participants in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events agree that the schemes have contributed to the improved management of ERDF and Cohesion Fund investments, they seldom identify changes to structures, practices or indicators that would require large scale adjustments and the involvement of multiple institutions or changes to national legislation. However, the impacts are more considerable where events aim to adjust and improve specific procedures within certain (often smaller) institutions, or the introduction of new practices or financial instruments. While larger-scale impacts such as a positive contribution to the fund absorption rate are difficult to pinpoint, TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer lives up to its goal of addressing the *ad hoc* issues practitioners face in implementing the ERDF, and the CF. TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer contributes to intra-institutional improvements in working practices, and provides an attractive networking opportunity for representatives of different Member States.

Most **CoPs members also reported that the scheme had an impact in a few broader areas, although specific examples were harder to identify**. The discussions in CoPs rarely translate into considerable institutional and system-level changes. This stems from both external and internal factors that affect the achievement of larger impacts. Nonetheless, many CoPs members reported seeing the potential for broader and higher-level impacts in the future.

Overall, the assessment and measurement of impacts stemming directly from participation in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs is challenging for several reasons:

- **First**, a lot of strongly interconnected external factors are at play when it comes to systemic changes, or transforming management practices. This makes it difficult to trace or isolate the impacts of the schemes (external factors include, but are not limited to, other EU instruments or framework conditions, as discussed in the intervention logic).
- **Second**, achieving higher-level changes requires commitment, time and a strategic approach to participation in the schemes, which is lacking both in case of CoPs and TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer. The difficulty of making such changes to monitoring systems or management tools in the middle of a programme's life cycle is also a barrier.
- **Third**, some significant structural changes can only be achieved at a political level; thus, the participants can only try to achieve their desired results indirectly, by organising follow-up activities and disseminating relevant information.

- **Fourth**, some participants were not seeking system-level impacts, and instead joined the schemes to address specific issues and find targeted solutions such as interpreting EU legislation, rather than changing working structures and practices within their institution.

Internal and external coherence

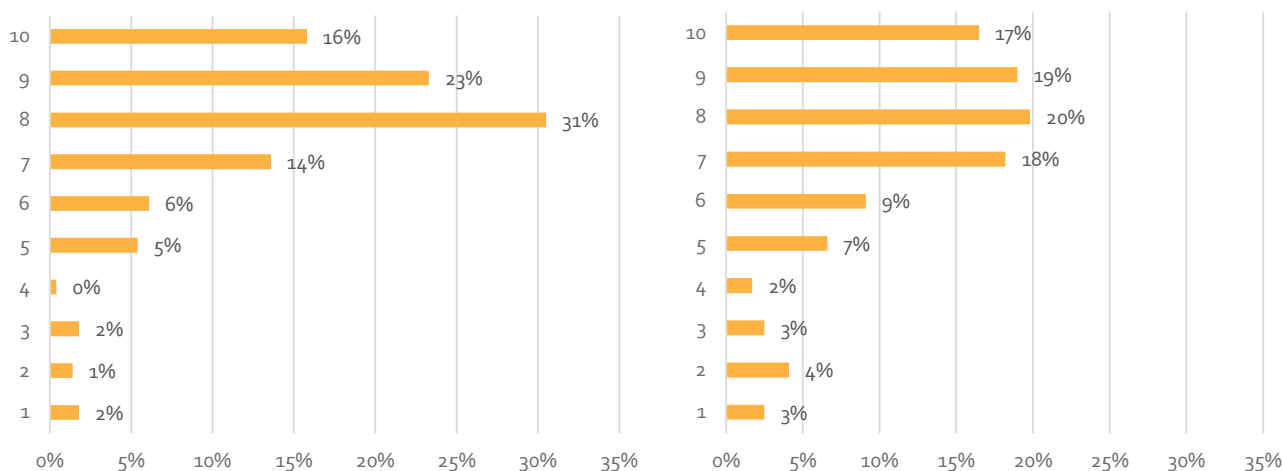
TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs share the same overall aim, but differ in terms of certain characteristics: TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer focuses on *ad hoc*, short term exchanges, whereas CoPs aims to build a community of practitioners, working continuously on selected topic(s). Thus, as it stands, the schemes can function separately, as they have differing logics. However, **larger synergies would seem to be natural, as both of the schemes focus mostly on the same target groups (CoPs were originally meant only for MAs and IBs, and practitioners from other bodies have until now been admitted only on a case-by-case basis), attract similar users, and work on similar topics.** The current synergies identified between the schemes are limited and could be better exploited. For example, TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer participants are not systematically invited to continue working on the topic by joining the CoPs.

The key issue in relation to external coherence and synergies with other networks managed by DG REGIO is **low awareness of the schemes and the possibilities they offer within DG REGIO itself.** This is particularly true in the case of the CoPs. Low awareness about the schemes limits cooperation and synergies with other DG REGIO networks. No duplications between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs and other DG REGIO networks were identified, as these networks either do not focus on peer learning activities, the topics they are working on do not yet overlap, or close coordination is already taking place to coordinate their activities. However, there is the risk that if activities are not coordinated in the future, certain overlaps might occur, especially in terms of thematic coverage.

Overall satisfaction with the schemes

The users of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs are largely satisfied with their functioning and with the various benefits that the schemes bring to them. Overall satisfaction among users of each scheme is fairly high. Survey respondents gave TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer an average score of 7.8 on a scale of 1 to 10 (almost 70% of respondents gave it a score of 8 or higher). CoPs received a similar evaluation, with an overall score of 7.3 (55% of respondents gave it a score of 8 or higher). Although CoPs users reported slightly greater interest in engaging in European peer-learning and networking activities than users of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer (see Figure 32), overall satisfaction among the latter group is higher. As seen in Figure 47, which provides a breakdown of user satisfaction, the higher scores (7 or above) given to CoPs are fairly evenly distributed, while the majority of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer users gave the scheme 8 or 9. Furthermore, more users offered negative evaluations of CoPs, and these are more evenly distributed than those of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, where fewer users evaluated the scheme negatively. Only 5% gave TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer a score of 1-4, while for CoPs this figure is 12%.

FIGURE 47: OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER (LEFT, N=279) AND CoPs (RIGHT, N=121) ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10, WHERE 1 = VERY UNSATISFIED; 10 = VERY SATISFIED



Source: PPMI survey

Users of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer are largely satisfied with the implementation of the scheme. The majority agreed that the scheme is implemented in line with its guiding principles: namely, by being light, flexible and providing quick and to-the-point solutions to current issues faced by beneficiaries. Its application and reporting procedures are comprehensive, and the support of DG REGIO in the preparation of the events is sufficient. The main difficulties encountered by beneficiaries relate to limitations on the number of participants (particularly the limit of three beneficiaries on study visits) and the difficulty of finding qualified experts in a timely manner. The experts for TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events are often found through beneficiaries’ personal contacts; the process tends to take longer if DG REGIO has to identify an expert, indicating certain shortcomings of the TAIEX REGIO expert database. Multiple beneficiaries also indicated that more guidance from DG REGIO could be useful as to which practices are really the best ones to learn from; however, greater intervention from DG REGIO could interfere somewhat with the bottom-up and peer to peer approach of the scheme.

The study concludes that the **CoPs was organised according to its guiding principles** and did not deviate from its original purpose and objectives, the most notable being its bottom-up approach and the autonomy of its participants. Most users agreed that these features make CoPs stand out from other administrative capacity building and training activities in the field. These features also allowed participants to shape activities to meet their needs, both institutionally and individually, making the scheme user-friendly. As for its horizontal structure, most CoPs members found participation to be relatively balanced because all participants are given equal opportunities and encouraged both to share their experience and to seek expertise from other members within the scheme. Nevertheless, the participants identified some shortcomings that reduce the effectiveness of the CoPs scheme. The main shortcomings indicated by survey respondents were a limitation to the number of workshop participants per country, insufficient thematic coverage, and an insufficient number of active participants.

3. Prospective analysis and recommendations

3.1. Introduction

This part of the Report focuses on a **prospective analysis**, which aims to identify opportunities to develop TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs to increase their potential for peer learning and improve coordination with the other administrative capacity building tools and networks of DG REGIO. The prospective analysis is informed by the data collected and the key findings presented in [section 2](#). However, this part of the Report also goes beyond this to present some additional insights collected during interviews, which included prospective questions on how the schemes could be developed. The analysis presented in this section is also complemented by findings obtained from the workshop with the administrative capacity building team at DG REGIO, Unit E1. This online workshop took place on 15 October 2020, with 11 participants from DG REGIO attending.

The prospective analysis presented here contributes to the achievement of two specific objectives of the study, namely:

- Identifying opportunities to develop the two schemes, in line with the aspirations of DG REGIO to develop and extend peer learning as a tool for capacity building, and taking account the needs of users, with the aim of maximising effectiveness, impact and contribution to overall administrative capacity building policy;
- Providing recommendations to DG REGIO on how to improve the schemes and increase the potential of peer learning to support administrative capacity building in the implementation of cohesion policy.

We apply a combination of different methods to carry out the prospective analysis, with the overall approach being one of policy pathway mapping.⁵⁰ The pathway mapping explores and sequences possible actions based on different development options during the next programming period, focusing on the design of the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and the CoPs initiatives. While this analysis **focuses on development pathways**, arguments as to the continuation or discontinuation of the schemes are also briefly presented.

The analysis is guided by the set of questions listed in the Technical Specifications of this study, as well as other topics that emerged from our desk research and stakeholder consultation. These questions, presented in Table 11, were also discussed during the workshop with the ACB team at DG REGIO. Instead of addressing these questions one by one, we integrate them under the specific pathways analysed.

⁵⁰ Haasnoot, M., Kwakkel, J., Walker, W. & ter Maat, J. (2013), "Dynamic adaptive policy pathways: A method for crafting robust decisions for a deeply uncertain world". *Global Environmental Change*, 23(2), pp. 485-498.

TABLE 11. MATRIX OF PROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

SCHEMES ADDRESSED	KEY QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTIONS	DATA COLLECTION AND VERIFICATION TECHNIQUES
TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs	<p>What arguments speak in favour of continuing TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and the CoPs in the next programming period (2021-2027)? Are there any reasons why not to? Would a different configuration or integration with other tools improve their coherence, effectiveness and efficiency? If so, what would need to change?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ EU-level interviews ■ Results of analysis under Tasks 1 to 3 ■ Pathway mapping ■ Workshop with the ACB team
	<p>How could peer learning be upscaled to reach a bigger, and yet more targeted, population? Is it possible and advisable to extend the scope of eligible users? How to promote the use of peer learning in countries that use it less and need a stronger administrative capacity? How to improve the match between applicants and peer experts to spread ideas and good practices?</p>	
	<p>How could peer learning make more of a strategic contribution to administrative capacity building for the purpose of implementing cohesion policy? How can DG REGIO promote specific topics and exchanges without compromising the bottom-up character of this initiative? What additional complementary opportunities/tools could be needed to cater for user needs? How could the scheme draw maximum benefit from the best practices and experiences shared?</p>	
	<p>How could coordination with other administrative capacity building tools and initiatives, in particular those developed by DG REGIO, be improved to increase impact? Could these services be delivered in a different way to improve their effectiveness? What arrangements would be needed to ensure the results are measured correctly?</p>	

3.2. Pathways

3.2.1. Introduction

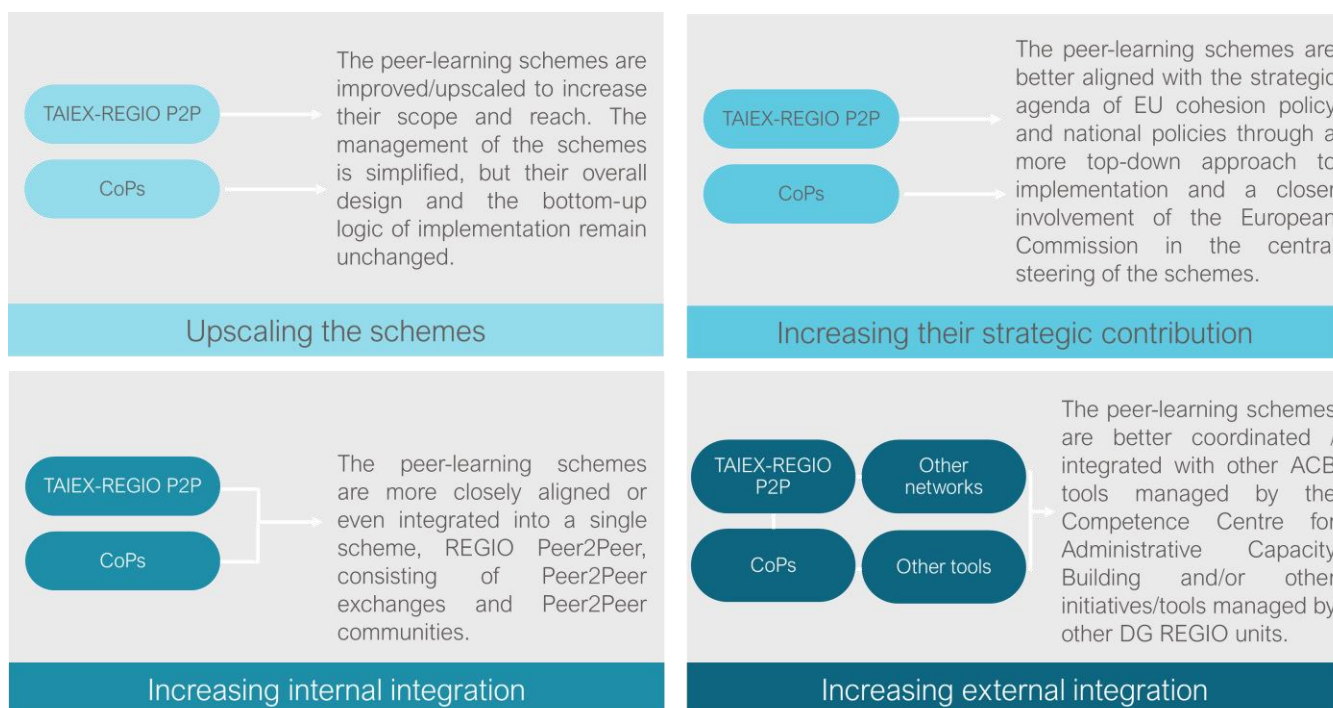
In this section, we discuss how the schemes could be further developed, and examine the possible internal and external coherence of the schemes together with other administrative capacity building tools and networks developed by DG REGIO. As part of the prospective analysis, we identified a set of pathways for the future development of the peer learning schemes. In addition to the situation of the *status quo*, we set out the following specific options:

- **Upscaling** of the peer-learning schemes;
- **Strategic contribution** of the peer-learning schemes;

- **Internal integration** of the peer-learning schemes;
- **External integration** of the peer-learning schemes.

These development scenarios could be implemented separately or in combination with each other. In order to facilitate the presentation of the advantages and disadvantages of each scenario, we decided to present them separately. However, various configurations are possible (for example, a combination of upscaling the schemes and increasing internal coherence) and might yield a greater increase in the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the schemes. Accordingly, in [section 3.2.7](#) we present conclusions as to what could be the preferred configuration for these pathways.

