



## Strathprints Institutional Repository

**Polverari, Laura (2016) 2014-2020 EU cohesion policy : results-orientation through better monitoring. European Structural and Investment Funds Journal, 4 (1). pp. 26-34. ISSN 2196-8268 ,**

This version is available at <http://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/57614/>

**Strathprints** is designed to allow users to access the research output of the University of Strathclyde. Unless otherwise explicitly stated on the manuscript, Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Please check the manuscript for details of any other licences that may have been applied. You may not engage in further distribution of the material for any profitmaking activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute both the url (<http://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/>) and the content of this paper for research or private study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge.

Any correspondence concerning this service should be sent to Strathprints administrator: [strathprints@strath.ac.uk](mailto:strathprints@strath.ac.uk)

# 2014-20 EU COHESION POLICY: RESULTS-ORIENTATION THROUGH BETTER MONITORING

## INTRODUCTION

Against the background of the new regulatory framework, this article reviews the varied experiences of selected programmes across the EU – the programmes that are part of the IQ-Net knowledge exchange network - with the fulfilment of the new monitoring requirements. The article is based on secondary source research and fieldwork interviews carried out in all the IQ-Net partner countries and regions with Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies, as well as an interview with the European Commission (DG Regio).<sup>1</sup> It starts with a review of the new monitoring obligations, and their rationale against the background of changed regulatory provisions. It then goes on to discuss the new monitoring arrangements in IQ-Net partner programmes, including the changes introduced to monitoring indicators and systems, the selection of results indicators, the main issues with the design and operation of the 2014-20 monitoring systems, the challenges that remain to be addressed, as well as the additional efforts undertaken to supplement monitoring data with administrative and survey data, to better serve the needs of evaluation. Some concluding reflections are provided at the end of this paper.

## MONITORING IN THE NEW PROGRAMMING FRAMEWORK

### Monitoring as a performance tool

The legislative framework for Cohesion policy 2014-20 places emphasis on the results-orientation of programmes. This is arguably an outcome of a variety of disparate impulses, including: the adoption within the European Commission of public management paradigms advanced by international bodies such as the OECD and UNDP, which over time have placed increased emphasis on performance;<sup>2</sup> the effect of the recent recession on public spending programmes and the related imperative, for public administrations, to deliver more results with reduced resources, and to provide evidence on the effectiveness and efficiency of public spending;<sup>3</sup> and, lastly, the mixed evidence on the achievements

---

<sup>1</sup> The author is Senior Research Fellow at the European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde in Glasgow (UK), email [laura.polverari@strath.ac.uk](mailto:laura.polverari@strath.ac.uk). This article is based on research undertaken for the IQ-Net network. For further details and data see Polverari L (2015) *The Monitoring and Evaluation of 2014-20 EU Cohesion Policy Programmes*, (IQ-Net Thematic Paper 36(2)). The author would like to thank all the IQ-Net researchers for their research in IQ-Net partner countries and all the IQ-Net partners who participated in the research. IQ-Net I sponsored by 18 Managing Authorities of ESIF programmes across Europe. The content and conclusions of this article do not necessarily represent the views of individual members of the IQ-Net network.

<sup>2</sup> OECD 2011, 2008 and 2005 quoted in Van Ongevalle and Huyse H (2014) 'Dealing with complexity through actor-focused planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME)', *Evaluation*, 20.4, 447-466, and UNDP (2009) *Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results*.

<sup>3</sup> Dahler-Larsen P (2007) 'Evaluation and Public Management', in Ferlie E, Lynn L E and Pollitt C (2007) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Management*, p. 618.

