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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

**Synthesis of the findings of the evaluations of European Structural and Investment
Funds Programmes**

**STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT ON THE
SYNTHESIS OF THE FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATIONS OF
EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL AND INVESTMENT FUNDS PROGRAMMES**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This staff working document (SWD) provides an overview of the evaluations undertaken by the Member States and the Commission on the programmes supported by European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds¹.

The stronger focus on results in the legislation for the 2014-2020 programming period reaffirms the value of evaluation as an important source of evidence on policy achievements and their underlying factors. Evaluation can indicate whether investments have been well designed, whether they are targeted to the objectives and whether they can deliver added value. As such, it can help improve policy design and implementation in the future.

The 2014-2020 Common Provisions Regulation² requires that programmes submitted for adoption are accompanied by an ex ante evaluation, in order to improve their design, and that evaluation plans are drawn up and submitted to the monitoring committees within a year of the programme's adoption.

Evaluation plans can be considered as living documents that are updated in response to changes in the evolving circumstances related, in particular, to implementation. An assessment of the plans showed a good level of completeness and coherence with regard to coordination, management and communication activities envisaged in them. Some of the latest updates of the plans have refined the number of the evaluations planned and their timeline, without affecting the thematic coverage.

During the programming period, Member States are obliged to carry out evaluations to assess effectiveness, efficiency and impact for each programme and to ensure that each evaluation is followed up appropriately.

Member States have been increasingly emphasising impact evaluations, which now represent around two thirds of those included in the evaluation plans. However, the number of impact evaluations carried out so far for the 2014-2020 programmes is still relatively low, despite an increase in the past year. This is because impact evaluations are normally carried out later in the programme cycle, and as these programmes started late, many actions have yet to produce results.

The impact evaluations carried out so far are uneven in terms of themes and geographical areas covered. They tend to concentrate on measures that are faster to implement such as promoting sustainable and quality employment, which directly benefit people in the EU.

To draw lessons from the evaluation findings and apply them to the 2021-2027 programming period, the quality of the Member States' evaluations is continuously scrutinised by the Commission. To increase the quality of the evaluations and the reliability of the evidence provided, the Commission is increasing its support to Member States in view of further improving their evaluation capacity.

¹ <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/>

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32013R1303>

The following sections present an overview per policy area of the Member States' and the Commission's evaluations of the ESI Fund-supported programmes. The detailed findings of the evaluations completed in the past year are reported in the annex³.

2. COHESION POLICY PROGRAMMES

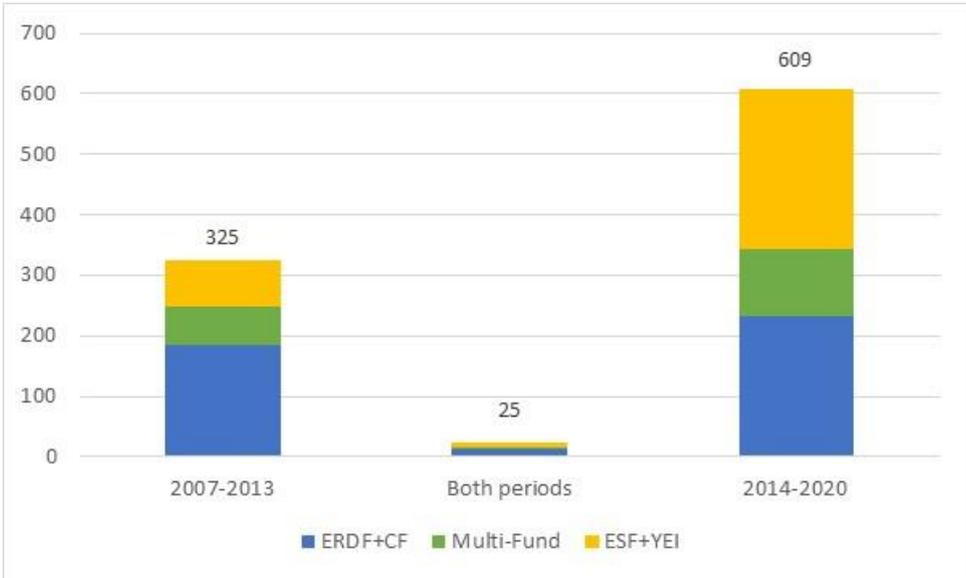
This section provides an overview of the evaluations of the actions funded by operational programmes supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI).

2.1. Evaluations completed by the Member States

2.1.1. General overview

Nearly 1,000 evaluations carried out by Member States have been published since January 2015. These relate either to 2014-2020 programming period or to the previous one (2007-2013), or in a small number of cases to both.

Figure 1: Evaluations published since January 2015 on cohesion policy programmes — breakdown by programming period and fund



Source: Commission evaluation helpdesk for cohesion policy

As shown in the above table, taken together, most of the published evaluations are for the ERDF and/or the CF programmes. For the 2014-2020 programming period alone, most are for ESF and/or YEI programmes.

Since 2015, 431 evaluations of ERDF/CF programmes and 351 evaluations of ESF/YEI programmes of the current and the previous programming period have been published. In

³ More details on the previous years' findings are available in the past editions of this SWD. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index.cfm/en/policy/how/stages-step-by-step/strategic-report/

addition, there have been 177 evaluations on multiple actions with support from ERDF/CF and ESF/YEI.