FIGURE 48. OUTLINE OF THE LOGIC BEHIND THE PATHWAYS



Source: prepared by PPMI

The table below provides a summary of each option for the future development of the peer learning schemes by providing their short description and main (positive, negative and neutral) effects. The main effects of the development pathways mostly concern their potential impact on the (financial and non-financial) operation of the schemes, their coherence and efficiency, effectiveness and impact.

The assessment of each scenario is based on all evidence collected during the study and the results of our prospective analysis. A more in-depth presentation of each pathway is provided following the table.

TABLE 12. POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF THE PATHWAYS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PEER LEARNING SCHEMES

PATHWAY	SHORT DESCRIPTION	POSITIVE (+), NEGATIVE (-) AND NEUTRAL (N) EFFECTS OF EACH DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO
Status quo	The peer learning schemes continue in their current form. Some gradual improvements of an ordinary type are introduced to improve their performance. The overall design of the schemes remains unchanged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Possibilities for continuing to make gradual improvements to the functioning of the peer-learning schemes through 'learning by doing' (+) ▪ Potential for a small increase in the effectiveness and impact of the schemes (+) ▪ Possible improvements identified in the study are not exploited (-) ▪ Potential complementarities and synergies identified in the study are unlikely to be exploited (-) ▪ No major change in the operational costs of the schemes (n)
Upscaling/improving	The peer learning schemes are upscaled to improve them, increasing their scope and reach. The management of the schemes is simplified, but their overall design and the bottom-up logic of implementation remains unchanged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Possibilities for reaching stakeholder groups that currently participate in the peer learning schemes less often, through awareness-raising and digitalisation (+) ▪ Possibilities for increased efficiency in the implementation of the schemes through greater flexibility or digitalisation (+) ▪ Possibilities for the better achievement of individual/institutional outcomes through the improvements introduced, as well as larger scope and reach (+) ▪ Additional financial and human resources, or redistribution of available ones, are necessary to improve/upscale the schemes (-)
Strategic contribution	The peer learning schemes are better aligned with the strategic agenda of EU cohesion policy and national policies through a more top-down approach to implementation and the closer involvement of the European Commission in the central steering of the schemes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential to better achieve the priorities of EU cohesion policy through a more strategic focus (+) ▪ Possibilities for a better contribution to policy and institutional outcomes, due to a closer link between policy development and peer learning (+) ▪ Greater involvement of the European Commission in the implementation of the schemes (+/-) ▪ Risk of undermining the key principles of peer learning and the bottom-up nature of the schemes (-) ▪ Additional human resources needed from the Commission's side to introduce and support the greater involvement of the European Commission (-) ▪ No major change in the operational costs of the schemes (n)

PATHWAY	SHORT DESCRIPTION	POSITIVE (+), NEGATIVE (-) AND NEUTRAL (N) EFFECTS OF EACH DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO
Internal integration	The peer learning schemes are more closely aligned or even integrated into a single scheme, consisting of Peer2Peer exchanges and Peer2Peer communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential for increased internal coherence of the schemes through a mix of different peer learning instruments (+) ▪ Possibilities for making a new scheme more flexible, improving its branding and increasing its reach (+) ▪ No major change in the operational costs of the schemes (n)
External integration	The peer learning schemes are better coordinated/integrated with other ACB tools managed by the Competence Centre for Administrative Capacity Building and/or other initiatives and tools managed by other DG REGIO units. The implementation modalities of the existing schemes are reviewed to match the results of this external coordination/integration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential for increased external coherence of the schemes through a mix of peer learning and other tools for capacity building (networks, frameworks, guidelines, projects, etc.) (+) ▪ Potential for increasing the effectiveness and impact of the schemes and other administrative capacity building networks/tools (+) ▪ Easier access for potential users of the schemes through a more clearly presented and communicated offer of different ACB opportunities by DG REGIO (+) ▪ Resistance from the owners of the schemes, depending on the level of increased coordination/integration (-) ▪ Additional coordination and management efforts are required within DG REGIO of the European Commission (-) ▪ Risk of undermining the key principles of peer learning and the bottom-up nature of the schemes (-) ▪ No major change in the operational costs of the schemes (n)

3.2.2. Continuation or discontinuation of the schemes

The retrospective analysis performed and presented in [section 2](#) reveals a number of arguments that support the continuation of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs.

Prevalence of individual-level outcomes, but also positive examples of institutional-level outcomes and impacts

Individual outcomes, including the improvement of professional knowledge and expertise, networking and the soft skills of the participants, are evident and very positive. Key examples include the improvement of professional skills and competences and international networking. At an *institutional level*, however, outcomes are more difficult to achieve, due to the intervention of various external factors and the specificity of schemes focusing on *ad-hoc* needs, the short-term nature of participation, and the fairly small size of the schemes. For TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, institutional outcomes are more visible in the case of events with a narrow and well-defined scope, precisely identified prior needs, and which aim to introduce new instruments, tools or practices rather than adjusting existing ones. Findings from the analysis of CoPs show that the institutional outcomes of participation in CoPs are intertwined with individual outcomes, and focus on the level of organisational systems, tools and structures, as well as human resources. The *impacts* of both TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs is difficult to directly pinpoint to participation in the schemes

due to their novelty, the lack of their more strategic use (particularly relevant for TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer), and the fact that impacts might take some time to materialise, as well as being affected by several external factors.

The schemes live up to their guiding principles

The **guiding principles behind TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer** are that the scheme is rapid, light, flexible, tailor-made and quality-controlled, providing quick, to-the-point and practical solutions to the problems faced by beneficiary institutions. The findings of both the survey and the interviews indicate that, with a few exceptions and common issues, the scheme is implemented in line with these principles. Over 80% of survey respondents agreed that TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer functions according to its guiding principles.

The fundamental **principles guiding the implementation of CoPs** are autonomy, horizontal structure and the co-creation of tools and solutions. Findings from the case study indicate that CoPs members tend to agree that participation is relatively balanced, because all participants are given equal opportunities and encouraged both to share their experience and to seek expertise from other members within the scheme. Survey respondents echoed this view: three out of four disagreed that the activities of CoPs were dominated by only a few participants. An overwhelming majority (over 90% of survey respondents) said that the initiative of members drives the activities of CoPs. Interview participants also reiterated the prevalence of this feature of the scheme. Moreover, it was also highlighted as one of the scheme's main advantages, making it stand out from other training or administrative capacity building efforts. The principle of the co-creation of tools and solutions was perceived as more multifaceted by participants – while a significant share of participants agreed that online and physical activities help to not only exchange but also to co-create new knowledge and develop new tools and solutions to the issues and challenges faced by participants in their work, not everyone echoed this opinion.

The principle of peer learning is much appreciated, and few other schemes provide such opportunities

Our analysis of the answers provided to the open-ended question on participation in other administrative capacity building actions, programmes or peer learning schemes reveals that the respondents most often attended various types of training (for example, in the framework of the Twinning programme⁵¹, those organised by EIPA, etc.). Only a few respondents indicated that they had participated in actions with a clear peer learning component. Thus, the principle of peer learning makes TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs stand out among other ACB opportunities.

Other networks, ACB related programmes and various tools managed by DG REGIO also provide some possibilities for peer learning among similar target groups to those targeted by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs. Examples include the INFORM network, the Transnational network of ERDF/CF SCO practitioners, Interact and URBACT. However, most of these are of a more top-down nature, focusing on very specific topics, and do not provide bilateral peer learning opportunities.

⁵¹ Survey respondents were most likely to refer to the Twinning programme under TAIEX, which is available to candidate countries. Survey respondents did not provide details to further elaborate on this training opportunity.

The schemes address the needs of their users

The majority of survey respondents (around 90%) agreed that one of the reasons they had decided to join TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer or CoPs was that the schemes addressed some of the *ad hoc* needs faced by the respondents and their institutions. Similarly, almost 90% of survey respondents identified TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer as providing a rapid response and solutions to their needs and problems.⁵²

Users are satisfied with the functioning of the schemes

Users are satisfied with the functioning of the schemes and the various benefits they bring. The majority agree that the schemes are implemented in line with their guiding principles. Their application and reporting procedures are comprehensive, and the support provided by DG REGIO in the preparation of the events is, in most cases, sufficient. All of those interviewees who were asked directly whether the schemes should be continued and why, expressed support for the schemes being continued.

3.2.3. Pathway 1: upscaling the schemes

Under this pathway, we provide recommendations as to what should be improved and how, assuming that the schemes continue to function separately. These recommendations are based on the key issues relating to the functioning of the schemes identified in [section 2](#), as well as the outcomes of the workshop with the ACB team at DG REGIO. Under this pathway, recommendations for TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs are provided separately.

TABLE 13. ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PATHWAY 1

ARGUMENTS FOR:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key pathway for increasing the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs. ▪ Opportunities to reach the stakeholder groups that currently participate in the peer learning schemes less frequently, through awareness-raising and digitalisation. ▪ Possibilities for increasing efficiency in the implementation of the schemes through greater flexibility or digitalisation. ▪ Possibilities to better achieve individual/institutional outcomes through the improvements introduced, as well as a larger scope and reach.
ARGUMENTS AGAINST:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are no strong arguments that speak against the implementation of this pathway, as it is the key option for improving TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs.
HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

⁵² The users of CoPs were not asked this question.

- Consideration should be given, however, to the possibility that the implementation of the actions proposed under this pathway will increase workload and might require additional **human resources**, mostly temporarily (e.g. for the reinforced and more direct promotion of the schemes, adjusting the information presented in the promotional materials, reinforcing the role of the CoPs champions, etc.). Some of the actions proposed for the CoPs would require a re-shuffling of existing resources or the need for additional resources in terms of community management (reinforcing online activities, expanding the thematic coverage of the CoPs, visualising various outputs prepared during CoPs activities and preparing them for visualisation, etc.). Overall, the implementation of Pathway 1 should result in greater demand for exchanges / an expanded circle of CoPs members. Thus, it might require additional permanent human resources to manage the increased number of exchanges and increased size of the CoPs.
- The impact of Pathway 1 in terms of the **financial resources** required to implement it will not be extensive, but some redistribution of existing financial resources or the allocation of additional resources might be needed – e.g. for the dissemination of information in multiple languages (TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer); incentives for host organisations (TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer); switching to an interactive and more visually attractive website (CoPs); and the use of a more comprehensive online collaborative platform (CoPs).

3.2.3.1 TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer

The data collected and presented in the analysis in [section 2](#) identified some areas in which improvements could be introduced to the functioning of the scheme. Some improvements/changes would result in the increased scope of the scheme, while others would not affect its current scope. First, we provide a summary of the key issues identified, then we propose recommendations to address each of the key issues.

Awareness and targeted promotion

A lack of awareness of the opportunities offered by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer is one of the major issues facing the scheme. It tends to be known among a fairly narrow circle of practitioners, mostly those who routinely engage in EU-level expert groups and find out about the scheme from the European Commission or from colleagues engaged in other such expert groups. DG REGIO uses various channels to reach out to potential users. These include providing information on its website, disseminating information through other networks, involving geographical units within DG REGIO as intermediaries, etc. However, the unit in charge of administrative capacity building in DG REGIO (unit E1) has a fairly weak link with cohesion policy practitioners on the ground (the Managing Authorities and beyond). In addition, a lack of awareness could be one of the reasons why some countries are less active participants in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer.

BOX 5. ACTIONS PROPOSED TO ADDRESS AWARENESS AND IMPLEMENT TARGETED PROMOTION (TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer)

- Expand the scope of promotional activities beyond EU-level expert groups and Managing Authorities in the Member States.
 - Update/revise the mapping of all relevant institutions at the level of the MS that are eligible for support under TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, and use it as a tool to shape the promotion strategy of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs.
 - Prioritise which countries should be targeted by DG REGIO, and promote the scheme directly to the institutions of these target countries, addressing multiple relevant institutions, not only the Managing Authorities (as they do not always distribute information). The level of administrative capacity in a country could be one of the criteria used to decide which countries to focus on.
 - If deemed relevant, promote the scheme within institutions from less active Member States, especially those from the EU15. Focus in particular on promoting and explaining that, even though

TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer is supported by the TAIEX instrument, it is not just available to the enlargement countries. Bigger (and especially federal) countries could also be prioritised, as information might not reach all authorities if the central national authorities are used as main contact points.

- Encourage the experts and beneficiaries from successful exchanges to be more actively involved in the dissemination of information about TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer.
- Better involve geographical units in spreading information about TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer.
 - Continue working to make geographical desks the national contact points for TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, or even for ACB in general. Set this expectation towards them, agree on the level of involvement needed from them, and the frequency of their contributions.
 - Improve internal communication with the geographical desks by creating a common web-based communication space between the ACB Unit and all relevant geographical desks.
 - Prepare and provide the geographical desks with messages and materials that they can distribute easily.
- Adjust the information provided in the promotional materials.
 - Showcase more best practices and practical examples of what TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer has to offer so potential participants from institutions or national contexts lacking peer learning tradition gain a better understanding of the benefits (especially potential beneficiaries from EU15).
 - A newsletter could be introduced, aiming to share experiences of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer workshops organised.
- Improve and expand TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer website visually and in terms of content.
 - Integrate information into the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer website about exchanges that have already been implemented, instead of referring users to the TAIEX REGIO Peer 2 Peer library.
 - Use a thematic classification for exchanges, thus helping potential users to identify area(s) of interest and inspiration.
 - On the website, provide practical examples of successful exchanges and practical information about what has been learnt; present more interactive material on the website.
- Consider disseminating information about TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer in multiple languages.

Strategic approach and follow-up

The study determined that the number of institutions and practitioners repeatedly taking part in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer is relatively small; most events aim to address *ad hoc* issues rather than continued cooperation. The use of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer is strategic in the sense that it addresses precisely identified needs, but not in the sense that it is part of an institutional training strategy. This *ad hoc* nature is in line with the principles of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer. However, the scheme could increase its potential for institutional-level outcomes and impacts if it were used more strategically, by combining TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer with national/institutional or other ACB opportunities, and by organising a set of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges in a coordinated way.

Most TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer participants share the knowledge they have gained during events within their respective institutions by disseminating presentations and other materials from the event to relevant practitioners. The organisation of actual follow-up events such as exchanges, funded by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer or other sources, covering the same or related topics and involving the same or different institutions is uncommon. This indicates the lack of strategic approach to participation in the schemes.

BOX 6. ACTIONS PROPOSED TO ADDRESS MORE STRATEGIC USE AND FOLLOW-UP

- Clearly communicate the rules on the number of exchanges allowed (i.e. that there is no limit on the number of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges per beneficiary). Include a question in the application/survey after the exchange, asking whether the beneficiary plans to organise follow-up/a series of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges. This could help to emphasise the need for a more strategic approach.
- Consider developing a separate type of application that would allow applicants to apply for a series of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges with one application, thus facilitating its more strategic use, combining several types of exchanges. This could also result in more institutional-level planning and the involvement of HR departments, as such an application would require some additional efforts beyond the identification of the **AD HOC** needs of specific individuals.
- Along with the exchanges that institutions apply for individually, national/regional MAs and CAs could be encouraged to organise TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events in a more centralised manner and invite relevant national institutions, thus encouraging a more strategic approach to the use of the scheme. A multi-country workshop for MAs and CAs could be organised in which more experienced MAs or the most active institutions could present their experiences of organising TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges involving other institutions in their countries.
- Prepare a very short handout for participants in exchanges, suggesting what kind of follow-up they could organise and how; and showcasing examples of good practice. This information could be sent together with or integrated into the evaluation form disseminated at the end of the event.