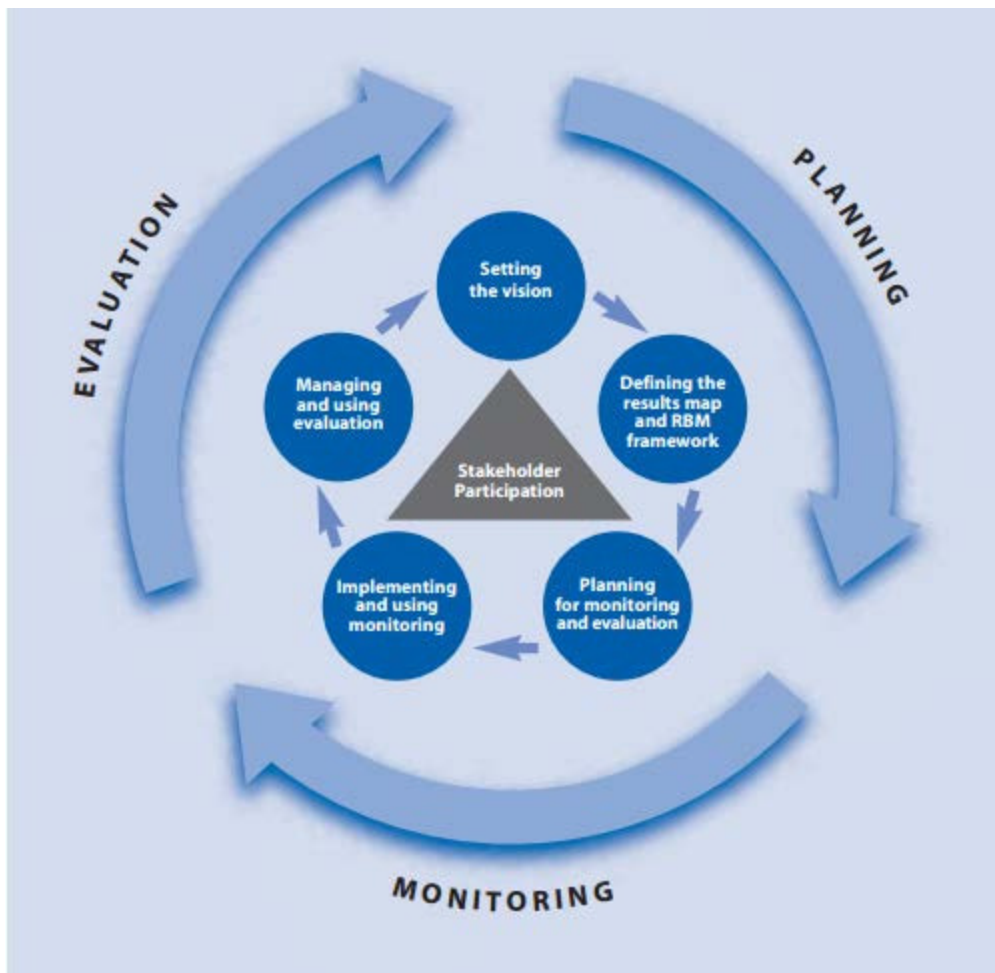
of previous Cohesion policy cycles, despite significant volumes of expenditure (historically equivalent to c. one-third of the EU budget) and the amount of resources invested in evaluation activities.<sup>4</sup>

Results-orientation can be achieved through 'results-based management' (RBM), which is an approach to the management of public policies intended to:

- 'support substantive accountability ...
- prompt corrective action
- ensure informed decision-making
- promote risk management
- enhance organizational and individual learning

linked together in a continuous process'<sup>5</sup>, as illustrated in Figure 1 below. This is the logic underlying the 'programming' and 'results-orientation' principles of Cohesion policy.

**Figure 1: Results-based management**



**Source:** UNDP (2009) *Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results*, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Bachtler J, Begg I, Polverari L and Charles D (2013) *Evaluation of the Main Achievements of Cohesion Policy Programmes and Projects over the Longer Term in 15 Selected Regions (from 1989-1993 Programme Period to the Present)*, Final Report to the European Commission (DG Regio), European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde (Glasgow) and London School of Economics.

<sup>5</sup> UNDP (2009) *Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results*, p. 9.

Within Cohesion policy, results-orientation is being sought through at least three main components.