Overall, the number of 2014-2020 evaluations has more than doubled in the past year, rising from around 250 to over 600 and exceeding the number of evaluations covering the 2007-2013 period published since January 2015. Almost 60% of ERDF/CF evaluations and 65% of ESF/YEI evaluations covering the current programming period were carried out in the past year.

Table 1: Evaluations published since January 2015 on cohesion policy programmes — breakdown by year, fund and programming period

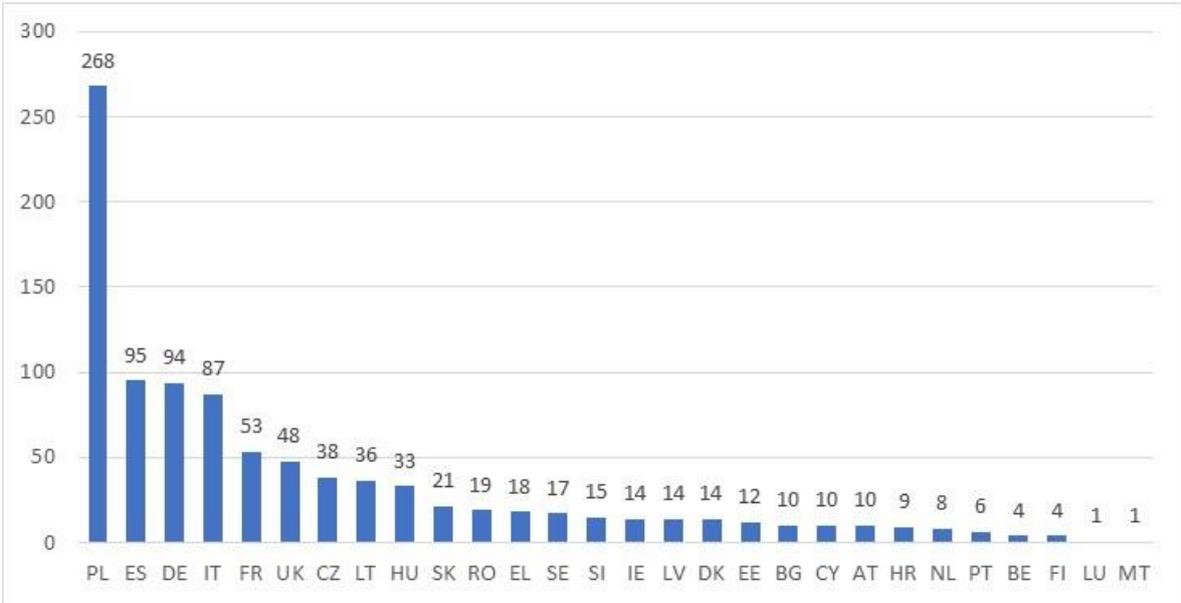
	Funds	2007-2013	2014-2020	Both periods	Total
	ERDF+CF	186	233	12	431
	ESF+YEI	77	266	8	351
	Multi-Fund	62	110	5	177
	Total	325	609	25	959
<i>of which in the past year</i>	<i>ERDF+CF</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>156</i>
	<i>ESF+YEI</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>174</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>189</i>
	<i>Multi-Fund</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>53</i>
	<i>Total in the past year</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>358</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>398</i>

Source: Commission evaluation helpdesk for cohesion policy

The evaluations completed so far are concentrated on a limited number of Member States. Poland (with 268 evaluations), Spain (95), Germany (94), Italy (87), France (53) and the UK (48) account for 66% of all evaluations published⁴. This is mainly due to the high number of operational programmes in these countries — especially Poland, which has carried out a large number of smaller evaluations.

⁴ Around 30 evaluations are for operational programmes funded under the European Territorial Cooperation goal. These are reported in the Member State that manages the programme.

Figure 2: Evaluations published since January 2015 on cohesion policy programmes — breakdown by Member State



Source: Commission evaluation helpdesk for cohesion policy

On the other extreme, five Member States have carried out less than five evaluations.

In the past year the number of evaluations has grown substantially in Poland, with more than 80 new evaluations, and in Germany, Italy and France, where around 50 new evaluations per country have been published.