Improving other operational aspects of the exchanges

The study findings show that TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer is implemented in line with its guiding principles (rapid, light, flexible, tailor-made and quality-controlled). Many respondents see no difficulties relating to the implementation of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges. However, in the feedback received via the survey and interviews, certain aspects relating to the way schemes are organised and implemented were identified for improvement.

One of the issues identified was that only a **limited number of participants** are allowed per type of event or per MS (study visits – a maximum of three representatives from the beneficiary; expert missions – a maximum of two visiting experts; workshops – a maximum of two visiting experts; multi-country workshops – a maximum of two participants per country). Even though the analysis of needs performed in 2014⁵³ identified that the majority of potential users preferred short-term exchanges, the **limitation on the duration of exchanges** (especially those for TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer study visits) was also raised as an issue by some respondents to our study.

Another operational issue relates to **finding qualified experts**. A large share of the experts surveyed and interviewed indicated that they were approached directly by the beneficiaries of events before their participation, rather than by DG REGIO. Based on the results of the survey, the experts enrolled in the expert database (EDB) received on average 2.6 requests to host or participate in an event. However, responses to this question ranged between zero and 10, indicating some level of

⁵³ EIPA, Assessment of demand and supply in administrative capacity to manage European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds and explore interest in a new staff exchange instrument called “Common Expert Exchange System” (CEES), FWC 30-CE0467851/0065 – Final Report, 20 07 2014.

path-dependency, and the strong role played by personal networks in the demand for certain experts. The experts interviewed confirmed this trend, with some indicating that they had been approached by potential beneficiaries and the EC repeatedly since the first event they took part in, while others did not receive any personal requests aside from the regular newsletters, despite being enrolled in the EDB. In addition, in the case of new or emerging topics, there can be a lack of relevant experts in the database.

The respondents indicated that it might be relevant to **expand the pool of eligible beneficiaries and experts** to include, for example, local authorities and municipalities, or experts from the private sector. However, such an expansion could result in a very broad scope and a very high demand. TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer might not be able to address the needs of this expanded circle of potential applicants, especially those of municipalities. In addition, municipalities are specifically targeted by the Interact and URBACT programmes, although these programmes do not offer bilateral exchanges, but instead offer other formats for capacity building and peer learning opportunities. NGOs could also be considered as a possible target group in the future, particularly as knowledge providers, but also as the beneficiaries of exchanges.

BOX 7. ACTIONS PROPOSED TO ADDRESS VARIOUS OPERATIONAL ASPECTS OF TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER

- Clearly communicate the rules regarding the number of participants and the duration of events.
 - Inform the beneficiaries that they can send more than three people to a study visit if they agree to cover their costs.
 - Consider covering the costs of more than three participants if they represent multiple institutions in the beneficiary country, since this would increase the outreach of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer.
 - Clearly communicate the possible duration of events depending on their agenda.
- Improve the timing and quality of expert-finding and matchmaking.
 - Ensure smooth cooperation and coordination with the geographical units in finding experts, through the introduction of a more structured approach – for example, using an online tool to post requests describing what experts are needed; these requests could reach all geographical units.
 - Open and expand the database of experts and enable potential beneficiaries to gain access so that they can engage actively in searching for experts.
 - Ensure the database is uniformly promoted, that experts are aware they are part of it, and that potential experts can easily sign up.
 - Regularly assess which experts have been approached; make sure that a wider range of experts are approached regularly if topical coverage allows (currently, some receive too many requests while others get none).
 - Expand the eligibility of experts (consider allowing private sector experts, experts from academia and NGOs to participate in cases where their expertise could be relevant; however, the schemes should retain their peer-to-peer focus rather than becoming alternative options for financing training activities).
- Consider further expanding the use of online exchanges.
 - Assess the lessons learned while implementing the most recent initiative of organising webinars (online expert visits or workshops).
 - Continue working to move some events online and employ blended learning (a mix of physical and online activities).
- Improve and simplify reporting and evaluation requirements.
 - Distribute evaluation forms later than six months after the event to better capture potential changes, which often take longer to materialise.

- Make the evaluation forms more user-friendly by developing a tailored online questionnaire instead of Word documents; anonymous forms would allow more honest evaluations.
- Mitigate the language barrier.
 - TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events could take place in languages other than English if hosts and beneficiaries agree.
 - TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer could cover interpretation costs to mitigate the language barrier.
- Financial incentives available to host institutions should be clearly communicated.
- Certificates recognising participation could be provided to hosts and beneficiaries.

3.2.3.2 CoPs

The data collected and presented in the analysis in [section 2](#) identified a number of areas in which improvements could be introduced to the functioning of the CoPs scheme. Some improvements/changes would result in an increase in the scope of the scheme, while others would not affect its current scope. Under this pathway, we analyse both of these types and propose recommendations as to how they could be addressed. First, we provide a summary of the key issues identified. We then propose recommendations that address each of the key issues.

Small core pool of active members

CoPs, despite having 1,800 members in its mailing list, is driven by the initiative of a few dozen active members ('champions'). The majority of participants receive or passively follow, rather than participating in the co-creation of knowledge and outputs. In theory, champions are the CoPs members who demonstrate additional initiative and commitment to its activities. They also provide support in organising activities by undertaking a variety of assignments and employing their expertise to facilitate and foster the successful functioning of the CoPs. Nevertheless, the exact role of champions is not yet clearly defined and established in practice, because it is not assigned but rather acquired at the initiative of the participants themselves. While some champions actively partake in the events organised under CoPs and also lead various assignments, others do not engage to the same extent, making the title of 'champion' somewhat relative. There is a need to increase the pool of the most active CoPs members who can drive its activities.

BOX 8. ACTIONS PROPOSED TO ADDRESS THE SMALL CORE POOL OF ACTIVE CoPs MEMBERS

- Identify a clear CoPs target group and define a clear entry point for participants.
 - Review the aims and objectives of the CoPs and clearly define the target group.
 - Clearly define different levels of CoPs members (CoPs champion, CoPs member, CoPs followers, etc.)
 - When a new member joins the CoPs, identify his/her initial interest and intended level of involvement; and assign them a certain defined role. Monitor and update whether the member's interest has changed over time.
- Reinforce the role of the champions.
 - Better describe the role of champions and what the expectations are towards them;
 - Increase the role of the champions as contact points at MS level, to disseminate information about CoPs within their own countries.
 - Increase the number of champions / key active members through wider communication and targeted promotion.

- Give the champions some formal recognition (e.g. a letter of recognition) and communicate this from the Commission to his/her institution, to ensure that it reaches the management and potentially translates into management support.
- Clearly communicate and present information on which champions lead which themes; assign all other members to corresponding themes so that it is clear which peers are working on the same or similar topics.
- Systematically inform TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer participants about the possibility of joining CoPs.

Awareness and targeted promotion

Despite the existence of various platforms and tools used to promote activities under the CoPs and to introduce practitioners to the functioning of the scheme in general, evidence suggests that awareness remains limited – more than half of survey respondents indicated that CoPs is not well known among colleagues in their institutions and in other institutions they tend to work within their countries. Interview findings also confirm that awareness is still not as widespread as it could be, and external communication efforts to support more extensive involvement are lacking.

BOX 9. ACTIONS PROPOSED TO ADDRESS AWARENESS AND IMPLEMENT TARGETED PROMOTION (CoPs)

- Expand the scope of promotional activities.
 - Prepare a clear communication strategy explaining the logic behind the CoPs and indicating the differences between the scheme and TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer. Focus on emphasising the added value of this longer-term cooperation.
 - Prioritise and further develop one social media tool for external communication, instead of using Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.
 - Prioritise which countries should be targeted by CoPs and promote the scheme directly to institutions in these target countries, addressing multiple relevant institutions; if deemed relevant, promote the scheme to institutions from less active Member States.
 - Alternatively, if possible, promote CoPs not by prioritising countries for direct promotion, but by prioritising themes that are currently loosely covered by CoPs, and target practitioners dealing with these themes directly.
 - Because participation in the CoPs requires longer-term continuous involvement, it is important to strengthen internal communication by addressing the management of those institutions that are already represented by CoPs members, with the aim of raising awareness among their management on the importance of these activities, to ensure the management's support for the continuous involvement of their staff.
 - Better involve geographical units in the spreading of information about the CoPs. Prepare and provide them with messages and materials they can distribute.
- Adjust the information presented in the promotional materials.
 - Continue disseminating information about good practices and specific tools developed by the CoPs, as well as the scheme's advantages and added value for potential participants.
 - Convert some of the knowledge generated during CoPs activities of into specific thematic publications and disseminate these to relevant target groups beyond the CoPs.
- Improve the CoPs blog by switching to an interactive and more visually attractive website, linked to the internal working environment accessible only to CoPs members (see recommendations below).
- Improve the user-friendliness of the way in which information is presented on the CoPs blog (e.g. make the information about CoPs members, events, outputs and opportunities clearer and more accessible).

Currently, navigation is complicated, especially in the participants' category. This could be addressed by sorting participants according to their working topics or countries, and by making the presentation of these aspects more interactive. Similarly, the 'working topics' section could be made shorter and clearer so that users of the blog can find information as quickly and conveniently as possible. Lastly, the design of the blog could be given a more unified style, fonts, colours and other elements).

Follow-up activities

Survey and interview findings demonstrate that while the majority of CoPs participants disseminate the information they acquire through the events, they rarely proactively organise any follow-up activities. Follow-up activities, where they occur, differ vastly between countries and institutions. The format that these efforts take depends largely on the perceived relevance of the topics discussed during events and the overall engagement of the participants with the scheme; it is also influenced by institutional readiness and flexibility to engage with and implement specific changes. Follow-up activities and their format are also shaped by existing institutional practices (existing channels for sharing information within the institution in general [e.g. the existence of newsletters]; a culture of knowledge-sharing, etc.).

BOX 10. ACTIONS PROPOSED TO ADDRESS FOLLOW-UP ON CoPs

- Directly ask and encourage CoPs members to share their experiences within their institutions and during other relevant meetings they attend. To support them, centrally prepare various messages that they can disseminate easily.
- Encourage CoPs members to disseminate various outputs produced during CoPs activities. To support this process, visualise these outputs centrally and prepare them for dissemination so that each CoPs member does not have to prepare them on his/her own.

Improving various operational aspects of the CoPs

The study concludes that CoPs is organised in accordance with its guiding principles, and has not deviated from its original purpose and objectives, the most notable of which are its bottom-up approach and the autonomy of participants. In addition, many CoPs users do not perceive any major shortcomings in the functioning of the CoPs. The most commonly identified shortcomings relate to the limited number of participants per EU country allowed for workshops, the fact that CoPs only cover a limited range of topics, and that the number of experts in certain thematic fields is too low.

BOX 11. ACTIONS PROPOSED TO ADDRESS VARIOUS OPERATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE CoPs

- Thematic coverage.
 - Thematic coverage of the CoPs should be extended, as its activities are now largely focused on state-aid. This could be achieved by employing better communication and extending the pool of active members (see previous recommendations).
 - Define clear target thematic areas that the CoPs can cover. Such a thematic framework of eligible themes, while not limiting the demand-driven approach, could inspire the initiative of CoPs members and their future activities.
- Relax the limitations on the number of participants.
 - Allow more than two experts per Member State in a multi-country workshop; or enable specific topics of interest to many countries to be discussed more frequently. This is especially relevant in the case of participants who come from different institutions within the same country.

- Expand the pool of eligible participants.
 - Currently, CoPs is intended for MAs and IBs only – this scope could be expanded to include Audit Authorities, Certifying Authorities, National Coordinating Bodies and Joint Technical Secretariats (aligning eligible participants with TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer).
 - Involvement of other international bodies could potentially help to address certain issues, depending on the theme being addressed.
- Reinforce online activities.
 - Consider the lessons learned while implementing webinars and reinforce the number of activities being implemented online in addition to the physical workshops implemented through TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer.
 - Instead of using Facebook, LinkedIn, emails, etc. for internal communication and online interactions, consider the use of a more comprehensive online collaborative platform, which would enable a collaborative approach, better information sharing, working on certain topics online, etc.
- Consider expanding human resources for community management. These additional resources could be directed towards expanding the scope of promotional activities, adjusting the information presented in the promotional materials, reinforcing online activities, etc. However, the focus should remain on the bottom-up approach of the communities and the reinforcement of the role of the champions as drivers of the CoPs.

3.2.4. Pathway 2: increasing strategic contribution through a more top-down approach

TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs are based on a bottom-up approach and respond to the needs of MS. Currently, the involvement of the Commission in these schemes is limited to overall coordination and support with certain organisational aspects of the schemes (e.g. finding experts, guiding the drafting of agendas, etc.). From the perspective of the European Commission, the peer learning schemes could be better aligned with the strategic agenda of EU cohesion policy and national policies through a more top-down approach to implementation, and the closer involvement of the European Commission in the central steering of the schemes (for example, by proposing certain topics for exchanges).

There is a certain feedback loop to the exchanges implemented by the MS. Even though the whole idea is to encourage MS to find solutions through discussions with their peers, and not by seeking validation from the Commission, it is important to check whether certain practices are in line with the views of the Commission. Thus, from the perspective of the users of the schemes, greater involvement on the part of DG REGIO and other DGs of the European Commission would in some cases be desirable. This is very much the case for events or initiatives that deal with new instruments or regulations, where no participants possess significant experience or expertise.

The more extensive involvement of the Commission in steering exchanges raises the risk of undermining the key principle of the schemes – its bottom-up approach. In addition, more intensive involvement (in the form of proposing or leading the organisation of exchanges on certain topics, or being present more often at exchanges initiated by the MS where the Commission’s participation is desired), would require additional human resources from the Commission’s side.

TABLE 14. ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PATHWAY 2

ARGUMENTS FOR:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential to better achieve the priorities of the EU cohesion policy through a more strategic focus. ▪ Possibilities to provide a better contribution to policy and institutional outcomes, due to a closer link between policy development and peer learning. ▪ Opportunities for the wider dissemination of outputs prepared by practitioners, if these are reviewed by the Commission. ▪ No major change in the operational costs of the schemes.
ARGUMENTS AGAINST:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Risk of undermining the key principles of peer learning and the bottom-up nature of the schemes. ▪ Additional human resources required from the Commission’s side to introduce and support more involvement of the European Commission.
HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As indicated, the implementation of Pathway 2 would not result in a major change in the operational costs of the schemes. However, additional human resources would be required from the Commission’s side to introduce and support the greater involvement of the Commission (e.g. proposing topics for exchanges; organising first workshops that aim to kick-off a series of exchanges; participating in certain exchanges if requested by practitioners and deemed relevant by the Commission; reviewing selected outputs prepared by practitioners).