- First, **ex ante conditionalities** have been negotiated to ensure that the necessary conditions for successful programme delivery are in place before programmes are launched or that they are established soon after their adoption, through dedicated action plans.
- Second, more explicit efforts have been made to design programmes according to a **logical framework**, whereby programmers start with the appraisal of the need to be addressed and the results to be achieved through the interventions to fulfil such need, rather than from the resources available (essentially a reversal of the traditional input-driven logic that has dominated the programming approach so far). This approach should lead to a **'clearer articulation of the policy objectives** [which] is key to implement a results-oriented policy and moving away from an excessive focus on the absorption of funding';<sup>6</sup>
- Third, as a consequence of the above **more emphasis is being placed on monitoring, reporting and evaluation** during and after programme implementation to: (i) test *in itinere* whether the anticipated results are being obtained or, conversely, whether efforts should be re-targeted (monitoring, reporting and evaluation), and (ii) appraise ex post what has been achieved thanks to the programme – in other words the contribution of the programme to addressing the initial need or programme impact (evaluation).

Timely and focused monitoring during implementation, and robust evaluation before, during and after programme implementation, are essential components of any results-based management system and of the performance framework of Cohesion policy. Within Cohesion policy, this is enshrined in a number of rules, which include a variety of tasks for Member State authorities.

## Monitoring obligations

The main tasks in relation to monitoring include setting up a monitoring system that tracks progression towards established target values (to be reached in 2023) in relation to:

- **'Output indicators'** linked to the actions funded by the programmes (art. 27.4(b) and art. 96.3(b) CPR), for example the number of recipients (e.g. firms, trainees) supported, the number of additional jobs created through the investment, the km of new metro/rail lines built, etc.<sup>7</sup>
- **'Result indicators'** linked to the specific objectives of the programmes (art. 27 and art. 96 CPR). Results indicators measure the change determined by the investments realised for the

---

<sup>6</sup> European Commission (2014) *The programming period 2014-2020. Guidance document on monitoring and evaluation, European Cohesion Fund, European Regional Development Funds, Concepts and Recommendations*, March 2014, available online at [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/wd\\_2014\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/wd_2014_en.pdf) (last downloaded 14 April 2016).

<sup>7</sup> For results indicators, the programme documents have to provide starting baseline values (art. 6 ERDF regulation). Where programmes are not able to provide baseline values, they are required to do so soon after adoption, according to a timetable specified in a dedicated action plan (art. 19.2 of ex ante conditionalities). For output indicators, on the other hand, no baseline values are foreseen, given that output indicators track the outputs of the investments made, and their starting point is therefore equal to zero (e.g. number of firms assisted by a programme measure).

target user-groups. Results indicators are not compulsory for programmes in relation to the performance framework, as this refers to the output indicators. However, with their focus on change, they are crucial for the realisation of the results-orientation approach, which is the real cornerstone of this programme period.

- A selection of '**common indicators**' linked to the actions of programmes (for ERDF) and also to the specific objectives of programmes in relation to the Youth Employment Initiative (for ESF). These are indicators that programmes have to select from a list provided by the European Commission in an annex to the Fund-specific regulations and submitted to the Commission annually through electronic data transmission.<sup>8</sup> These common indicators are meant to enable EU-wide aggregation of selected types of outputs across programmes and Member States.

Programme authorities must also prepare **annual reports** whose mandatory content is specified in art. 50 and art. 111 CPR.

The 2014-20 programme period has also seen the introduction of a new "performance framework", whereby programmes are required to establish measurable milestones (to be achieved by 2018) and targets (to be achieved by the end of the programme period, in 2023), linked to the allocation of a performance reserve of between 5 and 7 percent of each priority within a programme (except TA), for a total amount equivalent to 6% of each ESI Fund and category of region (articles 18-20 and Annex II CPR). Milestones and targets can relate to financial indicators, output indicators and, where appropriate, result indicators which are closely linked to the supported policy interventions (Annex II). Evaluation is also being strengthened (art. 54 and art. 56 CPR)<sup>9</sup>, with compulsory Evaluation Plans (arts. 114.1 and 110.2 CPR) and a shift from process evaluation towards impact evaluation.<sup>10</sup> All of these changes have direct implications for the monitoring activities of programme authorities.

## NEW MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS IN IQ-NET PROGRAMMES

### Main changes to monitoring systems

We have reviewed IQ-Net partner programmes and appraised the extent to which new monitoring systems or changes to existing monitoring systems are being introduced to support the programmes results-orientation and the needs of impact evaluation.