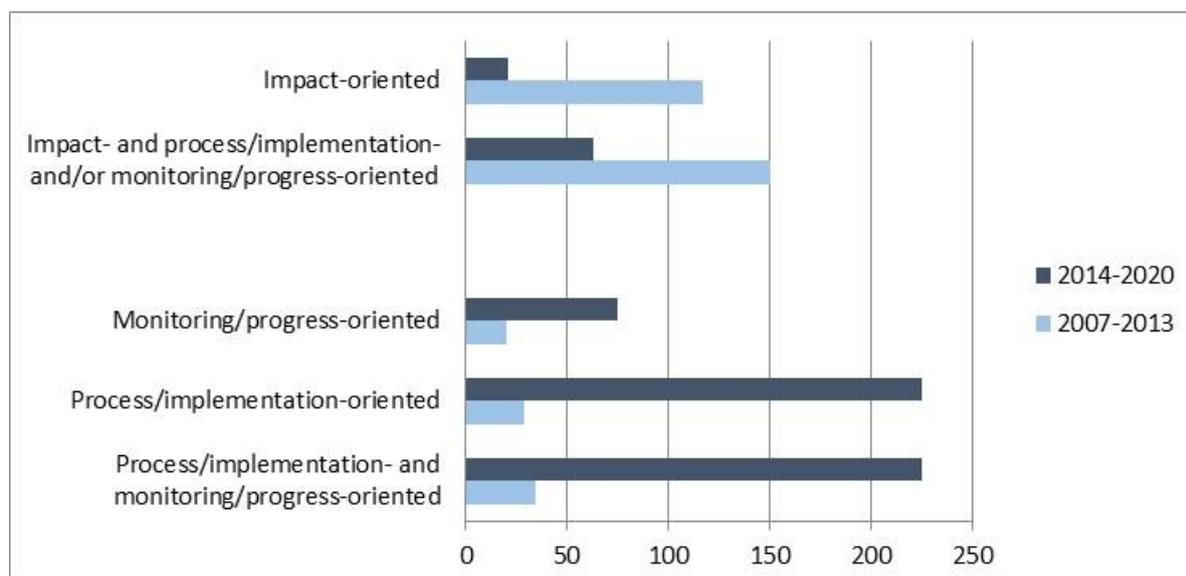
2.1.2. Type of evaluations

More than one third of the evaluations are impact-oriented (351), i.e. they assess the outcomes and results of the programmes. Of these, 40% are ‘pure’ impact-oriented evaluations, while the other 60% also look at how the actions were implemented and/or monitor progress towards achieving the set targets.

The share of impact-oriented evaluations varies significantly between the funds. For 2014-2020, the share of impact evaluations is much higher for ESF/YEI (20%) than for ERDF/CF and multi-fund programmes (9%) and this is partly due to the requirement that Member States undertake impact evaluations of the YEI by the end of 2015 and 2018.

The relatively low number of impact evaluations for 2014-2020 is mainly due to the fact that evaluations are normally carried out later in the programme cycle and the programmes’ start was delayed due to the late adoption of the regulatory framework. On the other hand, the high share of 2007-2013 impact evaluations is related to the window of the analysis, which starts at the very end of the period, when most evaluations tend to assess the impact of the programmes.

Figure 3: Evaluations published since January 2015 on cohesion policy programmes — breakdown by type and programming period



Source: Commission evaluation helpdesk for cohesion policy

Methods used for evaluations

Methods are often combined

Most of the published evaluations combine relatively simple qualitative methods with quantitative ones. Of the 959 evaluations, 760 combine at least two methods and many apply more than two. The most frequent combination consists of standard qualitative and quantitative methods. In some cases more sophisticated methods are used, essentially to assess the results and outcomes of the programmes. Of the approximately 140 ‘pure’ impact-oriented evaluations, 30% use counterfactual evaluation techniques, 23% use theory-based techniques and 12% apply a cost-benefit analysis, while the rest use standard methods.

The majority of evaluations for ESF/YEI and multi-fund actions use counterfactual techniques, while theory-based methods are more frequently applied in ERDF/CF evaluations.

Administrative data for counterfactual impact evaluations

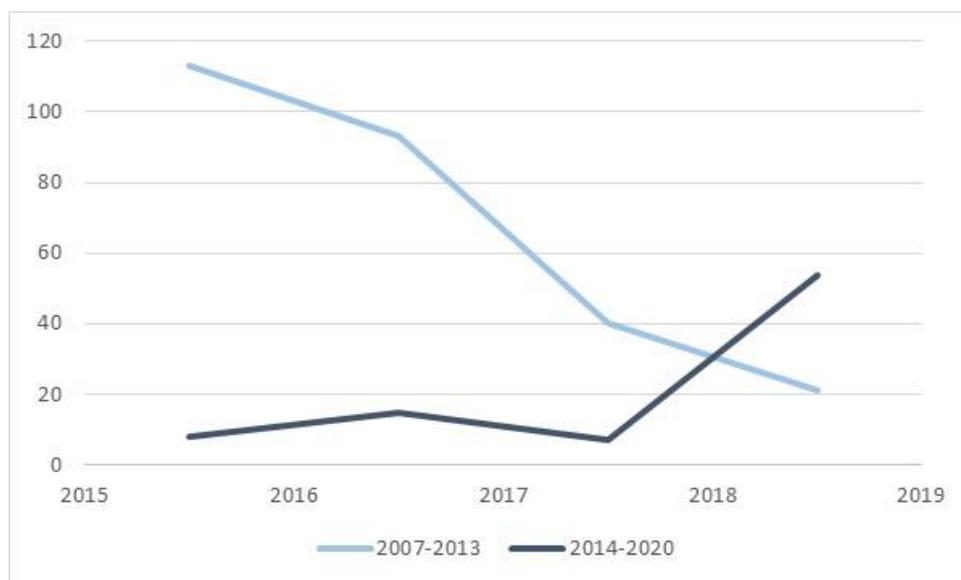
The Commission carried out a study⁵ to assess the feasibility of using administrative data to conduct counterfactual impact evaluations (CIEs) of ESF actions. It concluded that this would be feasible for labour market operations in all of the 26 Member States considered in the study. Using administrative data for CIEs on education operations is also possible but in fewer of the Member States. Despite a number of obstacles, there is scope to improve the accessibility and usability of administrative data, for instance, by introducing a ‘one-stop-shop’ approach to data delivery and unified and simplified protocols for privacy rules.

⁵ <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/84cc9eb9-b33d-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1>

The ability to effectively evaluate the programmes will be a crucial consideration when preparing for the next programming period. This includes an appropriate programme design and early arrangements for data collection, notably improved access to administrative data registers. The proposal for the ESF+ Regulation (COM(2018) 382 final)⁶ therefore expects that Member States make it possible for the managing authorities to obtain the data necessary for monitoring and evaluating the ESF+ from administrative registers.