During the workshop with the ACB team at DG REGIO, it was considered that there are other tools at the disposal of DG REGIO to address newly emerging policy topics. Bilateral peer learning would not be the best mechanism to address such topics, as there is a lack of practitioners who could provide such expertise to their peers. Thus, newly emerging policy topics could be targeted through various seminars and workshops organised by DG REGIO that aim to reach all MS, not just selected ones.

Having considered all of these arguments, in the table below we propose certain actions regarding how much the Commission could be involved in steering the schemes in the future.

BOX 12. ACTIONS PROPOSED REGARDING INCREASED STRATEGIC CONTRIBUTION

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The involvement of the Commission in steering the schemes should be limited to providing better support in drafting the agendas of exchanges, finding and validating experts, and proposing certain topics that the MS could further explore., Participating to some extent in certain exchanges could be considered. <p>Promoting certain topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First, it is important to show and communicate that certain topics can be addressed through TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs. Second, to kick-off a series of exchanges, the Commission could organise, for example, a first multi-country workshop to test whether a specific topic attracts attention and whether it generates further interest from potential applicants. ▪ CoPs is an especially relevant tool to steer MS towards exploring certain policy topics among/with their peers. This can be achieved through the Community Manager, who already plays an important role in promoting and suggesting certain topics.
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- For new policy topics, the most important aspect is finding relevant experts. This is where the role of DG REGIO should be increased (see recommendations on improving the timing and quality of expert-finding and matchmaking).
- Reinforce the involvement of the Commission in preparing the agendas of exchanges.

Involvement in the exchanges

- Beneficiaries of the exchanges could optionally and non-bindingly request the presence of the EC at their exchanges. TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer applications could include a section that asks whether and why the involvement of a representative of the Commission is desirable. In cases where it is, the Commission should still consider the feasibility and strategic importance of attending such an event. Such involvement should be limited to horizontal topics – those that might concern a broader circle of MS. To manage the expectations of the practitioners, it should be emphasised that the involvement of the Commission in exchanges is an exception and will only happen only in rare cases, depending on available human resources and the topics covered.
- Alternatively (or in addition), the involvement of the Commission could take place not during exchanges, but once the outcomes of an exchange are summarised and presented as a particular deliverable. Such an approach would encourage participants to discuss not only certain topics within the exchange, but also to prepare certain outputs on that topic, which could be shared more broadly. The Commission could also review the most important outputs prepared by CoPs so that they could be disseminated more widely. The Commission would have the opportunity to check the outputs of the Communities’ work and consider whether to enhance and/or promote them further.

3.2.5. Pathway 3: increasing internal coherence

Currently, the synergies between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs are limited to two types of examples. First, CoPs workshops are organised through TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer. Second, cooperation to identify experts who can provide knowledge to CoPs sometimes takes place by consulting the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer expert database. Conversely, experts for TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges may be identified through existing CoPs. TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer participants are not systematically invited to participate in CoPs even though the target groups of the schemes largely overlap (CoPs tend to focus on more experienced practitioners). TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs share the aim of encouraging and enabling knowledge and sharing good practice between peers, with the goal of upgrading the administrative capacity of participants and improving EU investment outcomes. TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer is implemented through physical events (study visits, expert missions and workshops), while CoPs includes a larger pool of activities (physical meetings, webinars, blog, social media). In terms of working topics, both schemes share some similarities, but TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer has a much broader focus. One of the main topics on which the CoPs focuses is state aid, which is also covered by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer.

TABLE 15. ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PATHWAY 3

ARGUMENTS FOR:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential for the increased internal coherence of the schemes through a mix of different peer-learning instruments. ▪ Opportunities to make a new scheme more flexible, improve its branding and increase its reach. ▪ No major change in the operational costs of the schemes.
ARGUMENTS AGAINST:

- No strong arguments speak against the implementation of this pathway.

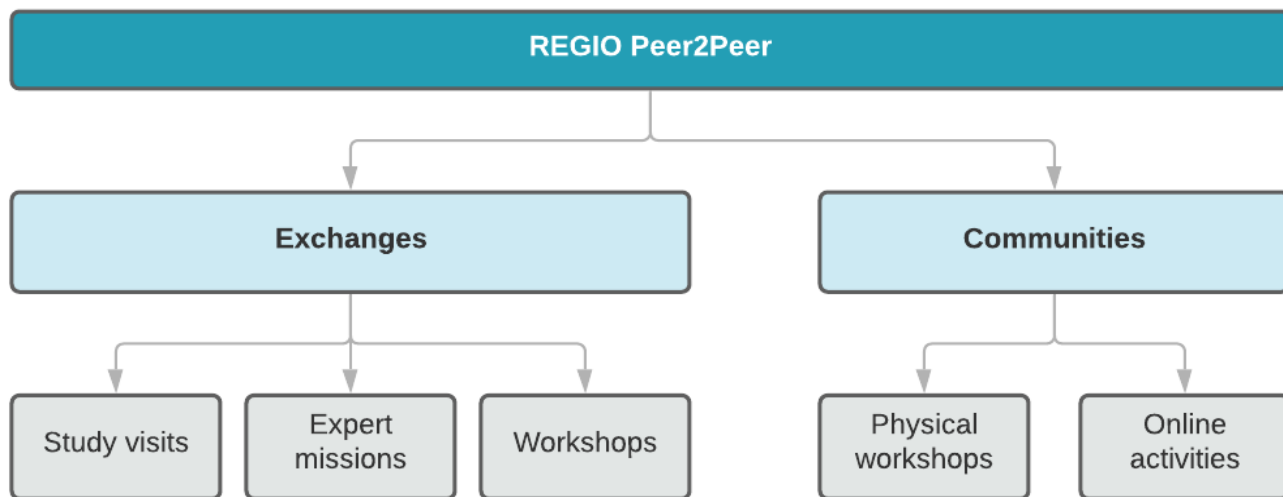
HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

- Implementation of Pathway 3 would not result in a major change in the operational costs of the schemes, but would result in a temporary increase in workload to plan and undertake the integration of the schemes.

BOX 13. ACTIONS PROPOSED REGARDING INCREASED INTERNAL COHERENCE

- As a minimum, all TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer members should be systematically invited to join CoPs.
- TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs could be merged into a single scheme, e.g. REGIO Peer2Peer, which would consist of Peer2Peer exchanges and Peer2Peer communities. In such a case, the more strategic use of the exchanges could be ensured by encouraging those who want more than *ad hoc* exchange to create a community on a specific topic of interest, and to keep working continuously on that topic. Peer2Peer communities could organise a few physical exchanges, but would also be required to work on the topic during the periods between exchanges, through online communities, and to involve a broader circle of practitioners and share the results more broadly.
- Create and use a common communication strategy and common branding. This would allow the objectives of both schemes to be communicated more clearly, and potentially achieve greater interest from potential members.

FIGURE 49. INCREASING INTERNAL COHERENCE



3.2.6. Pathway 4: increasing external integration

DG REGIO actively invests in capacity building tools targeted at experts and practitioners in the Member States. These tools include both various initiatives supporting the sharing of knowledge and encouraging learning, as well as various expert groups and networks. Since these networks and tools have been developed over time, they lack a more unified approach – at least at the level of developing clear intervention logics, including a clear identification of aims and target groups. The study findings show that:

- There is no evidence of duplication between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs and the other REGIO networks analysed. The potential for duplication is limited by the fact that not all networks have direct ACB and peer learning components; where such potential does exist, close coordination takes place to avoid this risk.
- There are some examples of cooperation between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and other REGIO networks. No such cooperation was identified with the CoPs.
- One of the key issues that might prevent more extensive cooperation and greater synergies is the lack of awareness about TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, and especially the CoPs, within DG REGIO.
- TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer cooperates extensively with the SCOs network, both by disseminating information about the opportunities and coordinating the exchanges themselves. Opportunities to organise exchanges with peers were also disseminated via the Evaluation Network. Urban Innovative Actions has plans to begin implementing capacity building activities for the urban actors it targets, under the wider umbrella of the European Urban Initiative.
- Representatives of other DG REGIO networks expressed a strong willingness to cooperate more with TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and the CoPs. However, they emphasised the need to get to know the schemes better, especially in terms of identifying clearly how such cooperation could benefit the members of their networks. Representatives of other networks expressed the opinion that the activities of their networks and those of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs have their own specific logic and place within the current pool of DG REGIO tools.

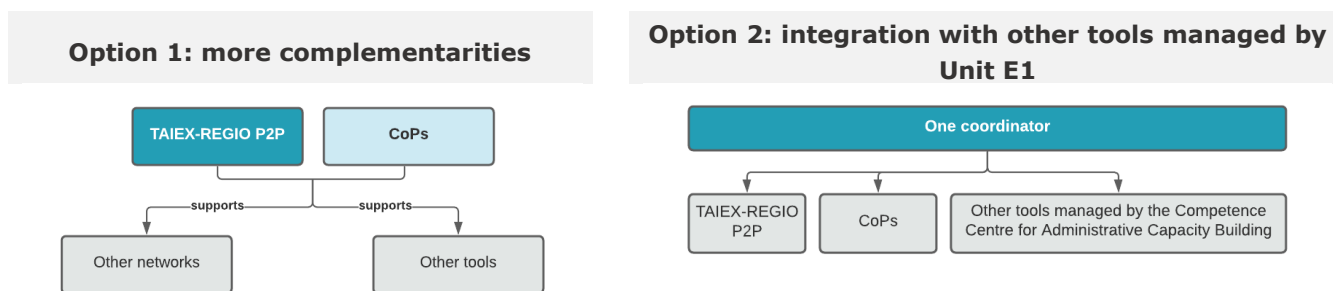
When analysing how DG REGIO could further proceed with increasing external coherence, we developed **two sub-pathways**: Sub-pathway 1 involves increasing the integration of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, CoPs, and other administrative capacity building tools managed by the Competence Centre for Administrative Capacity Building (Unit E1); Sub-pathway 2 involves increasing the integration of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, CoPs, and other administrative capacity building tools and networks of all DG REGIO units. Below, we briefly present these two sub-pathways aimed at increasing external integration.

3.2.6.1 Sub-pathway 1 – increased integration of ACB schemes and tools managed by Unit E1

The idea behind this sub-pathway is to focus on integration within the Competence Centre for Administrative Capacity Building (Unit E1), with the aim of bringing TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, the CoPs and other administrative capacity building tools managed by the Competence Centre for Administrative Capacity Building closer together. This could help to maximise the impact of the initiatives managed internally by Unit E1, ensure the most efficient use of resources, and simplify the understanding of the functioning of these initiatives among various stakeholders. When considering how this coherence could be increased, we proposed two main options, which lead to different levels of integration:

- **Option 1:** increasing coherence between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs and other tools for capacity building managed by Unit E1, keeping TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs more or less as they function now. The key idea behind this option is that TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs should better interact with the other capacity building tools of Unit E1, exploring further complementarities, and better supporting them through peer-learning opportunities.
- **Option 2:** introducing more changes and bringing TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, CoPs and other capacity building tools managed by Unit E1 under one umbrella. This could help to maximise the impact of these initiatives, ensure the most efficient use of resources, and simplify the understanding of the functioning of these initiatives among various stakeholders.

FIGURE 50. BETTER EXTERNAL INTEGRATION SUB-PATHWAY 1: TWO OPTIONS



Source: prepared by PPMI

TABLE 16. ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUB-PATHWAY 1 UNDER PATHWAY 4

ARGUMENTS FOR:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential to increase external coherence of the schemes through a mix of peer-learning and other tools for capacity building. ▪ Potential to increase the effectiveness and impact of the schemes and other administrative capacity building tools. ▪ Easier access for potential users of the schemes through a more clearly presented and communicated offer of the different ACB possibilities offered by DG REGIO Unit E1
ARGUMENTS AGAINST:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Additional coordination and management efforts are required within Unit E1.
HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implementation of Sub-pathway 1 under Pathway 4 would not result in a major change in the operational costs of the schemes, but would result in a temporary increase in workload to plan and undertake the integration of the schemes and tools.

During the workshop with the ACB team at DG REGIO, it was discussed that both options are feasible and could be implemented in the short or medium term. As opposed to the integration of all DG REGIO ACB schemes by placing tools and networks under one umbrella (Option 3 under Sub-pathway 2, presented below), the integration of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, CoPs and other ACB tools managed by Unit E1 would be an internal reform initiative with the arguments that speak for it outweighing the arguments speaking against (see Table 16 above).

BOX 14. ACTIONS PROPOSED REGARDING INCREASED EXTERNAL COHERENCE: SUB-PATHWAY 1

Actions relating to Option 1: increased complementarities

- Consider increasing the use of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs to support the activities of other tools of Unit E1, building on the experience already in place (support to the pilot frontloading administrative capacity for the post-2021 period, support to the integrity pacts project in 2017, support to the development of the REGIO competency framework for ERDF and Cohesion Fund practitioners).

- Encourage other tools to share information about the opportunities offered by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs by tailoring information to the needs of the users of specific tools (which users of which specific tools the schemes are most relevant for; what themes they can address using the schemes, etc.).

Actions relating to Option 2: integration with other ACB tools managed by the Competence Centre for Administrative Capacity Building

- As a first step, Unit E1 should undertake a stock-taking exercise by mapping all of its ACB-related tools and initiatives, clearly describing their intervention logics. This could serve as a tool internally, allowing Unit E1 to gain a full picture of what is available. It could also be further used to externally communicate the various possibilities available to potential beneficiaries. This would contribute to greater clarity as to which tool is the most appropriate for which audience, and how different tools can complement each other.
- Following the mapping, information about the various ACB-related opportunities offered by Unit E1 should be presented more clearly to potential users. The website could provide a more unified and interactive presentation of what is available depending on the type of potential user and sector, showing how various existing opportunities could be combined and complement each other for the benefit of potential users.
- The final step could be to integrate TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, CoPs and other ACB tools managed by the Competence Centre for Administrative Capacity Building under one umbrella to create a single coordination centre.