In many cases, the monitoring systems used in 2007-13 will continue to be in use. In some programmes, monitoring systems are considered to have worked effectively during 2007-13, and thus are being subject to only **minor adjustments**, to suit the new regulatory requirements and/or e-Cohesion agenda (e.g. in Austria, Flanders (BE), Wales) or link-up the monitoring of financial data with the domestic accounting system (in Slovenia, so that data are uploaded only once).

---

<sup>8</sup> Art. 6 ERDF regulation; art. 5 of the ESF regulation, whereas 13 of the Cohesion Fund regulation, and Annex I in all three regulations and Annex II of the ESF regulation.

<sup>9</sup> Ex ante evaluation is left out of this present note as it falls beyond the scope of the thematic paper.

<sup>10</sup> European Commission (2014) *op. cit.*, p. 8. For more discussion on the changes in evaluation requirements and programmes responses to them, see Polverari L (2016, forthcoming, 'Evaluating the ESIF Programmes. New Ambitions, New Rules: Opportunity or Constraint?', *ESTIF* (forthcoming)).

In other cases, more **substantial revisions** are required to meet the new regulatory requirements and improve the functioning of systems, such as simplification of monitoring for project beneficiaries and Managing Authorities (e.g. Finland), addressing weaknesses that emerged during 2007-13 (e.g. in Denmark, Finland, Pomorskie (PL), Portugal, Spain), and harmonisation of monitoring across programmes, funds and with domestic policies (e.g. in France).

There is also a group of countries or programmes where **wholly new monitoring systems** are being introduced, as in France, Greece, England (UK) and Scotland (UK) or the previous system has undergone a major overhaul (Czech Republic). A summary of the different approaches to the 2014-20 monitoring systems is provided in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: 2014-20 monitoring systems**

No change except for adjustments to new requirements	Improvement on previous systems	New monitoring systems or major overhauls
Austria	Denmark	Czech Republic
Belgium, Flanders	Finland	France
Slovenia	Poland, Pomorskie	Germany, Nordrhein-Westfalen
UK, Wales	Portugal	Greece
	Spain	UK, England
		UK, Scotland

**Source:** IQ-Net research.

### ***Improvement of indicators***

Among the countries that have made changes to existing monitoring systems, Denmark, Portugal and Spain have placed particular emphasis on the improvement of the design of monitoring indicators and the way they are interpreted and tracked by project applicants and implementing authorities.

In Denmark, this has entailed work by the Danish Business Authority (DBA) to select more appropriate indicators, the production of 'indicator guidelines' for applicants, sensitisation work aimed at project applicants by the growth fora secretariats on how to select and interpret indicators and how to establish realistic target values, and enhanced checks ex ante, whereby the DBA can send applications back to applicants where the guidelines have not been adequately followed. Project applicants are also required to describe the chain of effects, which is intended to provide a good basis for evaluation. According to the DBA, the monitoring system now features 'significantly improved indicators'.

In Portugal, major efforts were focused on developing indicators, and to this aim, the Portuguese authorities asked the OECD to carry out a full and independent analysis of the indicators included in the Portuguese OPs, including their appropriateness for the needs of implementation (e.g. for project selection), monitoring ('scoreboard' indicators) and evaluation (results indicators). The review concluded that the system of indicators was overall of very good quality, but also provided practical recommendations regarding specific weaknesses. It also identified areas for future work, for example the recommendation to take advantage of the work done and extend the indicators to the wider framework of domestic public policies, that the results-orientation is maintained during the implementation phase through the project selection process and the design of contracts with beneficiaries, and that a framework for monitoring and evaluation is set up to enable policy-learning and the communication of achievements to the broader public.

In Spain, strengthening of the monitoring system engaged the national officials in the DG for EU funds (Ministry of Finance and Public Administration) for over a year, resulting in a number of changes to the monitoring system in use in 2007-13, aimed primarily at ensuring that achievements across all ERDF programmes, also across OPs, can be measured and that the programmes' contribution can be identified. The main changes entail streamlining the number of indicators across OPs; standardisation of the interpretation of the indicators and their calculation to enable aggregation of data across programmes; enhanced accountability, through the assignment of management responsibilities for indicators to ensure that the key requirements are addressed and that the indicator values entered into the system are reliable and accurate; synchronisation between financial implementation and physical performance; and the obligation for programme managers to update physical indicator values at the same time as spending certification.