Member States have confirmed that the number of 2014-2020 impact evaluations will continue to rise significantly in the coming years and exceed the previous period, building on the marked increase observed in the past year.

Figure 4: Impact evaluations published since January 2015 on cohesion policy programmes — breakdown by programming period



Source: Commission evaluation helpdesk for cohesion policy

Despite this positive trend, Member States are still far behind the initial timetable set out in the evaluation plans, according to which almost 600 impact evaluations should be completed by 2019. Managing authorities must make additional efforts to make available the required evaluation evidence as soon as possible, as the preparations for the new post-2020 programmes have already started.

2.1.3. Quality of evaluations

In addition to the quantity of evaluations, their quality plays an equally important role, as strategic programming choices have to be made on the basis of reliable evidence.

⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018PC0382>

To identify good practices and map the availability of reliable evidence by country and by theme, the Commission set up an evaluation helpdesk for cohesion policy to summarise and review the evaluations completed by the Member States. An analysis of the final reports to assess the reliability of their findings was carried out on more than 80% of impact evaluations in order to support policy learning. It showed that the findings are fully or partly reliable for the majority of the evaluations.

In terms of criteria used to rate the quality of impact evaluations, the clarity of the evaluation design scored the highest. All the other criteria, namely the appropriateness and correctness of the techniques applied, data quality and availability, the validity of the findings and of the conclusions, scored very close to the average value and there were only marginal differences between the evaluations covering the two programming periods.

Table 2: Quality rating of cohesion policy impact evaluations (1-min, 4-max)

	Number of evaluations reviewed	Clarity of evaluation design	Appropriateness of evaluation design	Data quality and availability	Validity of findings	Validity of conclusions	Overall
2007-2013 (including 12 evaluations covering both periods)	207	2.9	2.5	2.6	2.4	2.5	2.6
Impact-oriented	100	3.0	2.5	2.7	2.5	2.4	2.6
Impact and monitoring/progress-oriented	38	2.8	2.4	2.6	2.4	2.6	2.6
Impact and process/implementation-oriented	35	2.9	2.5	2.5	2.3	2.5	2.5
Impact and process/implementation and monitoring/progress-oriented	34	2.7	2.4	2.5	2.3	2.5	2.5
2014-2020	79	2.9	2.4	2.6	2.3	2.5	2.5
Impact-oriented	17	3.1	2.8	2.8	2.6	2.5	2.8
Impact and monitoring/progress-oriented	22	2.8	2.5	2.7	2.5	2.5	2.6
Impact and process/implementation-oriented	8	3.0	2.6	2.8	2.4	3.0	2.8
Impact and process/implementation and monitoring/progress-oriented	32	2.9	2.2	2.3	2.1	2.3	2.4
Global overall	286	2.9	2.5	2.6	2.4	2.5	2.6

Source: Commission evaluation helpdesk for cohesion policy

The quality of impact evaluations is affected by different elements. Their main shortcomings often relate to the failure to properly assess the effect of factors other than the measures addressed that could affect the results. In other cases, the effect of the measures is judged only on the basis of surveys or interviews with recipients of support. Other shortcomings concern limitations in data availability or other technical issues.

Sustained efforts are therefore necessary to improve evaluation quality. The evaluation aspect already needs to be considered in the programming stage when operations are designed. This is important both in terms of data requirements and of evaluation techniques to be used. It is particularly relevant for counterfactual impact evaluations (CIEs) which have highly demanding data requirements and may require the use of administrative data registers which are usually a more accurate and richer source of data than surveys.

The need to improve the quality of Member States' evaluations has led to closer collaboration with the Commission who will provide more comprehensive support and feedback on their evaluations, not only after completion but also during the design and implementation phases.

2.1.4. Initial findings on impact evaluations

Preliminary findings on the impacts of interventions funded under 2014-2020 programmes, drawn from the most reliable evaluations, despite uneven thematic and geographical coverage, indicate positive results and offer recommendations to develop the interventions in order to consolidate and extend their benefits.

For example, an evaluation in Lithuania shows that measures to promote entrepreneurship have had positive effects on SME productivity and could be boosted further by an increased use of financial instruments.

A positive contribution to employment is highlighted in evaluations of the Youth Employment Initiative in the eligible Member States. Positive effects in terms of placement into jobs and employability have been found in Latvia, Poland and Germany (Thüringen).

The econometric modelling approach used for the evaluation of macro-economic effects of cohesion policy in Poland (Świętokrzyskie) showed a positive impact on regional development, in particular on transport and communication, with effects more concentrated in large urban centres. These findings are coherent with the meta-analysis carried out on evaluations referring to the 2007-2013 period in the same country.

Other evaluations of 2007-2013 programmes have also shown positive results. Measures supporting competitiveness, internationalisation and innovation of SMEs in Portugal have had a positive impact on growth and productivity, with an effect often found to increase over time. Support to equity investment in new businesses in Poland contributed to job creation, but only the most innovative start-ups supported remained in operation at the end of the period.

Measures to improve tourism services in Romania stimulated job creation and investment in related businesses and could benefit from a more integrated approach.

The evaluation of railway projects in Poland identified factors that helped or hindered implementation, providing lessons for 2014-2020 actions.