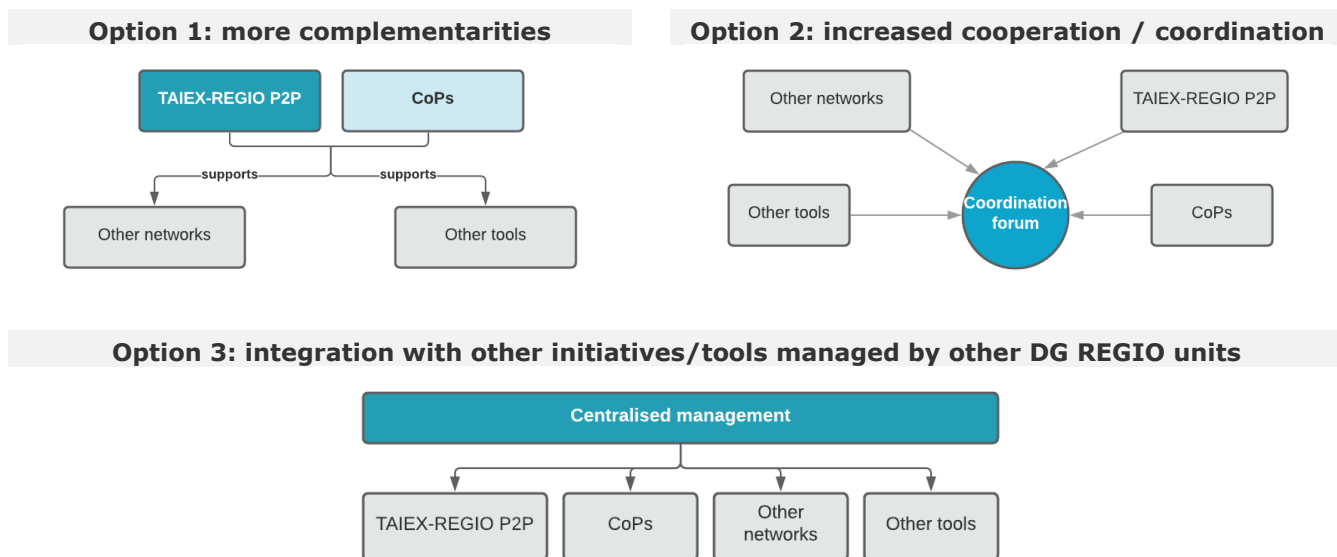
3.2.6.2 Sub-pathway 2 – increased integration of ACB schemes, tools and networks across the whole of DG REGIO

In comparison to Sub-pathway 1, this sub-pathway could lead to much more extensive changes compared with the current functioning of DG REGIO’s ACB schemes, tools and networks. It would encompass greater integration across the whole of DG REGIO, not just the ACB Unit (E1). When considering how this coherence could be increased, we came up to three main options, leading to different levels of integration:

- **Option 1:** increasing coherence between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs and other networks and tools for capacity building managed by DG REGIO, keeping TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs more or less as they function now. The key idea behind this option is that TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs should better interact with other networks and capacity building tools, explore further complementarities, and better support them through peer-learning opportunities. As identified earlier, the relevant existing example here is cooperation with the SCOs network.
- **Option 2:** increasing coordination between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs and other networks and the tools for capacity building managed by DG REGIO, keeping TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs more or less as they function now. The idea underlying this option is that activities should be better coordinated centrally by assigning a designated coordinator who would bring together representatives of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, CoPs and other networks and capacity building tools to ensure continuous coordination and better complementarities between activities.
- **Option 3:** introducing many more changes and bringing TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, CoPs and the networks and capacity building tools managed by various units of DG REGIO under one umbrella. This could help to maximise the impact of these initiatives, ensure the most efficient use of resources, and simplify the understanding of the functioning of these initiatives among various stakeholders. However, it would also be an extensive reform that

would require many changes to the current functioning of the initiatives, including the need to overcome reform resistance from the managers of the various initiatives outside the Competence Centre for Administrative Capacity Building.

FIGURE 51. BETTER EXTERNAL INTEGRATION SUB-PATHWAY 2: THREE OPTIONS



Source: prepared by PPMI

TABLE 17. ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUB-PATHWAY 2 UNDER PATHWAY 4

ARGUMENTS FOR:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential for the increased external coherence of the schemes through a mix of peer learning and other tools for capacity building (networks, frameworks, guidelines, projects, etc.) ▪ Potential to increase the effectiveness and impact of the schemes and other administrative capacity building networks/tools. ▪ Easier access for potential users of the schemes through a more clearly presented and communicated offer of different ACB possibilities by DG REGIO.
ARGUMENTS AGAINST:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resistance from the owners of the schemes, depending on the level of increased coordination/integration. ▪ Additional coordination and management efforts are required within DG REGIO of the European Commission (unit E1 and other units). ▪ Risk of undermining the key principles of peer learning and the bottom-up nature of the schemes.
HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implementation of sub-pathway 2 under pathway 4 would not result in a major change in the operational costs of the schemes, but would result in a temporary increase in workload to plan and undertake the integration of the schemes.

During the workshop with the ACB team at DG REGIO, it was agreed that the disadvantages of the third option (putting all schemes, networks and tools under one umbrella) outweigh its possible advantages. The second option of increasing coordination was also debated, with the conclusion being that what is needed is better communication, rather than the establishment of a specific coordination body.

The first option (increased complementarities) was preferred during the workshop, as this was identified as the most feasible way forward, at least in the short term. Although the recommendations below focus mainly on the first option we also argue that there is some need for better coordination (Option 2) and suggest how this could be accomplished.

BOX 15. ACTIONS PROPOSED REGARDING INCREASED EXTERNAL COHERENCE: SUB-PATHWAY 2

Actions relating to Option 1: increased complementarities

- Consider increasing the use of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs to support the activities of other DG REGIO networks and tools, building on the experience already in place (e.g. collaboration with the SCOs network).
- Encourage other networks and tools to share information about the opportunities offered by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs by tailoring information to the needs of specific networks and tools (which members of which specific networks and tools the schemes are most relevant for; what are the themes they can address using the schemes, etc.).

Actions related to Option 2: increased cooperation / coordination

- Create a coordination forum in which the managers of various DG REGIO networks, tools and schemes can gather at a defined frequency to discuss their activities, so that everyone is informed about the latest developments and thus any risk of thematic overlaps is avoided.
- Better communication and sharing of knowledge within DG REGIO are required so that all of the managers of different initiatives are aware of the various networks, tools and schemes available within DG REGIO, as the internal lack of knowledge was identified as one of the key issues.

Actions relating to Option 3: integration with initiatives/tools managed by other DG REGIO units

- DG REGIO should undertake a stock-taking exercise by mapping all its ACB-related tools, networks and schemes, clearly describing their intervention logics. This could serve as a tool internally, allowing DG REGIO to gain a full picture of what is available. This could also be further used to externally communicate the various possibilities available to potential beneficiaries. It would require the involvement of different units of DG REGIO, and would contribute to greater clarity as to which tool is the most appropriate for which audience, and how the different tools can complement each other.
- Following the mapping, information on various ACB-related opportunities offered by DG REGIO should be more clearly presented for potential users. The website could provide a more unified and interactive presentation of what is available depending on the type of potential user and sector; showing how various existing opportunities could be combined and complement each other for the benefit of potential users. The EC should frame peer-learning tools within a wider strategy for administrative capacity building, and switch from a tool-based to a user-based approach.

3.2.7. Suggested configuration of pathways

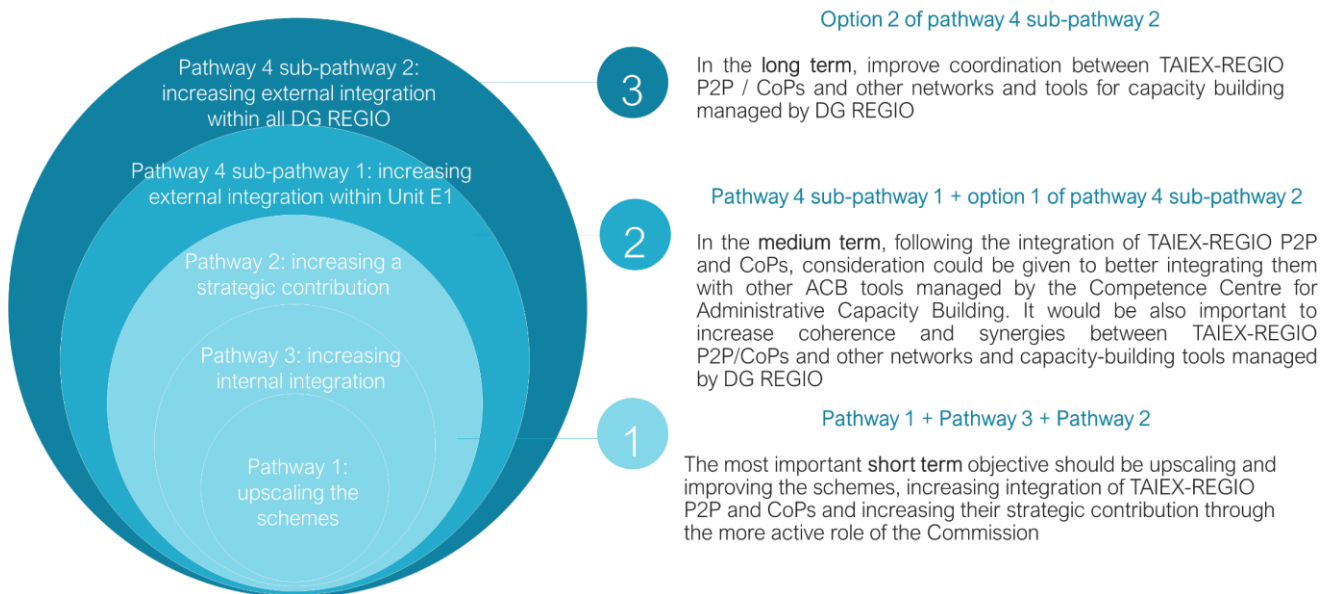
This Report has already described four pathways that could be implemented in various configurations. DG REGIO could choose to implement only one of the pathways (for example, only improving and upscaling the schemes (Pathway 1) or only increasing strategic contribution through the greater role of the Commission (Pathway 2)). However, to increase the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the schemes, we suggest implementing all four pathways (or certain elements of them), while prioritising their implementation in the short, medium and longer term.

We suggest that in the **short term**, DG REGIO should upscale and improve the schemes, as well as increasing their internal integration by bringing TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs together into one scheme. Implementation of these two pathways should occur in parallel, as many of the specific actions proposed for upscaling and improving the schemes should be adapted slightly to take into account the integration of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs. In addition to these measures, DG REGIO could consider increasing the involvement of the Commission in the exchanges by promoting certain priority topics and participating in selected exchanges.

In the **medium term**, following the integration of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs, consideration could be given to better integrating the new integrated scheme with other ACB tools managed by the Competence Centre for Administrative Capacity Building. This option appears more feasible than the integration of all ACB-related schemes, tools and networks managed by DG REGIO, because it avoids the risk of creating a structure that is too centralised, rigid and therefore harder to manage. Nonetheless, it would be important to increase coherence and synergies between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer/CoPs and the other networks and capacity-building tools managed by DG REGIO. This could be achieved by promoting the use of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs to support the activities of other networks and initiatives, and encouraging their coordinators to inform members or beneficiaries about the two schemes.

In the **long term**, DG REGIO could work on increasing the coordination between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs and other networks and tools, by creating a coordination forum in which managers of various DG REGIO networks, tools and schemes could gather periodically to discuss their activities, ensuring that everyone is informed about the latest developments and any risks of thematic overlap are avoided.

FIGURE 52. SUMMARY OF THE CONFIGURATION PROPOSED



The table below further elaborates on the configuration of the pathways proposed for the short, medium and long term, and provides a summary of the specific actions proposed under each pathway. For the full list of specific actions proposed, refer to the description of each pathway provided in the previous chapters.

TABLE 18. CONFIGURATION OF PATHWAYS AND SUMMARY OF THE SPECIFIC ACTIONS PROPOSED

SHORT-TERM PREFERENCE			
Upscale and improve TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs (Pathway 1), increase their internal integration (Pathway 3), and increase their strategic contribution through the more active role of the Commission (Pathway 2)			
Pathway 1		Pathway 3	Pathway 2
TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer	CoPs	Actions relating to Pathway 3:	Actions relating to Pathway 2:
<p>Awareness raising and targeted promotion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand the scope of promotional activities to involve wider target groups and geographical units. Improve and expand the content of the website and promotional materials. Address the language barrier. <p>Strategic approach and follow-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the organisation of follow-up events and clearly communicate the eligibility criteria. Involve MAs and HR departments of participating institutions to encourage a more strategic approach. Develop a procedure for a single application for multiple events. <p>Operational aspects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the process for finding experts. Clearly communicate the rules regarding the number of participants and duration of events. Organise more online activities. Improve and simplify reporting and evaluation procedures. 	<p>Increasing the core pool of active members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly define the target groups, entry point and the roles of different members, especially champions. Systematically inform TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer participants about CoPs. <p>Awareness-raising and targeted promotion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand the scope and increase the quality of promotional activities. Consider developing a more interactive online interface. Encourage follow-up activities. Encourage event participants to disseminate information and outputs within their institutions and administrations. Provide support for the preparation of such materials. <p>Operational aspects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand and structure thematic coverage and the pool of participants. Relax the limitations on the numbers of participants. Expand online activities. 	<p>As a minimum, all TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer members should be systematically invited to join CoPs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs could be merged into one scheme, e.g. REGIO Peer2Peer, which would consist of Peer2Peer exchanges and Peer2Peer communities. Create and use a common communication strategy and common branding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The involvement of the Commission in steering the schemes should be limited to providing better support in drafting the agendas of the exchanges, finding and validating experts, and proposing certain topics that the MS could further explore. To some extent, participation in certain exchanges could also be considered. <p><i>Promoting certain topics</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First, it is important to show and communicate that certain topics can be addressed through TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs. Second, to kick-off a series of exchanges, the Commission could organise: for example, the first multi-country workshop to test whether a specific topic attracts attention and whether it generates further interest from potential applicants. CoPs is an especially relevant tool for steering MS towards exploring certain policy topics among/with their peers. This can be achieved through the Community Manager, who already plays an important role in promoting and suggesting certain topics. For new policy topics, the most important aspect is finding relevant experts. This is where the role of DG REGIO should be increased (see recommendations on improving the timing and quality of expert finding and matchmaking). Reinforce the involvement of the Commission in preparing the agendas of the exchanges. <p><i>Involvement in exchanges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beneficiaries of exchanges could optionally and non-bindingly request the presence of the EC at their exchanges. To manage the expectations of

- Consider allowing exchanges in languages other than English and covering the costs of interpretation.

practitioners, it should be emphasised that the involvement of the Commission in an exchange is rather an exception and will occur only in rare cases, depending on the available human resources and topics covered.

- Alternatively (or in addition), the Commission could be involved not during the exchange, but once the outcomes of the exchange have been summarised and presented as a specific deliverable. The Commission would have the opportunity to check the outputs of the communities' work and consider whether to enhance and/or promote them further.

MEDIUM-TERM PREFERENCE

Increase external coherence through integration with other ACB tools managed by the Competence Centre for Administrative Capacity Building (Sub-pathway 1 (Pathway 4)) and ensure greater complementarities with other initiatives/tools managed by other DG REGIO units (Option 1, Sub-pathway 2 (Pathway 4))

Sub-pathway 1 (pathway 4) and option 1 of sub-pathway 2 (pathway 4)

Actions relating to Sub-pathway 1 (Pathway 4): integration with other ACB tools managed by the Competence Centre for Administrative Capacity Building

- As a first step, Unit E1 should undertake a stock-taking exercise by mapping all of its ACB-related tools and initiatives, clearly describing their intervention logics.
- Following this mapping, information about the various ACB-related opportunities offered by Unit E1 should be presented more clearly for potential users.
- The final step could be to integrate TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer, CoPs and other ACB tools managed by the Competence Centre for Administrative Capacity Building under one umbrella to create a single coordination centre.

Actions relating to Option 1 of Sub-pathway 2 (Pathway 4): increased complementarities

- Consider increasing the use of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs to support the activities of other DG REGIO networks and tools.
- Encourage other networks and tools to share information about the opportunities offered by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer and CoPs by tailoring information to the needs of specific networks and tools.