A more systemic reorganisation is taking place in Finland, where the improvements introduced to the Cohesion policy monitoring system (now renamed EURA 2014) have been more comprehensive. First, better links between Cohesion policy and domestic business aids monitoring systems were developed (TUKI2014), to avoid duplication of effort and the risk of inaccuracies/mismatches. Second, e-Cohesion was embraced fully, to make the monitoring system an integrated platform for all communication and documentation exchange between applicants/beneficiaries and the MA. Third, the monitoring platform was utilised in order to reduce error rates and improve the efficiency of implementing bodies in managing applications. The key novelties introduced include the following:

- Full electronic provision – all data-processing (application and other forms) is done electronically. There is no need to sign forms and send them by post (as previously). This is intended to allow for significantly faster processing of applications, particularly where additional information or corrections are needed.
- No separate monitoring forms – monitoring information is provided together with the payment application; this reduces the risks of delays or inaccuracies.
- No mid-term reporting for projects – instead, description of implementation progress is provided as part of the periodic monitoring information.
- Provision of key information in English – the name of the project and a summary are also provided in English, and subsequently published for international dissemination.

### ***Introduction of new systems***

In other IQ-Net partner programmes, wholly new monitoring systems are being introduced. This is the case in the Czech Republic, France, Greece, and in the UK, in England and Scotland.

In the **Czech Republic**, a new monitoring system was designed and tested during the three years prior to the programme's finalisation, and a final version was being tested by the MAs in March 2014 (when IQ-Net fieldwork took place). While the new system is considered to be rather complex and cumbersome for programme managers (given its comprehensive nature – discussed below), it fulfils the requirements of the new performance framework, and is considered to be an improvement on past practice particularly from the point of view of applicants and beneficiaries. The main characteristics of the new system are:

- **a single system for all Operational Programmes and all ESI Funds**, which means less onus on project beneficiaries (applicants/beneficiaries have to learn the system only once and

can use it for all other potential applications), more harmonisation across funds, and more oversight/summative potential for the purposes of reporting and evaluation;

- **fully integrated electronic platform** for data transfer across actors and levels of implementation, **effectively serving as an e-management tool** through which applications and monitoring reports can be submitted to the MA electronically (whereas previously they were printed and submitted physically);
- **interoperability with other platforms**, i.e. some parts of an application form can be copied to another application, or information relevant to applications can be downloaded directly into the forms from applicable Czech registers or databases; and
- tracking of the **information required by the new performance framework**, such as results indicators and milestones.

The drawback is that combining all funds (ERDF, ESF, CF as well as EFF and EAFRD) and all the information required by the related regulations (thematic objectives, performance framework, categories of regions etc.) has made the system quite cumbersome for programme administrators.

In **France**, the joint effect of the changes in the requirements contained in the ESI Funds regulations and the decentralisation of ERDF management to the reformed regions (and of ESF, to a much more limited degree) has led to the introduction of a new information system for the ERDF called SYNERGIE. In addition to tracking the indicators required by the new regulatory framework, the new system will allow the electronic administration of projects throughout the full project cycle, from submission of an application to closure (this, however, will be optional rather than compulsory). It will also communicate with other information systems and databases. For the moment, the implementation of the new system is uneven across regions, the ESF and EAFRD will run their own systems, for the regions the integration in the new platform is not compulsory and some will continue to run their own monitoring systems. However, the ambition is eventually to create a common platform for the monitoring and implementation of the French PA and OPs.

New online monitoring systems are also being introduced in Nordrhein-Westfalen (DE), England and Scotland (both UK). In **Nordrhein-Westfalen**, a new IT platform, revised monitoring forms (much more streamlined, shorter and simpler to fill in) and new procedures for entering data into the system are being introduced to simplify monitoring requirements for programme beneficiaries, reduce the length of time necessary to input information into the system, and devolve the responsibility for uploading monitoring information in the IT system to implementing bodies (taking advantage of a major streamlining of the delivery arrangements of the programme, i.e. the reduction of the number of intermediate bodies from the previous 108 to the current nine). Whilst in 2007-13 monitoring data was entered into the monitoring system by the Managing Authority, in 2014-20 the Implementing Bodies will upload data directly into the system, which should allow the Managing Authority to focus more on strategic management.

