



Brussels, 1.10.2020
SWD(2020) 220 final

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

Mid-term evaluation of the Structural Reform Support Programme

{SWD(2020) 219 final}

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

Mid-term evaluation of the Structural Reform Support Programme

Without growth-enhancing reforms, economies stagnate and decline. The implementation of well-designed reforms helps to improve productivity, speed up convergence, strengthen the economy's resilience and improve the delivery of public services like justice, health and education. The **Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP)** helps EU Member States design and implement growth-enhancing reforms by providing the right expertise to national authorities. The support can, for example, take the form of strategic and legal advice, studies, training and expert visits on the ground. It can be provided by international organisations, public bodies, consultancies, or by the European Commission's own staff. **With a budget of EUR 222.8 million for 2017-2020**, the programme is managed by the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM).

In line with the SRSP Regulation¹, the programme is subject to a **mid-term evaluation**. The purpose was to examine how the SRSP had performed so far against five evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added value) and draw lessons for possible future improvements. In this staff working document, the Commission's staff presents and reflects on the findings.

The mid-term evaluation assessed the programme's 2017 and 2018 budgetary cycles, the 2016 Preparatory Action and projects funded through the voluntary transfers of additional resources to the SRSP budget by Greece and Bulgaria in 2018. To support the evaluation exercise, an external contractor performed an evaluation study.² In total, the study analysed over 300 technical support projects in 24 Member States. **The Commission considers the quality of the collected evidence satisfactory.** The most important limitation to the robustness of the findings was the fact that the SRSP had only very recently been established when the evaluation took place and many technical support projects were still in progress. The staff working document therefore provides only initial conclusions and lessons learned, which might evolve as the programme continues to be implemented.

¹ Article 16 of Regulation (EU) 2017/825 of the European Parliament and of the Council, OJ L 129, 19.5.2017, p. 1–16, as amended by Regulation (EU) 2018/1671, OJ L 284, 12.11.2018, p. 3–5.

² Ernst & Young, 'Mid-term Evaluation of the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) 2017-2020' (2020), available on <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2887/656262>. Executive summaries are available on <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2887/584399> (English), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2887/244815> (French), and <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2887/530192> (German).

Regarding the **relevance** of the SRSP, the findings of the evaluation show that the SRSP addresses the needs of Member States to a large extent. According to the stakeholders consulted, the SRSP is a suitable instrument for providing technical support to Member States to design and implement growth-sustaining reforms. The programme is perceived as a significant tool for improving the Member States' capacity to define more efficient processes and methodologies. Furthermore, the high degree of flexibility, the simplicity of the contracting and implementing procedures managed by the Commission and the absence of co-financing requirements are especially appreciated by Member States. In addition, the findings suggest that technical support for reforms continues to be needed. This is also demonstrated by the increased demand from Member State for technical support over the years.

Regarding the **effectiveness** of the SRSP, the findings show that the projects funded under the SRSP are generally well designed and take into account the needs and particular situation of the beneficiary authorities who requested support. Relevant socio-economic impacts are also taken into account, and the designed actions are often feasible and with realistic timelines. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that the SRSP is progressing towards achieving its objectives. Most of the technical support projects are likely to achieve their results, or have already done so. Evidence shows that changes in the political structure of the beneficiary authorities and a lack of collaboration among stakeholders are important obstacles to the delivery of project outputs. A comprehensive evaluation of the programme's impact will be carried out at a later stage.

The findings from the evaluation indicate that the governance of the SRSP is **efficient**. The Commission's current internal IT system is largely adequate as a monitoring tool, although at the time of evaluation it still needed further improvements. Additionally, all interviewed Commission departments indicated that their cooperation with DG REFORM was efficient. In terms of cost-effectiveness, the findings suggests that the results achieved are proportional to the budget allocated. Taking into account the limitations of the analysis, the SRSP-funded actions can be considered cost-effective so far. Finally, the evidence demonstrates that the programme's absorption rate is aligned with the two-year duration of the SRSP project cycle. Therefore, it can be concluded that the SRSP is time-efficient in terms of budget execution. At the same time, the findings indicate that common standards for monitoring technical support at national level could be considered. Further attention could be paid to some minor risks of delays in the contracting procedures.

As for the **coherence** of the programme, the analysis demonstrates that the different components of the intervention logic of the SRSP are logically linked to one another. The programme is also well integrated in the Commission's European Semester framework for the coordination of economic policy. The evidence shows that DG REFORM has put in place an appropriate technical support coordination mechanism. This coordination mechanism enables timely identification of potential synergies and helps to avoid double funding of activities funded by other EU funds and programmes. Interviews with other Commission departments confirm that the complementarities between the SRSP and other programmes are largely

safeguarded. However, some of the Commission's Directorates-General also highlighted that the fact that the SRSP support is not aligned to their programming period imposes challenges on other EU programmes with related objectives. The findings also suggest that Member States would need to increase their capacity to perform more in-depth checks to identify double funding.

Lastly, the evaluation highlights the programme's clear **EU added value**. The technical support provided under the SRSP is intended to target those reform challenges that Member States cannot address at national level but for which they need to seek support at EU level due to capacity or knowledge constraints. In addition, the technical support projects very often provide a platform for sharing good practices and lessons learned among Member States. These are essential features that the SRSP was expected to deliver in terms of EU added value. However, the exchange of information between beneficiary authorities in different Member States could be further improved to allow for an optimisation of synergies and solution sharing.