The quality of healthcare services was improved in Lithuania thanks to the combined support of ERDF and ESF, still further improvements are needed for the healthcare system.

Measures for self-employment and business creation were successful in Italy (Piemonte) while they had mixed results in Slovakia, where support to self-employment should be more closely tailored to the participants' needs.

ESF measures funded at the federal level in Germany were found to be consistent with the different needs of regions and their labour market policies. In Cyprus the national ESF OP was generally effective in achieving its objectives.

The detailed findings of the most reliable evaluations completed in the past year are reported in the annex.

2.1.5. Support to Member States

Member States are required to carry out evaluations for each programme and ensure that each evaluation is followed up appropriately.

Since the start of the programming period, the Commission has provided Member States with significant **evaluation guidance**⁷ and other forms of support. It is committed to continuing its support to increase the quality evaluations.

For example, the Commission's online resource entitled 'Evalsed' provides guidance on how to evaluate socio-economic development. It consists of a guide and sourcebook on methods and techniques⁸. The guide: (i) defines the role of evaluation in socio-economic development; (ii) discusses various ways to develop evaluation capacity; (iii) elaborates on evaluation approaches; and (iv) provides guidance on how to design and implement evaluations and ensure their quality. The sourcebook describes a wide range of quantitative and qualitative methods and techniques for evaluating socio-economic development, and includes sections on theory-based and counterfactual techniques.

Managing authorities also receive support from the Commission in the form of guidance on monitoring and evaluation, evaluation plans, terms of reference for impact evaluations and quality management of external evaluations.

The Commission manages the ERDF evaluation network and the ESF evaluation partnership, discussion platforms with Member States on evaluating cohesion policy. Topics discussed include methodological guidance, indicators, evaluation plans, progress in ongoing evaluations, and evaluation results and their use. On these topics and more, Member States exchange experience and good practice in order to strengthen evaluation capacity throughout the EU.

The Commission's evaluation helpdesk also supports Member States by conducting a systematic review of the evaluations completed and organising **peer reviews** of selected evaluation dossiers. The helpdesk has recently extended its support to participating authorities to include advice on planned and ongoing evaluations.

The Commission also organises **summer schools** for managing authorities and others involved in the evaluation of programmes, with methodological training on pertinent issues. The 2019 edition that took place in Bulgaria used concrete examples of evaluations provided by the participants on topics that had been selected by the Member States ahead of the

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/evaluations/guidance/

⁸ While 'Evalsed' focuses on evaluating EU cohesion policy, it is also relevant for the evaluation of other socio-economic development tools. The better regulation toolbox also includes it as a resource for applying the Commission's principles when preparing new initiatives and proposals and for managing and evaluating existing legislation (https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-making-process/planning-and-proposing-law/better-regulation-why-and-how_en).

training. These included how to: (i) improve evaluation questions; (ii) design an evaluation of a whole operational programme; and (iii) use the results of an evaluation.

The **Centre for Research on Impact Evaluation (CRIE)**⁹, which is part of the Competence Centre on Microeconomic Evaluation of the Commission's Joint Research Centre, continues to provide support to the managing authorities of ESF/YEI programmes to carry out quality CIEs. In recent years CRIE has carried out CIEs in a number of Member States and produced guidance materials and tutorials¹⁰. In 2019, the CRIE provided customised support at the request of the managing authorities, for example on the choice of action to be evaluated, selection of data sources, and sample construction. CRIE also maintains the CIE community of practice, where the managing authorities and experts share experience and knowledge. In 2019, the community's discussion focused on the data needs for CIEs¹¹. The activities within this community of practice, including the organisation of meetings and workshops, and the customised support for ESF/YEI managing authorities¹², will continue in 2020.

2.2. Evaluation work by the Commission

2.2.1. *European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund (CF)*

An ex post evaluation of investment projects in **research and technological development (RTD) infrastructures, competence centres and activities** financed by the ERDF in 2007-2013 was launched in the second half of 2019. This evaluation complements the work packages¹³ of the ex post evaluation of cohesion policy programmes financed by the ERDF and the CF in 2007-2013. As it aims to investigate the impact of investments which — due to their scope and nature — take longer to implement and even longer to yield results, it is planned for some years after the actions have been completed. The evaluation will analyse the factors that contributed to the actions' success or failure and the mechanisms of change under different socio-economic conditions. As such, it will provide robust evidence for a more effective policy in this area.

An ex post evaluation with the same objectives is being designed for the **information and communication technologies (ICT)** investments supported by the ERDF in 2007-2013. It aims to identify good practice in ICT investment, particularly in telecommunication networks (broadband) schemes, and assess ICT investments' contribution to social economic development. This evaluation will be the last of the additional evaluations on the work packages of the ex post evaluation of the previous period. Its findings are expected in 2021.

The evaluation of **e-Cohesion**, the electronic data exchange system to facilitate the exchange of documents and data between the beneficiaries of ESI Funds and the relevant authorities, in place for 2014-2020, is also currently under design.

⁹ <https://crie.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

¹⁰ <https://crie.jrc.ec.europa.eu/?q=policy-cycle>

¹¹ <https://crie.jrc.ec.europa.eu/?q=cop-cie-esf>

¹² Requests of support can be addressed to CRIE by ESF/YEI managing authorities through the mailbox: JRC-CRIE@ec.europa.eu

¹³ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/evaluations/ec/2007-2013/

In 2019, the Commission completed the ex post evaluation of **major projects** supported by ERDF and the CF between 2000 and 2013, which analysed the long-term contribution of large-scale investment projects on economic and environmental development, quality of life and the well-being of citizens. The first part of the evaluation, focused on transport, was finalised in June 2018. In September 2019 the second part was completed for the environment area. The SWDs based on the findings of the studies will be available in early 2020.