LONG-TERM PREFERENCE

Improve coordination between TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer / CoPs and other networks and tools for capacity building managed by DG REGIO

Option 2 of Sub-pathway 2 (Pathway 4)

Actions relating to Option 2 of Sub-pathway 2 (Pathway 4): increased cooperation/coordination

- Create a coordination forum in which the managers of various DG REGIO networks, tools and schemes can gather at a defined frequency to discuss their activities, ensuring that everyone is informed about the latest developments and thus avoiding any risks of thematic overlap.
- Better communication and sharing of knowledge are required within DG REGIO.

Annexes

This Report is accompanied by a number of Annexes. These either provide additional, more detailed analysis that informed the preparation of this Report (e.g. social network analysis, revised classification of topics, case studies), or technical information about the interviews completed or tables containing the answers to each survey question.

Below is a full list of the annexes attached to this Report:

- Annex 1: Social Network Analysis of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer participants;
- Annex 2: Revised classification of the topics covered by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer;
- Annex 3: List of interviewees (provided in an external file);
- Annex 4: Survey results (provided in an external file);
- Annex 5: Case studies and factsheets (provided in an external file);
- Annex 6: Bibliography;
- Annex 7: Report of the Final Workshop (provided in an external file);
- Annex 8: PPT presentation used during the Final Workshop (provided in an external file);
- Annex 9: Excel file containing the classification of TAIEX-REGIO Peer to Peer events

Annex 1: Social Network Analysis of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer participants

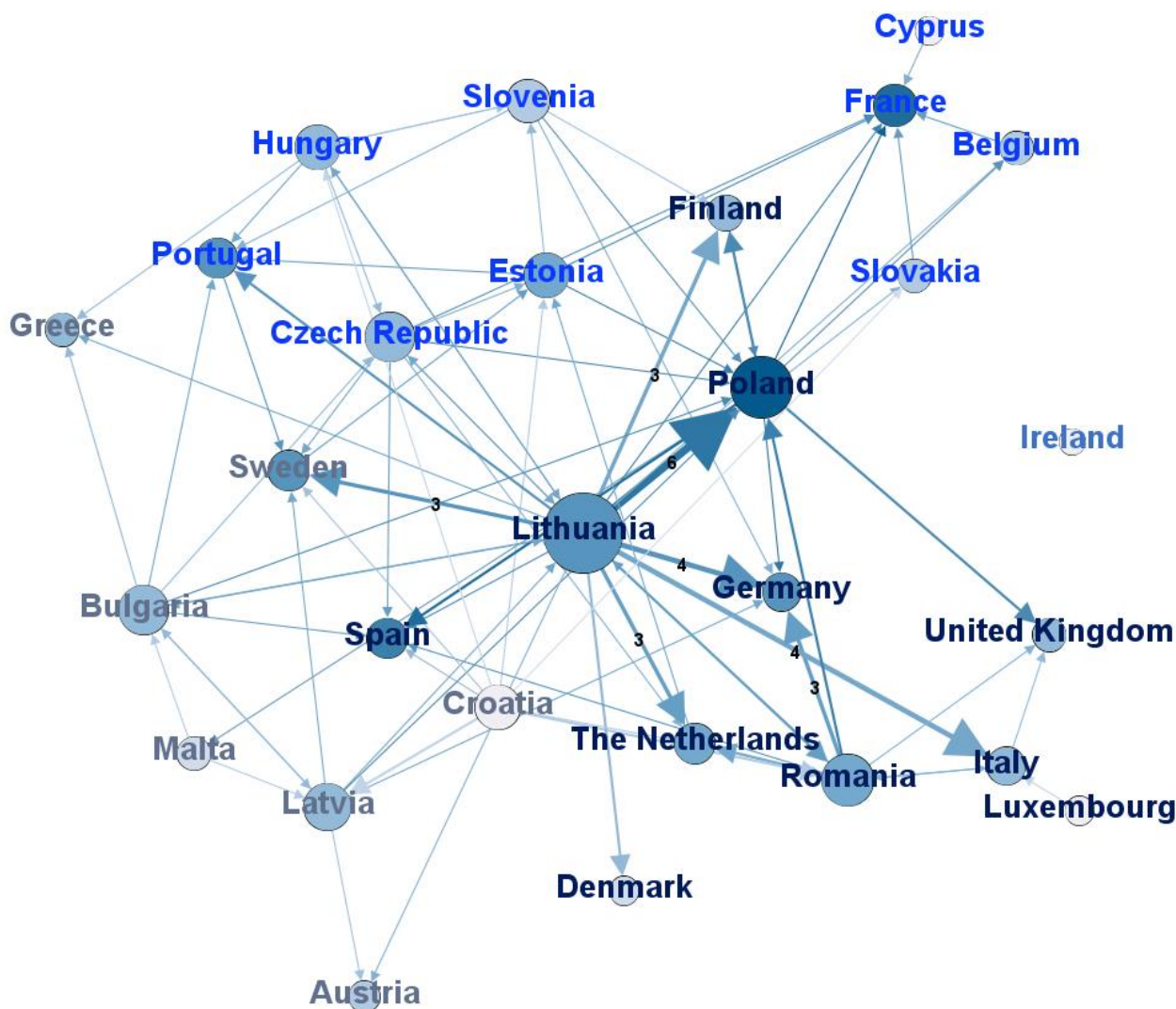
1. Country-level social network analysis of study visits

Plotting the data on TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer study visits as a social network provides additional insights into the dynamics between the beneficiary and host countries. This network reveals not only the number of events initiated, but also the countries that were chosen as providers of expertise by the beneficiaries. Expert missions, workshops and multi-country workshops were excluded from the country-level analysis because of multiple countries participating as beneficiaries or hosts. In the case of expert missions and workshops, the experts often come from several countries, and multi-country workshops do not have a clear beneficiary country. For the same reason – namely, that they had multiple beneficiaries or host countries – two study visits were also excluded. While it would be possible to choose only one expert for the origin of expertise in the case of expert missions or workshops, or to regard the place in which a multi-country workshop was held as the beneficiary country, such assumptions would lead to misleading results.

The network analysis presented in Figure 53 consists of 116 study visits. The nodes represent the Member States and are ranked by degree, representing their embeddedness in the network, or how well they are connected to other countries. The larger the individual node and its label, the more study visits the Member State took part in as a beneficiary or host. Furthermore, the nodes are coloured by in-degree, meaning that the darker the colour of the node, the more study visits the respective Member State has hosted. If the node is white, the Member State did not host any study visits and only participated as a beneficiary. The labels of the nodes are coloured by modularity class, indicating four groups of countries that form communities and are more closely connected to each other than to the rest of the network. The modularity score for the network is fairly low, indicating that the communities are not strongly separated from each other, and that linkages exist between most of the groups.

The edges, or the lines connecting the nodes, are directional, with the arrows pointing from the beneficiary to the host country. Furthermore, they are weighted by the number of individual study visits organised; thicker arrows indicate that there have been multiple exchanges between the respective countries. Edges representing more than two study visits are labelled according to the number of study visits initiated.

FIGURE 53: COUNTRY-LEVEL SOCIAL NETWORK OF STUDY VISITS



Source: prepared by PPMI, based on TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer online library.

Notes: Size of the node stands for the degree (number of edges/interactions for each node), colour represents in-degree (how often the country acted as a host for an event). Different colours represent modularity class (four communities more likely to interact with each other). Arrows on the edges point from the beneficiary to the host country, and are weighted according to the number of exchanges and labelled in cases where more than two exchanges have taken place.

The network reveals that Lithuania and Poland are the most active countries overall when it comes to hosting or benefiting from study visits, followed by the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Romania. The greatest number of study visits (six) took place from Lithuania to Poland, followed by Lithuania to Italy (four), and Lithuania to Germany (four). Lithuanian practitioners also went to Sweden and Finland three times each, while Romanians visited German institutions three times. While overall, Lithuania is the most active Member State, it is less involved as a host of study visits. The most active knowledge providers are Poland (eight study visits hosted), France (seven) and Spain (six), while the latter two have not initiated any events as beneficiaries. Croatia, Cyprus and Luxembourg, on the other hand, have not hosted any study visits, while Ireland represents a complete outlier, having neither initiated nor hosted any events of this type.

Looking at the colour versus the size of the nodes, it is evident that many Member States predominantly act either as hosts or beneficiaries, and only a few are active in both capacities. The

network also allows us to spot such details as Estonia and Slovenia not having initiated or hosted more than one exchange with any of the other Member States, Denmark has hosted two study visits, both with Lithuanian institutions, while Malta only selecting other EU13 countries as hosts.

The modularity score of the network identifies four communities, albeit interlinked and not very distinct, of Member States that have interacted more actively with each other than with the rest of the networks. Ireland remains an outlier, while the other three communities can be distinguished by the colours of the node labels.

2. Social network analysis of individual institutions

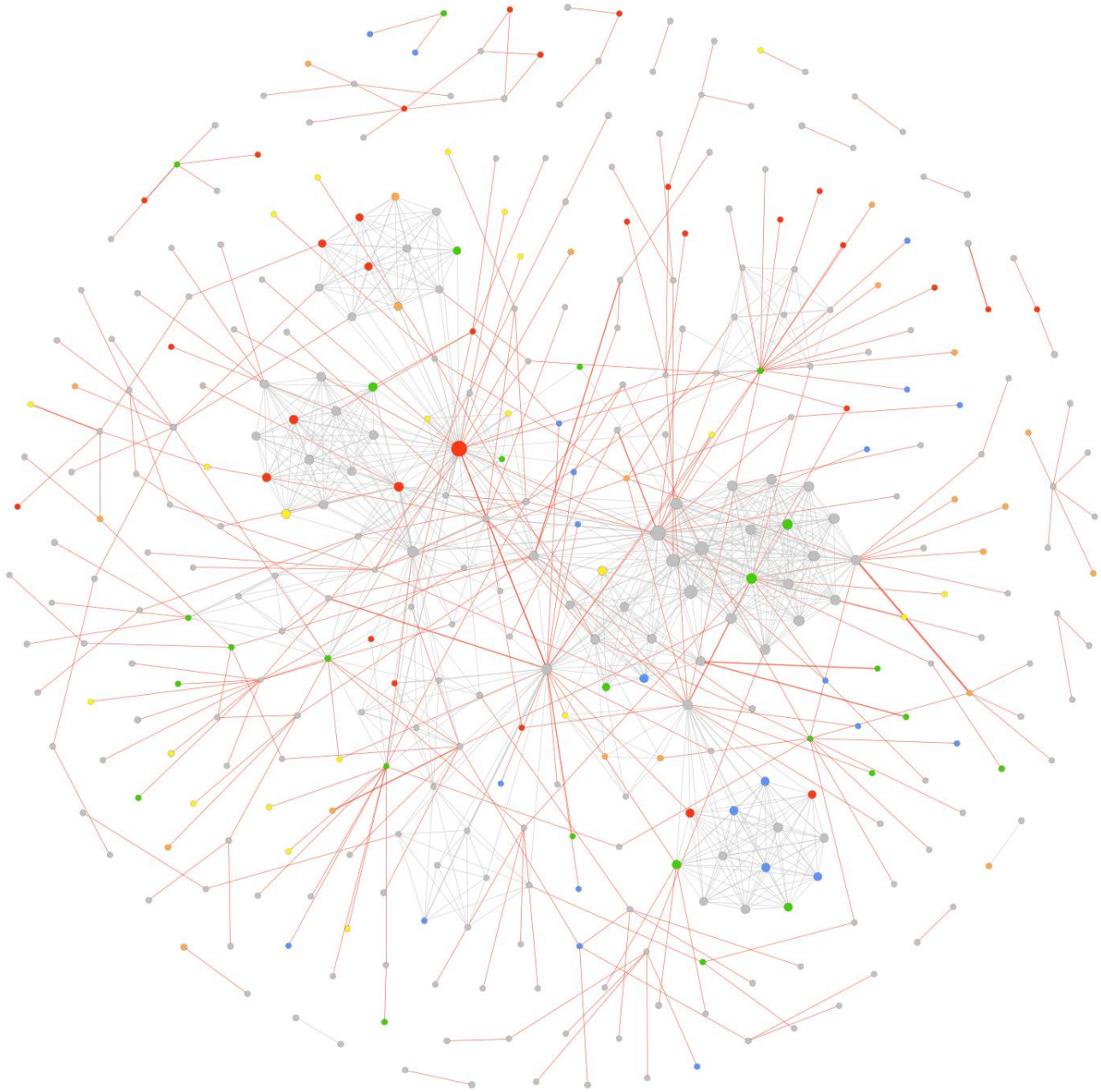
Plotting individual institutions as a social network provides additional insights into the interactions between them. This network includes all 208 TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events. However, unlike the previous network which showed directional interactions from study visit beneficiary to host institution, this network is non-directional, merely connecting institutions that have interacted with one another. This simplification was necessary to accommodate multi-country workshops, since they do not have a clear host or beneficiary; all representatives of participating institutions exchange knowledge with one another, and so it is impossible to determine the direction of expertise.

Inter-institutional interactions in the case of expert missions and workshops with multiple experts are coded as separate edges from the beneficiary institution to each individual provider of expertise. In the case of multi-country workshops, all pairs of institutions that have participated in the respective event are connected by edges. The network consists of 382 institutions connected by 1,010 edges representing their interactions.

The social network of individual institutions that have participated in at least one TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer event (Figure 54) is fairly indicative. The labels on the nodes have been removed for the sake of readability. The colours of the nodes represent the five most actively interlinked countries. Poland is red; Lithuania is green; Germany is yellow; Italy is blue; and the Netherlands, orange. The size of the nodes indicates the degree, meaning that the bigger the node, the more other institutions the institution has interacted with. The modularity score of the network is fairly high in this case, indicating that the communities are distinct and either poorly linked with each other, or not interlinked. The network consists of 30 communities, many of them as small as two institutions. These can be observed on the fringes of the network, and depict institutions that have organised one study visit with each other. Workshops or expert missions can be recognised as one central node connecting to several others. Multi-country workshops, on the other hand, generate the 'clouds' of edges that can be seen in the middle of the network. The colour of the edges indicates the type of event: grey connects participants of multi-county workshops, while red edges indicate all the other types of events where a clear, single beneficiary can be identified.

The network indicates that a significant portion of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer participants form small communities that are either not linked, or poorly interlinked. Furthermore, the majority of the interactions (70% of the edges in the network; see the grey edges in Figure 54) took place at multi-country workshops. With the exception of a few institutions, mostly situated in the middle of the network, which have participated in more than one multi-country workshop, these also tend to form fairly closed communities. The colours of the nodes representing an institution's country of origin do not reveal any notable trends. At least one of the most active countries is represented in most of the multi-country workshops, but there also are events organised among less active countries that do not involve any of the coloured five.

FIGURE 54. SOCIAL NETWORK OF INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTIONS PARTICIPATING IN TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER



Source: prepared by PPMI based on TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer online library.