In **England**, the new online monitoring system has been devised to embrace the e-Cohesion agenda as well as to unify all monitoring data in a single platform across England, in line with the rationalisation of Cohesion policy support in a single England-wide (national) programme (compared to the 10 regional ERDF programmes of 2007-13). Whereas there were previously some differences



between the English regions in indicator definition (where in addition to the standard core indicators the regional programmes also added their own indicators), the system will now track the same indicators across all regions. Indicator definitions will also be standardised.

A new monitoring system is also being rolled out in **Scotland**, particularly with a view to obtaining better insights on what is being achieved through the programmes than had been possible in 2007-13. The previous monitoring system focused mostly on measuring financial progress and the Managing Authority has been investing extensive effort to ensure that the new monitoring system allows the appraisal of what operations are achieving throughout implementation and that the data submitted by projects are accurate. This will be ensured through checks undertaken prior to payments being made. Further, the anticipated move to simplified costs should facilitate a shift from financial monitoring to a focus on achievements.

Lastly, the monitoring system in **Greece** also received a major overhaul, particularly with a view of improving the quality of data and address gaps in some key fields such as R&D and ICT. The existing Integrated Information System has been upgraded, with better-defined and more customised indicators, guidelines for field completion and compatibility with SFC2014 and electronic exchange protocols. An improved role for beneficiaries in providing data has been linked with efforts to enhance the administrative capacity of all stakeholders (MAs, IBs, beneficiaries), on measuring and tracking indicators, through training.

## **The rationales for the changes introduced**

Where significant changes to monitoring systems have been introduced - whether through changes to pre-existing monitoring systems, or via the creation of new systems altogether - these have responded to a group of common aims and rationales, namely:

- **simplification and reduction of the onus upon project beneficiaries and/or programme administrators**, also with a view to improving data quality, efficiency and timeliness;
- **streamlining, harmonisation and interoperability of monitoring platforms across programmes, funds and between EU and domestic systems**, to allow aggregation of information and the elaboration of summative views on achievements beyond the single fund or programme, and to provide evaluation with the data that are necessary to isolate, insofar as possible, a programme's contribution;
- **increased linkages or full-out integration with management and accounting systems**, to ensure the timeliness and comprehensiveness of monitoring submissions (e.g. by linking the inputting of data and/or the satisfactory pass of checks on data quality to certification of expenditure and payment), faster processing of projects and reduction of error rates;
- **introduction of enhanced checks and accountability**, to increase the quality of data entered into the systems, also with a view to adequately accommodating the needs of evaluation;
- in some cases, **sharing the load**, i.e. direct inputting by beneficiaries or implementing bodies of data into the system, in order to improve ownership, quality and management efficiency.

The new or improved monitoring systems are intended to enable ongoing learning about the performance of a programme, fund, intervention or project; to provide MAs with timely information to allow them to introduce adjustments to the programmes where needed; to serve the data needs of evaluation and, in a number of cases, to act as integrated management platforms for projects and programme management alike. These are ambitious goals that are linked to the new results-orientation of programmes, but they go beyond the new regulatory requirements.

## **Ongoing challenges**

A number of open challenges or unsolved issues in relation to the design and operation of the new or revised monitoring systems remain. As in the previous programming cycles, a period of adaptation and adjustment will be necessary to iron out unforeseen weaknesses or address new issues that might emerge as implementation progresses. The main issues relate to the rolling-out of new systems and procedures, to ensuring that the data tracked by the monitoring systems is accurate and reliable, and to the treatment of sensitive data, particularly in relation to ESF. The selection of results indicators and the setting of baselines and target values were also problematic in some cases.