In June 2019, the Commission organised the **8th Conference on the Evaluation of EU cohesion policy** in Bucharest, under the auspices of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The conference, entitled ‘Investing in our Shared Future’, gathered around 500 stakeholders, from academia to practitioners and policy makers. It provided a platform to discuss the present and future of evaluation and how to create a common evaluation culture. Participants stressed the importance of all three main functions of evaluation, namely accountability, policy learning and communication. The substantial work on evaluating cohesion policy and the Commission's role as a strong promoter and facilitator of evaluation was broadly acknowledged.

The Commission has made considerable efforts to collect, synthesise and review the evaluations carried out in the Member States. This work is carried out by the **evaluation helpdesk**, which has collected around 1,000 evaluations since 2015 on the ERDF/CF and ESF/YEI programmes. Summaries of the main findings of the Member States' evaluations (on ERDF/CF and ESF/YEI), including a description of the data and methodologies used, as well as the full evaluation studies, are available in the evaluation library published on the 'Inforegio' website¹⁴. All evaluations, including a structured summary, have also been published on the cohesion policy open data platform¹⁵.

2.2.2. European Social Fund (ESF) and Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)

As preparations for the future ESF+ programmes begin, in order to take stock of the increasing number of successfully completed actions, the Commission has launched four thematic evaluations for all EU countries covering 2014-2018. These are:

- evaluation of the ESF/YEI support to youth employment;
- evaluation of the ESF support to employment and labour mobility (thematic objective 8 excluding support to youth employment);
- evaluation of ESF support to social inclusion (thematic objective 9); and
- evaluation of ESF to education and training (thematic objective 10).

They will assess the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and EU added value of actions funded by the ESF. They will also address the complementarity and coherence with other EU initiatives in the relevant fields during the period concerned.

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/evaluations/member-states/

¹⁵ <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/dataset/OP-Evaluations/iz3t-u7bv/data>

The conclusions of the evaluations will feed into the preparation of the next programming period 2021-2027, since the lessons drawn from the completed operations will help with negotiations on the ESF+ programmes.

The public consultation on the **evaluation of the ESF/YEI support to youth employment** ran from 24 May to 16 August 2019, gathering 1,376 replies. The first analysis provides some insight into the outcomes of youth employment initiatives. The most commonly cited benefits for ESF/YEI participants were mainly improved skills and qualifications. A smaller but still significant share of respondents acknowledged that EU support helped them get either a temporary or a permanent job or improved their employment situation. Only 1 in 10 respondents claimed that the support they received did not help.

According to the organisations that expressed their views in the consultation, results are mostly linked to the development of skills and qualifications and to activating young people to look for a job. This includes young people who are not in employment or education and other disadvantaged individuals, such as disabled people. The full results of the public consultation will be integrated into the SWD for the evaluation.

The interim report for the preparatory study was finalised in August 2019. According to its findings, the youth employment measures in the ESF and the YEI appear to address the needs of the target population. Participating in the YEI appears to increase one's chances of finding a job. However, these results may well be affected by underlying circumstances, such as differences in the jobs available, the characteristics of the various measures and the way they are implemented, and the characteristics of the young people receiving support.

The evaluation will be published in the first quarter of 2020.

The **evaluation of the ESF support to employment and labour mobility** (thematic objective 8, excluding support to youth employment) will take stock of the results of the EU-supported actions for the current programming period (2014-2020), building in particular on the evaluations carried out by Member States up to February 2019. The evaluation's conclusions will be used for the remainder of the programme's implementation.

The **evaluation of the ESF support to promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and discrimination** (thematic objective 9) will pay particular attention to structural reforms. It will assess the visibility, outreach, usefulness, relevance, value for money and effectiveness of actions funded by the ESF in the current programming period for this thematic objective.

In addition to the usual evaluation criteria, the **evaluation of the ESF support to education and training** (thematic objective 10) will focus on synergies with other EU funds such as Erasmus+ and ERDF.

Public consultations for these three thematic evaluations are currently on-going to collect the views from stakeholders and citizens.

3. EUROPEAN AGRICULTURAL FUND FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT (EAFRD)

3.1. Evaluations completed by the Member States

3.1.1. Progress in implementing the Evaluation Plan

The evaluation plan is an important tool introduced in the rural development programmes (RDPs) to facilitate the Managing Authorities' assessment of achievements and impacts. The analysis of Chapter 2 of the annual implementation reports submitted by the Member States in 2019 ('AIRs 2019') showed that the evaluation plans of the rural development programmes (RDP) were fine-tuned, with revisions mainly to timelines, governance and coordination mechanisms. In total, **41 modifications of the evaluation plans were reported in 22 AIRs 2019 by nine Member States.**

In total, **511 evaluation activities were reported in the AIRs 2019.** Compared to the previous years, Member States mainly reported on concrete evaluation activities, namely collecting data, applying analytical methods, and assessing RDP achievements and impacts. Activities related to the planning and preparation phase of evaluations were reported to a lesser extent, e.g. planning additional thematic assessments, organising supplementary arrangements to fill data and information gaps, or selecting the functionally independent evaluator.