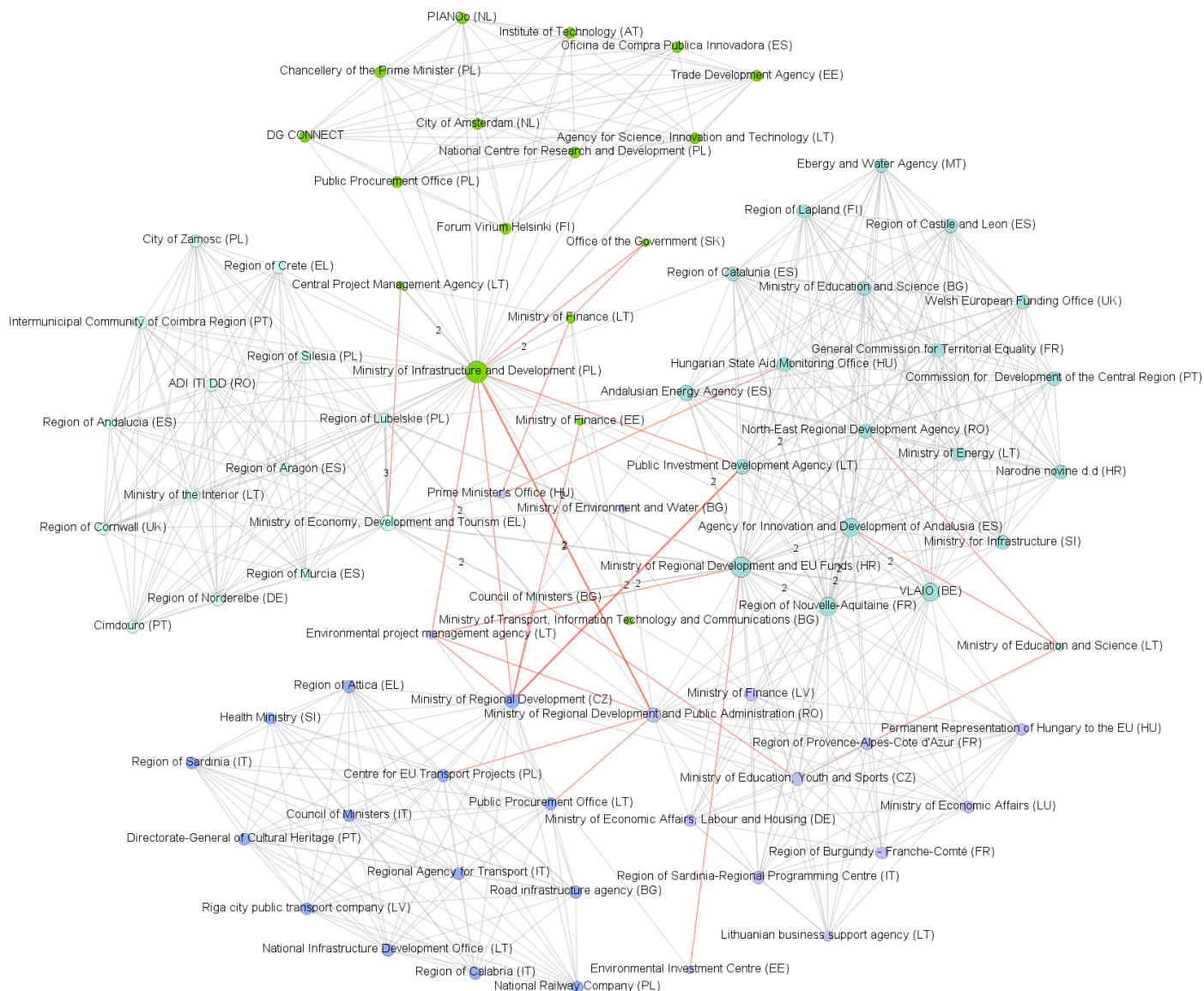
Notes: Size of node represents the degree (embeddedness in the network); colours indicate five most interlinked countries (PL=red, LT=green, DE=yellow, IT=blue, NL=orange). Grey edges represent multi-country workshops, while red ones represent all other types of events. Thicker edges indicate that multiple events were organised between the respective beneficiaries.

The social network in Figure 55 zooms in on the more active institutions that have interacted with other institutions 10 or more times (that is, they have at least 10 edges). The network consists of 80 institutions, or 20% of the entire network, connected by 564 nodes (over half of the total number of interactions in the network). Multi-country workshops are somewhat overrepresented in this

network, since one large workshop might already be enough for an institution to interact with participants from 10 other institutions. This is why the graph does not completely correspond with Table 5, which outlines the most active TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer participants, since their participation in a multi-country workshop counts as one event, while it signifies multiple interactions in this network. However, the key active institutions from the table, such as the Polish Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, are clearly visible in the middle of the social network. Some institutions have fewer than 10 edges because the less active counterparts with which they have interacted (which do not themselves have 10 interactions) have been filtered out. Overall, the network indicates that there is a **fairly small core of active institutions which participate in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events repeatedly.**

The interactions shown are non-directional, meaning that the graph only depicts an interaction between two institutions, but it is not possible to tell which of them acted as a host and which a beneficiary. As in the previous networks, the size of the node stands for its embeddedness in the network (degree), the bigger the node, the more edges it has and the more institutions it connects to. The colour of the nodes indicates a modularity class or the distinct community to which a particular institution belongs – meaning that it has interacted with nodes of the same colour more actively than it has with the rest of the network. The modularity score of the network is average (0.6) indicating that it consists of distinct communities, some of which are interconnected. Thicker edges indicate that multiple exchanges have taken place between institutions. Edges are labelled according to the number of exchanges between the respective institutions, if more than one has taken place. The colours of the edges, as in the previous network, indicate whether an exchange was a multi-country workshop (grey) or another type of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer event (red).

FIGURE 55. SOCIAL NETWORK OF ACTIVE INSTITUTIONS



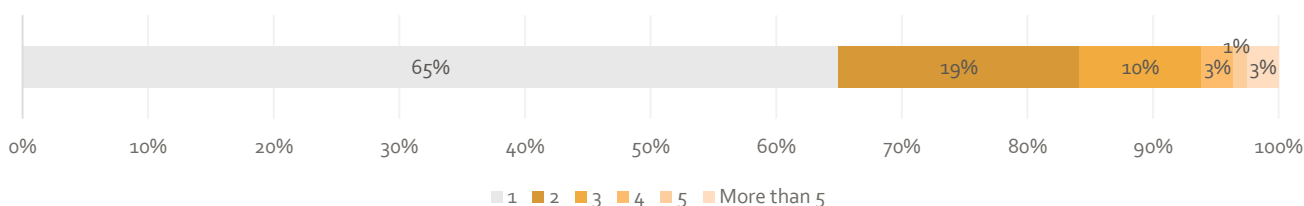
Source: prepared by PPMI based on TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer online library
 Notes: Size of node indicates degree (number of edges it has); colours represent modularity class (indicating a community, or institutions which tend to interact with each other more actively); thicknesses of the edges indicate the number of interactions between a pair of institutions (edges representing more than one interaction are labelled); edge colour indicates the type of event (grey for multi-country workshops, red for other events)

Many of the interactions between institutions participating in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events place at multi-country workshops. About 70% of all the edges connect multi-country workshop participants, which is also reflected in the 'clouds' of grey edges around the workshops. Looking closely, however, we can also see that there are multiple institutions that have participated in several multi-country workshops. These are especially visible in the turquoise community of institutions at the right-hand side of Figure 55, where some institutions took part in as many as two multi-country workshops with each other, and others also participated in events within the purple or light green communities. While multi-country workshop nodes dominate the graph, we can also see that other events such as study visits, expert missions or workshops took place between active institutions. For instance, the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science did not participate in multi-country workshops with any of the institutions in the network, but organised three events of other types with institutions from the Czech Republic, Romania and Spain. Both the Polish Ministry of

infrastructure and Development and the Romanian Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration have participated in multiple multi-country workshops, but have also organised two other exchanges with each other. A similar situation exists between the Czech Ministry of Regional Development and the Lithuanian Public Investment Development Agency – neither shares any multi-country workshops in common, but they have exchanged knowledge at two other events. More interesting patterns such as this can be seen when closely examining the network in Figure 55.

However, out of the 564 edges connecting the 80 most active institutions, only 17 are weighted, indicating that repeated interactions between the same pairs of institutions are not common. Zooming out to the entire network, weighted edges indicating multiple exchanges between pairs of institutions number only 28 out of a total of 1,010 connections, underlining that follow-up events using TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer are indeed fairly uncommon. (This network does not cover interactions between institutions outside the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer scheme which, according to our interview respondents, might take place informally or using other peer learning tools.) Our survey findings further support these insights. As seen in Figure 56, two-thirds of survey respondents indicated that they had only participated in one TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer event, while just under one-fifth took part in two. Only 17% – less than one in five respondents – participated in three or more events.

FIGURE 56. FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPATION IN TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER EVENTS (N=277)



Source: PPMI survey

Annex 2: Revised classification of the topics covered by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer

One of the tasks identified in the Technical Specifications to be completed by the Contractor is to develop a revised classification of the topics covered by TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges. The purpose of this revised classification is twofold: it should be used to analyse and present the distribution of already completed exchanges, and should be suitable as a reference for future classification. Bearing in mind these retrospective and prospective purposes behind the reclassification, it should be guided by the current 11 ESIF thematic objectives used during the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework, and the five policy objectives and specific objectives for the ERDF and CF for the 2021-2027 period. It should also include cross-cutting topics such as state aid, public procurement, the prevention of fraud/corruption, management, and verification.

To review and revise the classification of the topics covered by the scheme, we used the database of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges received from the Commission, combined with additional data from the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer online library. 208 events organised between March 2015 and end of December 2019 were included in the analysis. We draw on information about the sector and topic of an event from the database and complement this with keywords outlined in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer online library.⁵⁴ We first review the current classification to identify the most commonly used topics, sectors and keywords, and then suggest a new structured and simplified way to group the events using thematic and policy objectives as a basis.

It is recommended that DG REGIO further test the classification proposed using several applications for exchanges it has received, before performing any final revisions, if necessary.

Current classification of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer topics

Currently, completed TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges are grouped according to their topic and sector. Up to four keywords may also be used to indicate the focus of each event. Table 19 presents the most commonly used topics, sectors and keywords for exchanges organised between 2015 and 2019. It includes topics, sectors and keywords that were used on five or more occasions in the database. The database consists of 208 events. The overall count of keywords is higher since all keywords, and not just the first one, are included in the table.

TABLE 19. MOST COMMON TOPICS, SECTORS AND KEYWORDS FOR TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER EVENTS

TOPIC	COUNT	SECTOR	COUNT	KEYWORD	COUNT
Financial instrument	26	Management, control	32	Coordination of structural instruments	209
State aid	20	Smart	19	Programme management and implementation	31

⁵⁴ Available at: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/TMSWebRestrict/resources/js/app/#/library/list>

TOPIC	COUNT	SECTOR	COUNT	KEYWORD	COUNT
Smart	19	Urban	17	State aid	20
Public procurement	15	Environment	13	Public procurement	17
Audit	12	Public procurement	13	Reduction of administrative burden	16
Education	9	Transport	11	Financial instruments	15
Environment	9	Audit	10	Integrated territorial investments	15
Fraud	9	SMEs	9	Protection of the environment and resource efficiency	15
SCOs	7	Education	8	Financial management and control	14
Integrated territorial investments	7	Financial instrument	8	Research, technological development and innovation	13
Urban	5	Innovation	7	Audit	12
Transport	5	State aid	6	Education, training and lifelong learning	11
Management and control system	5	Research and development	5	Anti-fraud measures	9
Evaluation	5	Technical Assistance	5	Efficiency of public administration, including use of technical assistance	9
Control	5	Energy	5	Sustainable transport and network infrastructures	9
ICT	5	Energy efficiency	5	Horizontal areas	8
				Programming cycle	8
				Competitiveness of SMEs	6
				Monitoring and reporting	6
				Community-led local development	5
				European territorial cooperation	5
				Sustainable urban development	5

Source: prepared by PPMI, based on TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer library of events and online library.

The table above shows that cross-cutting topics such as the coordination and control of financial and structural instruments, state aid, programme management and implementation, public procurement, audit, anti-fraud measures and administrative capacity building were the key focus areas for TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer exchanges. With regard to sectoral keywords, many exchanges focused on the environment, education, transport, urban development, energy, as well as research and development.

The current classification is problematic in the sense that it reveals a certain inconsistency in the designation between topics and sectors. In the case of numerous events, the same keyword is used to denote both topic and sector, and only the keywords reveal the sectoral focus of the event. For example, 'state aid' can be used to denote both topic and sector, while the keywords (up to three) mention that the event was on 'energy efficiency' or 'environmental protection'. Some events, for example, list 'transport' as both topic and sector, while the keywords and event description reveal that the event dealt with 'state aid' in the 'transport' sector. The current distinction in the classification between what a topic and a sector stand for is not always clear. The (up to) three keywords that can currently be selected for each event also mix topical and sectoral components.

Furthermore, the topical keywords lack a clear classification and seem to overlap to an extent. For instance, cross-cutting topics such as 'audit' or 'fraud' can also fall under the category 'management and control', whereas currently they are used inconsistently and simultaneously.

Neither sectors nor keywords are clearly pre-defined and so the overlaps between topics such as 'control' or 'management and control system', 'smart' and 'ICT', or sectors such as 'energy' and 'energy efficiency' are unclear. Taking into account these issues, the next section suggests a more structured initial classification of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer topics that would allow the focus of events to be captured in a more structured manner, and avoid the omission of important information.

Proposed reclassification of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer topics

To avoid the issues with the current classification outlined above, particularly that concerning the overlap of keywords denoting topic and sector, and to provide an easy and comprehensive way to group TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events, these could be classified using two types of keywords:

- **A horizontal keyword** relating to an administrative aspect or phase of project implementation drawn from the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), as well as a review of past event descriptions and keywords commonly used in the current classification;
- **A thematic keyword** indicating the policy area or sectoral focus of the event, based on the current ESIF thematic objectives and ERDF policy objectives for 2021-2027 MFF, adding in prospective keywords for policy areas or initiatives that are expected to be important in the new MFF.

Having two separate categories of keywords solves some of the issues with the current classification, in which combining horizontal and sector or policy-area-oriented keywords leads to the omission of large portions of important information about a particular event. For instance, the use of one keyword would not allow an event to be indicated as dealing with state aid in the transport sector. For this reason, rather than developing a list of potential combinations of horizontal and sectoral keywords, we suggest a classification based on two short and clearly defined lists of keywords.

In addition, we propose the **option to add a second keyword to each of the two groups**, since scanning the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer online library and retrospectively reclassifying the events led to the observation that there are numerous instances in which two horizontal or policy area keywords would be useful. For example, there are events dealing with issues such as the auditing of state aid or financial instruments, or the use of financial instruments in environmental projects in rural areas. In the case of such events, the possibility of adding a second keyword would be more beneficial than prioritising one aspect or the other. The current reclassification we propose here was, however, based on prioritising a single keyword.