**Rolling out the new monitoring systems.** In Finland, the EURA 2014 monitoring system was launched in May 2014, although various components were still in the process of being finalised. Even though the system builds on the experience of implementing the previous monitoring system, EURA 2007, the many new features have meant that the launch has not taken place without problems. The exceptionally large (simultaneous) user group at the end of August 2014 resulted in technical problems. There are also capability issues, and a training programme has been organised for the key users of the system (e.g. the regional councils and intermediate bodies, such as the ELY-Centres), particularly on the new components introduced. There have been both monitoring-specific training events and general training events. There were also difficulties with the rolling out of the new monitoring system in the Czech Republic. Despite efforts to simplify and reduce the administrative burden for all involved, finding a balance between comprehensiveness and manageability is proving to be challenging. Combining all the ESI Funds and all the regulatory requirements into a single system – that includes thematic objectives, performance framework, categories of regions etc. and takes into account the variability of requirements across different funds – has rendered the new system particularly complex. This has resulted in an increased administrative burden for programme administrators.

**Quality control.** Data quality was a concern in a number of programmes in 2007-13, and the procedures to control the quality of the values inputted for output and result indicators are still considered to be in need of improvement in a number of cases. Measures being introduced include more systematic controls on the data inputted in the monitoring systems, improvements of target-setting and introduction of cross-checks across different bodies (e.g. in Flanders, Denmark and Portugal).

**Sensitive data and privacy legislation.** Dealing with sensitive data in relation to project participants emerged as an issue in Wales, where, although there is now a legal basis for collecting participant-level data, there are still potential problems related to data protection issues. The sensitivity of data can have knock-on implications for complete data sets. For instance, projects can support participants who do not provide data on data protection grounds (data provision does not determine eligibility), but then cannot claim for them (as one cannot claim for a participant unless the monitoring system

includes the complete set of data). This can lead to a discrepancy in reporting, where the AIR can report a higher figure than the monitoring system, which can undermine the monitoring system and create problems in relation to financial claims and programme expenditure. The treatment of sensitive data is also an issue in the Czech Republic. A new group of laws, set to enter into force on 1 July 2015, is imposing some changes on the way such data can be collected and treated. This will require changes to the way ESF data is collected and the introduction of a new system at the end of 2015 whereby data on project recipients, before and after the realisation of a project, will be entered directly by beneficiaries.

## Identifying results indicators

The selection of indicators, particularly of results indicators, appears to have been largely straightforward (or at least without major problems) for most IQ-Net partners. However, for over a third of the programmes reviewed the selection of results indicators and identification of baselines and targets has entailed difficulties, relating mainly to:

- **appropriate definition of objectives and intervention logic** (e.g. in Greece and Slovenia);
- **capacity issues**, i.e. the difficulty for actors more accustomed to dealing with output and financial indicators to deal with a new type of indicator (e.g. in France);
- **uniform interpretation of indicators** across different actors, intermediate bodies and applicants (e.g. in Finland, England). Some of the indicators simply leave too much room for interpretation, for example: 'New research or R&D jobs' - what is the difference between research and R&D jobs? Or 'Firms participating in projects led by R&D institutes' - what qualifies as 'participation'?
- **measurement of impact** (and thus indication of target values) for programmes whose funding represents only a small portion of public policy in the region and which can thus only contribute to a certain trajectory of change, rather than lead to a quantifiable impact (e.g. Austria, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Wales);
- **different approaches to baseline and target-setting by different Commission DGs** (a problem for multi-fund OPs, e.g. the Czech Republic); and,
- **difficulties for the administrations to take a position on targets proposed by beneficiaries or implementing bodies** where estimates are of technical nature (e.g. on saved energy).

Where there were difficulties, this was not necessarily an entirely negative thing. In Wales, for example, the work done on setting up an appropriate framework of results indicators and related targets is considered to have had a positive effect, in terms of making the programmes more focused. A working group was set up to consider alternative approaches to the measurement of success and impact within the ERDF, ESF and EAFRD programmes. The remit of the group was to consider what were the most important transformational changes that should result from the 2014-20 programmes and how the MA was going to measure the degree of success in achieving them. The group concluded that the main area where beneficial economic change would be observed would be within

the business community, and impact measures typically used within the business environment could be appropriate measures. It is thus recommended that there should be support for ongoing work on improving data on business need, such as through the development of databases more typically seen in the private than public sector (e.g. for supermarket loyalty cards or financial comparison websites), designed to continually update the type of information they hold and over time becoming valuable monitoring tools.<sup>11</sup>