A total of **329 activities** were reported specifically **on the provision and management of data.** Table 3 shows the distribution of these activities across planning data arrangements (e.g. making agreements with data providers), preparing data systems (e.g. developing tools to fill data gaps), and implementing data collection and analysis (e.g. triangulating data and visualising trends).

Table 3: Distribution of reported activities across different data management phases (N=329)

Phase	Share	Examples
<i>Planning</i>	13%	Screening data and information sources; making agreements with data providers; defining roles and responsibilities.
<i>Preparing</i>	44%	Building/updating the RDP data and information system; developing tools to fill data gaps; building the capacity to manage data.
<i>Analysing</i>	43%	Collecting and analysing data; checking data quality; visualising and publishing data.

Source: Screening of the AIRs 2019, European evaluation helpdesk for rural development

The number of completed evaluations reported in the AIRs 2019 (N=230) increased by almost 20% compared to 2018. Within this number, 166 concerned actual evaluations in

relation to the effects of RDPs 2014-2020¹⁶: the largest share (25%) concerned completed evaluations on RDP priority 4 ‘Ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry’, followed by evaluations covering multiple RDP priorities and objectives (10%) and evaluations of the ‘RDP governance and delivery mechanisms’ (10%). Evaluations concerning RDP priority 1 ‘Knowledge transfer and innovation’ (9%) increased also notably compared to 2017, whereas the remaining RDP priorities (3, 5, 6) and other RDP aspects (e.g. technical assistance, national rural networks, etc.) were overall covered to a lower extent by specific evaluations.

Examples of completed evaluations related to 2014-2020 RDPs

Member States reported assessments on specific RDP topics. For instance, on **viable food production**, Niedersachsen-Bremen, Germany assessed the effects of RDP animal welfare measures, specifically on *chickens* and *pigs*¹⁷.

Most thematic assessments concerned the **sustainable management of natural resources and climate actions**. For instance, Lithuania assessed the RDP effects on *climate change* using renewable energy indicators¹⁸.

Completed evaluations on **balanced territorial development** mostly dealt with LEADER/CLLD. For instance, Scotland, UK assessed the economic, social, cultural and environmental *impact of LEADER* on rural communities¹⁹.

Member States also completed in-depth assessments on horizontal priority 1: **knowledge transfer and innovation**. For instance, mainland Finland carried out a specific evaluation on *Measure 02 — Farm advisory services*²⁰.

Member States reported **301 communication activities** to publicise evaluation findings, reaching significantly more stakeholders (6.9 million) than in 2018 (almost 4 million). Of the stakeholders reached, 92% were reached through websites, and a smaller share through other communication channels such as newsletters, social media, evaluation reports, as well as through internal and open meetings, workshops, conferences and seminars.

Member States reported **365 follow-up actions** based on evaluation results. These concerned:

- **Improving the RDP delivery mechanism and implementation**, for instance: aligning timelines and streamlining procedures (e.g. in Sachsen, Germany; and Campania and Lazio in Italy); designing or updating the RDP communication strategy

¹⁶ The remaining 64 reported evaluations concern previous evaluation milestones (ex-ante, ex-post) or AIRs.

¹⁷ https://www.eler-evaluierung.de/fileadmin/eler2/Publikationen/Projektberichte/5-Laender-Bewertung/2019/5_19_Bericht_Legehennenmassnahme_final.pdf and https://www.eler-evaluierung.de/fileadmin/eler2/Publikationen/Projektberichte/5-Laender-Bewertung/2019/4_19_Bericht_Ringelschwanzpraemie_final.pdf

¹⁸ http://zum.lrv.lt/uploads/zum/documents/files/LT_versija/Veiklos_sritys/Kaimo_pletra/Lietuvos_kaimo_pletras_2014_%E2%80%932020_m_programa/Steb%C4%97sena_ir_vertinimas/Tyrimai_ir_vertinimai/KPP2014-2020_itakos_klimato_kaitai_vertinimas_2019.pdf

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/process-evaluation-leader-2014-2020/>

²⁰ <http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/161529>

(e.g. the French national programme, Slovenia); and optimising administrative procedures for the selection of beneficiaries (e.g. Saarland in Germany).

- **Adjusting the RDP intervention logic**, such as revising the selection criteria (e.g. Emilia Romagna in Italy; Poland); modifying the financial allocation of RDP measures (e.g. in Czechia and Slovenia); or withdrawing some sub-measures (e.g. in Sachsen-Anhalt and Niedersachsen/Bremen, Germany).
- **Improving the RDP monitoring and evaluation**, for instance: coordinating the collection and provision of data between regional authorities and local action groups (e.g. La Rioja, Spain); adapting the operational data base (e.g. Greece); refining the definition and methodology to assess high nature value farming areas (e.g. Castilla La Mancha, Spain).
- **Preparing the CAP 2021-2027 strategic plans**, for example: developing the rates of support for organic farming in the new financial period (Estonia); training farm advisors to provide better advisory services post-2020 (Slovenia); and drawing lessons from the experiences of RDP selection criteria (Mayotte, France).

3.1.2. Quality of evaluations

In comparison to the evaluation activities carried out in 2017, the quality of evaluations of RDPs has overall increased in terms of (a) level of answering the common evaluation questions (CEQs), (b) robustness of evidence basis for replies. This concerns particularly the assessment of the focus-area related objectives (CEQs 1-18), where the higher level of RDP uptake allowed the application of both qualitative and quantitative methods, or a combination thereof.