We propose align the first, horizontal keyword with the phases of fund implementation and management outlined in the Regulation No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council, which lays down common provisions for, among other things, the ERDF, CF and ESIF. However, classification should not deviate too far from the horizontal keywords currently used (see Table 19). If none of the horizontal keywords listed in Table 20 reflects the focus of an event, it would be classified as 'none', and the thematic keyword should be referred to instead. This would be the case if an event focused on an exchange of best practice in a certain policy area, without referring to any specific EU funds. The proposed list of horizontal keywords is flexible and can be contracted or expanded if needed by either adding in specific aspects of any of the phases of the project cycle, or by condensing keywords into more general categories, such as placing any of the specific implementation keywords under 'Implementation and Management'.

TABLE 20. PROPOSED CLASSIFICATION OF TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER TOPICS, CROSS-CUTTING KEYWORDS

PROGRAMME CYCLE	KEYWORDS	ELABORATION
Planning	Programming	Exchanges relating to administrative mechanisms used to pursue the objectives of the ESIF and CF, including the identification of strategic priorities and indicative actions, outlining financial allocations, and summarising management and control systems for a seven-year programming period; exchanges relating to preparations for the new programming period (2021-2027)
	Planning and selection of operations	Exchanges relating to the preparation of operational programmes.
Implementation	Financial instruments	Exchanges aiming to learn about the implementation or uptake of financial instruments (loans, guarantees, equity)
	State aid	Exchanges relating to the administration and provision of state aid (advantages given by the government to the private sector through the allocation of grant subsidies, provision of interest or tax reliefs, preferential purchasing terms).
	Public procurement	Exchanges specifically relating to public procurement, the improvement of public procurement procedures (except for e-procurement, which falls under 'Uptake of ICT technology and methods')
	Simplification and SCOs	Simplification and application of simplified cost options (SCOs including lump sums, unit costs or flat rates) in ERDF/CF funded projects
	Repayable assistance	Exchanges relating specifically to the implementation and management of repayable assistance schemes.
	Integrated territorial investment	Exchanges relating specifically to the management of integrated territorial investments
	Public-private partnerships	Exchanges relating to the development of public-private partnerships (PPP).
	Implementation and Management	Exchanges relating to the implementation and management of the ERDF and CF, focusing on multiple or other instruments not specified above, or on improving the effectiveness of the implementation and management of projects and programmes in general.
Monitoring and Control	Audit	Exchanges relating to sharing practices on the auditing of projects funded by the ERDF, CF and ESIF
	Anti-fraud and anti-corruption	Anti-fraud and anti-corruption measures relating to the implementation of the ERDF, CF and ESIF, exchanges on the implementation of Integrity Pacts.
	Evaluation	Exchanges relating to project evaluation practices, the development of indicators for project selection and evaluation
	Monitoring and control	Other control, monitoring and verification measures applied in the oversight of the projects funded by the ERDF, CF and ESIF.
	Closure	Exchanges relating to the closure of projects in general; may include several aspects relating to monitoring and evaluation
Other	Uptake of ICT technology and methods	Exchanges relating to the uptake of digital methods and procedures in OP management, including exchanges specialising in e-cohesion and e-procurement
	Partnership and stakeholder engagement	Exchanges focusing on developing partnerships and stakeholder engagement (trade unions, NGOs, employers and

PROGRAMME CYCLE	KEYWORDS	ELABORATION
		other bodies, the establishment of joint programmes throughout the whole programming process)
	None	Events having a broad scope and no clear horizontal focus such as exchanges of good practice in a certain policy area, projects or practices not directly relating to the ERDF and CF. The focus of such events is determined by the thematic keyword.
	Other	Events that do not fit under any of the above categories, or events with a broad focus on administrative capacity building, the development of roadmaps or the evaluation of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer.

Source: Prepared by PPMI

The second keyword is be aligned with the thematic objectives of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) for 2014-2020 and the policy objectives of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund (CF) 2021-2027 to reflect the thematic or policy area related goal of the TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer event. Several keywords were added on the basis that they could be specifically relevant for the prospective classification of upcoming events during the new MFF. These include 'Climate change', 'Smart specialisation' or 'Just transition'.

As seen in Table 21, the objectives of the ESIF, ERDF and the CF largely overlap. ESIF Thematic Objectives 1-3 align with the first priority area of the ERDF and CF, namely 'smarter Europe'. ESIF objectives 4-6 correspond to the second ERDF and CF objective group, a 'greener, low-carbon Europe', largely addressing environmental and energy issues and focusing on greening and sustainability. ESIF thematic objective 7 (and to an extent objective 2) overlap with ERDF and CF policy objective 3, a more connected Europe, dealing with both digital and physical connectivity and infrastructure. ESIF thematic objectives 8-10 largely fall under the ERDF and CF objective of a 'more social Europe'. What ESIF thematic objectives do not precisely cover is the fifth policy objective of the ERDF and CF, namely 'Europe closer to citizens', which focuses on urban and regional development and has figured prominently as one of the keywords of the current TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer classification. Furthermore, the 11th ESIF thematic objective, 'enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration' can be delivered under each of the policy objectives of ESIF according to the simplification measures in the cohesion policy for 2021-2027.⁵⁵ It is therefore listed as the overarching objective 'State and administration reform' in Table 21, which then outlines a list of proposed keywords based on the synergy of thematic, policy and specific objectives, along with several specific additional keywords.

TABLE 21. CORRESPONDENCE OF THE OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES OF THE ERDF, CF AND ESIF

ESIF 2014-2020	ERDF AND CF, 2021-2027	
Thematic objectives	Policy objectives	Specific objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TO1: Strengthening research, technological development and innovation - TO2: Enhancing access to, and use and quality of information and communication technologies (ICT) 	A smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies - Reaping the benefits of digitalisation for citizens, companies and governments - Enhancing the growth and competitiveness of SMEs

⁵⁵ Cohesion Policy Simplification Handbook, p. 3. Available at:

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/factsheet/new_cp/simplification_handbook_en.pdf

ESIF 2014-2020	ERDF AND CF, 2021-2027	
Thematic objectives	Policy objectives	Specific objectives
- TO3: Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)		- Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship
- TO4: Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors - TO5: Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management - TO6: Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency	A greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management	- Promoting energy efficiency measures - Promoting renewable energy - Developing smart energy systems, grids and storage at local level - Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience - Promoting sustainable water management - Promoting the transition to a circular economy - Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution
- TO7: Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures	A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity	- Enhancing digital connectivity - Developing a sustainable, climate-resilient, intelligent, secure and intermodal TEN-T - Developing sustainable, climate-resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility - Promoting sustainable multimodal urban mobility
- TO8: Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility - TO9: Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination - TO10: Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning	A more social Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights	- Enhancing the effectiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through the development of social innovation and infrastructure - Improving access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through the development of infrastructure - Increasing the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities, migrants and disadvantaged groups, through integrated measures including housing and social services - Ensuring equal access to health care through the development of infrastructure, including primary care
	A Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas and local initiatives	- Fostering the integrated social, economic and environmental development, cultural heritage and security in urban areas
TO11: Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration	(overarching objective in every policy area)	

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/2021_2027/;
https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/glossary/t/thematic-objectives

TABLE 22. PROPOSED THEMATIC KEYWORDS FOR TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER EXCHANGES

POLICY OBJECTIVE	KEYWORD	ELABORATION
Smarter Europe	R&D	Investment in research, development and innovation
	ICT development and deployment	Uptake of advanced technologies and ICT, development of ICT infrastructure
	SMEs	Enhancing the growth and competitiveness of SMEs
	Smart specialisation	Exchanges aiming at the development of smart specialisation strategies allowing regions to develop their own competitive growth strategies by bringing together local authorities, academia, business and civil society.
Greener Europe	Environment	Environment, resource efficiency, environmental protection, circular economy, biodiversity
	Climate change	Exchanges addressing climate change, European Green Deal and climate strategy, climate-neutral economy, the reduction of CO2 emissions, EU emissions trading system
	Just transition	Just transition: exchanges related to the Just Transition Mechanism of the EU, including the Just Transition Fund, InvestEU "Just Transition Scheme", Just Transition Platform, just transition plans. Other exchanges addressing the climate-neutral economy, but not related to Just Transition Mechanism, would fall under the categories Environment, Climate Change or Employment, depending on their focus
	Energy	Energy, energy infrastructure, energy efficiency, renewable energy
	Resilience	Disaster prevention and mitigation, resilient recovery of the economy
Connected Europe	Transport	Development of transport infrastructure
	Infrastructure	Development of infrastructure including public infrastructure, development and implementation of large infrastructural projects.
Social Europe	Employment	Enhancing the effectiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment
	Education	Enhancing access to quality education, vocational training and lifelong learning
	Social inclusion	Fostering the integration of migrants and people from disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring equal access to healthcare and social services, combating poverty and discrimination
Europe closer to citizens	Urban development	Sustainable development of urban areas
	Rural development	Sustainable rural and integrated territorial development
	Heritage protection	Protection and conservation of cultural heritage
Overarching objective	State and administrative reform	Events specifically aiming at enhancing administrative capacity without a specific thematic focus or covering several thematic areas.
Other	Multi-thematic	The event does not have a clear thematic focus and focuses on an issue covered by the horizontal keyword, or covers multiple policy areas

POLICY OBJECTIVE	KEYWORD	ELABORATION
	Other	Other thematic focus that does not fit under the categories above

Source: prepared by PPMI

While our proposed list should be relatively exhaustive, it is not impossible that other keywords might be needed, which could be added to the classification later. Furthermore, ‘Multi-thematic’ is likely to be a common thematic keyword, given that a lot of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events dealt with a cross-cutting aspect, such as the better implementation of certain financial instruments, new funding rules or audits thereof, irrespective of the policy area. Such events cannot clearly be assigned to a certain thematic area.

A new classification such as this, based on up to four keywords, would not deviate significantly from the current one, but would provide more structure and ensure that both horizontal and thematic topics and objectives of the events are correctly specified. Furthermore, it would ensure the consistency of information for prospective classification, since each event would contain information about both its horizontal and its thematic focus. For this purpose, it is also important to stick with a clearly defined and exhaustive list of keywords so that the ‘None’ and ‘Other’ options would not be used too frequently. Building the proposed classification on the analysis of current data on the sector, topic and keywords of each TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer event allowed us to identify such lists but also to merge and specify the keywords so as to reduce the possibility of overlaps or the same issues being classified under different keywords due to a lack of clarity in the latter. Finally, the use of two to four separate keywords will allow event data to be analysed more thoroughly. For instance, it will be possible to determine how many events were organised dealing with ‘state aid’ in the area of ‘transport’, or what horizontal issues were addressed in the events on the ‘environment’.

Table 23 provides a retrospective reclassification of the 208 TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events organised up to the end of 2019, based on the newly proposed keywords. The two categories of keywords remove the overlaps that occurred in the old classification, such as ‘transport’ or ‘state aid’ appearing as both the topic and sector of an event. Now all of the events have at least two keywords, one denoting the horizontal focus of the event and relating to the programme cycle, and another marking a thematic or policy objective focus that relates to the objectives of the ERDF, CF and ESIF. The ‘None’ and ‘Multi-thematic’ categories are well represented under both cross-cutting and thematic keywords, showing that events focusing either on a certain aspect of fund management or on a broader policy area are common. There are, however, no events that would not have either a defined horizontal or thematic keyword. Some keywords, such as ‘Just transition’ or ‘Climate change’ have not yet occurred in the database, but are likely to become important for prospective classification during the new MFF.

TABLE 23. RECLASSIFICATION OF PREVIOUS TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER EVENTS

HORIZONTAL KEYWORD (PROGRAMME CYCLE)	COUNT	THEMATIC KEYWORD (POLICY OBJECTIVE)	COUNT
None	34	Multi-thematic	61
Implementation and management	29	State and administration reform	19
Financial instruments	18	R&D	17
State aid	16	Transport	16
Monitoring and control	15	Urban development	16
Audit	14	Smart specialisation	14
Public procurement	14	Energy	10

Anti-fraud and anti-corruption	9	Infrastructure	10
Partnership and stakeholder engagement	9	Environment	10
Simplification and SCOs	8	Education	8
Uptake of ICT technology and methods	8	SMEs	8
Programming	7	Rural development	6
Integrated territorial investment	6	ICT development and deployment	3
Planning and selection of operations	6	Heritage protection	2
Closure	4	Employment	2
Evaluation	4	Resilience	2
Public-private partnerships	4	Social inclusion	2
Repayable assistance	2	Climate change	0
Other	1	Just transition	0
Total	208	Total	208

Source: prepared by PPMI

As noted, the horizontal keyword 'None' (34 instances) and the thematic keyword 'Multi-thematic' (61 instances) are relatively overrepresented. This is because multiple TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer events either deal with the general exchange of best practice in a certain policy field, or with aspects of fund management across different policy areas. In such cases, the focus of the event can be determined by consulting the other keyword. Table 24 provides a breakdown of these largest categories by the second keyword. As we see, many of the events on public procurement, audit or anti-fraud and anti-corruption dealt with the management of ERDF and CF in general and did not touch upon a specific policy area. On the other hand, numerous events in the fields of education, environment, R&D, transport and urban development focused on the exchange of best practices rather than any specific aspects of funding arrangements through the ERDF or CF. Comparing Table 23 and Table 24, we note that more than half of total events on audit or public procurement had a broad focus, whereas state aid would usually be tied to a specific policy area, since only two of the events did not have a clear thematic focus. Conversely, half of the events focusing on education and all of those on resilience were general exchanges of good practice.

TABLE 24: BREAKDOWN OF THE KEYWORDS 'MULTI-THEMATIC' AND 'NONE'

THEMATIC KEYWORD 'MULTI-THEMATIC'	COUNT	HORIZONTAL KEYWORD 'NONE'	COUNT
Public procurement	10	Education	4
Audit	9	Environment	4
Anti-fraud and anti-corruption	7	R&D	4
Simplification and SCOs	7	Transport	4
Monitoring and control	6	Urban development	4
Uptake of ICT technology and methods	6	Rural development	3
Financial instruments	5	SMEs	3
Closure	2	State and administration reform	3

Repayable assistance	2
State aid	2
Integrated territorial investment	1
Partnership and stakeholder engagement	1
Planning and selection of operations	1
Public-private partnerships	1
Total	61

Energy	2
Resilience	2
Smart specialisation	1
Total	34

Annex 6: Bibliography

Administrative and monitoring data and various documents received from the Commission

- 2014 needs analysis underpinning the development of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer
- Administrative capacity building matrix, work programme for 2018/19, for 2020
- Contract and report Policy Lab 2016 (CoPs)
- Contracts with the CoPs Community Manager
- CoPs event reports
- CoPs implementation reports
- CoPs mailing list
- DG REGIO policy paper on administrative capacity building post-2020
- Evaluation of TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer pilot phase conducted in 2016
- List of participants in events
- Monthly statistics on requests and exchanges implemented
- Presentation for EGESIF meeting in October 2019
- Results of the evaluation survey of CoPs (January 2019)
- Results of the focus group held during a meeting of the community on state aid in March 2019
- Service-level agreement between DG REGIO and DG NEAR for managing the scheme
- Six-month interim reports on the implementation (TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer)
- Surveys of participants in TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer: at the end of the event and after six months

Policy documents

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