### **Enhanced cooperation with National Statistical Offices and additional data-gathering arrangements**

The authorities in charge of the programmes reviewed expressed mixed views on whether the data gathered by the monitoring systems will be adequate to fulfil the needs of evaluations. They also diverged on the degree of confidence in the quality of the new monitoring systems. On the whole, however, there is agreement on the fact that the new monitoring systems and procedures will represent an improvement compared to the past and that the new results-orientation will be useful in terms of allowing programmes to gain a better overview of what is being achieved and support the achievement of the desired goals.

A trend, across a number of programmes, is the increased use of administrative data and strengthened cooperation with national Statistical Offices (e.g. in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain). This applies particularly to results indicators and to the data on individuals and firms, which could be used to allow counterfactual impact evaluation of projects and interventions. In some cases, investments are being planned to strengthen national statistical databases and/or undertake additional data collection exercises. For example, survey research is anticipated or been undertaken in a number of countries, including Austria, France and Slovenia.

- In **Austria**, ÖROK commissioned factsheets in 2013, one for each of the nine *Länder* and a national summary, to acquire baseline data specifically geared to the ERDF OP. These factsheets have been produced by the Joanneum Research Policies Institute, using a variety of sources, including data from the Austrian Statistics Office, labour market data and data produced at the European level, as well as own surveys and calculations. The data collection exercise will be repeated when needed (e.g. for the Strategic Reports in 2017 and 2019) and a budget has been set aside for this. It is considered that this exercise will play an essential role in any future evaluation activity to appraise the impact of the programme.
- In **France**, three regions (Corsica, Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrenees) intend to use data sources that are additional to the available administrative and monitoring data, such as surveys, field research and studies. It should be noted that the decisions by these French regions do not appear to be correlated with the financial scale of programmes or their overall evaluation budgets (Corsica, for example, is the smallest French programme).
- In **Slovenia**, additional data-gathering exercises will be funded, especially surveys of the general public. Collaboration with the national Statistical Office of Slovenia and the Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development (*Urad RS Slovenije za makroekonomske analize in razvoj*) is also being fostered in the framework of the activities of the Evaluation Plan, so as

---

<sup>11</sup> WEFO Papers to the February 2015 Programme Monitoring Committee.

to identify and collect in a timely manner the data that is necessary to undertake the planned evaluations.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

By and large, the results-orientation focus of the new regulations, the new monitoring and evaluation requirements, and the shift in emphasis in these activities from implementation to impact are viewed with favour by programme authorities. These changes are considered to represent a move forward compared to the past programme period where financial absorption, partly linked to the economic crisis, dominated the agenda.

The expectation is that the new requirements will result in an improved understanding of the achievements of Cohesion policy in EU regions and Members States, and of the policy's impact upon target groups.

There is awareness amongst IQ-Net partners that the availability of the right data and adequate data quality have been an issue in the past, and that this has hindered the ability of programme authorities to undertake good impact evaluation in 2007-13. In the light of the new regulatory requirements, IQ-Net partners have invested resources and efforts towards improving programmes' monitoring systems, and the availability and usability of administrative data.

In designing the new programmes, the identification of results indicators has been challenging for a number of IQ-Net programmes and there are still various open issues. Nevertheless, views gathered from IQ-Net partners and DG Regio Evaluation Unit indicate that the experience has been helpful and that this work has helped making the programmes more focussed and better targeted towards achievements. The fact that programmes have identified clear results indicators and targets is enabling for the first time the production of a narrative about what the programmes are intending to achieve, which would not have been possible at the start of the last programme period. This is viewed by the Commission as 'a good start'.

Moving from programme design to implementation, capacities – within Managing Authorities, implementing bodies, project holders and the evaluation community – continue to be an issue in some countries. At the same time, new challenges are emerging in relation to the necessity to carry out (impact) evaluations that require different skills than those employed in 2007-13. To address these, improvements to monitoring systems and collaboration with data providers, and dedicated training initiatives (both on monitoring and evaluation) have been put in place in a number of countries.