3.1.3. Initial findings on impact evaluations

For the first time in this programming period, Member States carried out impact evaluations (see Table 4) to assess the RDP contributions to the EU level objectives (CEQs 22-30). In this area, robust methodologies such as quasi-experimental approaches or quantitative modelling techniques were applied especially in situations of good data availability. When the calculation of ‘net’ contributions was particularly challenging, Member States implemented alternative approaches with limited sensitivity and robustness (e.g. regression analysis without counterfactual situations or naïve comparisons before-after).

Areas of improvement include particularly the quantification of the values for the relevant complementary result indicators and the ‘net’ values of the common impact indicators. The reporting on complementary result indicators increased compared to 2017 but remained overall low. The ‘change in gross agricultural output’ was the most frequently reported indicator (61 RDPs), although the values reported in some cases raise questions about the methodology and data used. The ‘increase in efficiency of energy use in agriculture and food-processing’ was the least reported complementary result indicator (12 RDPs).

The quantification of secondary contributions represents another challenge for the Member States, especially for the complementary result indicators. The enhanced AIRs in 2017 and

2019 were expected to show achievements coming both from measures primarily attributed to the relevant focus area (i.e. designed principally to contribute to that objective), as well as from other measures with secondary contributions. For instance, this helped showing the cross-cutting contribution of measures related to knowledge transfer (e.g. trainings, farm advisory, pilot projects) towards other RDP focus areas. However, more efforts are needed in terms of improving the information systems to ensure a consistent approach throughout all RDP measures.

Main findings from these evaluations, including limitations and bottlenecks faced by MS are described in the annex.

Table 4: Level of reporting on CAP impact indicators related to Pillar II in the AIRs 2019

	CAP Impact Indicator	Sub-indicator	% of RDPs reporting gross contributions	% of RDPs reporting net contributions
Sectorial Impacts	I.01 Agricultural Entrepreneurial Income		77%	25%
	I.02 Agricultural factor income		76%	24%
	I.03 Total factor productivity in agriculture		67%	11%
Environmental impacts	I.07 Emissions from agriculture	Greenhouse gas emissions from agric. (1000 t of CO2 equivalent)	83%	26%
		Greenhouse gas emissions from agric. (% of total GHG emissions)	77%	19%
		Ammonia emissions from agriculture	61%	17%
	I.08 Farmland bird index		72%	10%
	I.09 High Nature Value farming		68%	23%
	I.10 Water abstraction agric.		71%	13%
	I.11 Water quality	Gross Nutrient Balance – potential surplus of nitrogen	76%	19%
		Gross Nutrient Balance –potential surplus of phosphorus	65%	15%
		Nitrates in freshwater – surface water	63%	6%
		Nitrates in freshwater – surface water	59%	4%
		Nitrates in freshwater – surface water	51%	3%
		Nitrates in freshwater - groundwater	67%	5%
		Nitrates in freshwater - groundwater	62%	4%
	I.12 Soil organic matter in arable land	Total estimates of organic carbon content	63%	16%
		Mean SOC concentration	65%	16%
	I.13 Soil erosion by water	Estimated rate of soil loss by water erosion	71%	14%
		Estimated agricultural area affected by a certain rate of soil erosion by water (t / ha / year)	68%	18%
Estimated agricultural area affected by a certain rate of soil erosion by water (1000 ha)		67%	17%	
Socio-	I.14 Rural employment rate	15-64 years	75%	16%

economic impacts	(15-64 years)			
	I.14 Rural employment rate (20-64 years)	20-64 years	66%	10%
	I.15 Degree of rural poverty	Total poverty rate	75%	16%
	I.15 Degree of rural poverty (in thinly populated areas)	Poverty rate in rural areas	66%	10%
	I.16 Rural GDP		70%	10%

Source: Screening of the AIRs 2019, European evaluation helpdesk for rural development

3.1.4. Support to Member States

The Commission supports Member States and other evaluation stakeholders in meeting the objectives of the common monitoring and evaluation system and in facilitating networking between them. In view of the AIRs 2019 its evaluation helpdesk for rural development provided considerable guidance²¹ and support to the stakeholders, such as a dedicated yearly capacity building event in each Member State, specific guidance on ‘Assessing RDP achievements and impacts in 2019’, as well as a series of good practice workshops²² on assessing sectorial, environmental and socio-economic impacts.

3.2. Evaluation work by the Commission

Member States sent the Commission their ex post evaluation reports for the 2007-2013 RDP by 31 December 2016. In line with the legislation²³, a summary of the ex post evaluations was published²⁴. This synthesis is one element of the Commission's evaluation SWD currently under preparation.

The evaluation studies of the CAP on climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, generational renewal, local development and jobs in rural areas are publicly available²⁵. The staff working document concerning the ‘Evaluation study of the forestry measures under rural development’ has been finalised and is publicly available on the Europa website²⁶. A number of evaluation studies on the impact of the CAP on a series of topics are currently on-going i.e. on habitats, landscape and biodiversity, sustainable management of the soil and socioeconomic aspects of territorial development of rural areas.

²¹ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/publications/_en

²² https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/good-practice-workshops_en

²³ Article 87 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 supporting the EAFRD, supplemented by Article 18(2) of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 807/2014.

²⁴ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/assembly4_exposteval.pdf

²⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/evaluation_en

²⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/forestry/documents/eval-cap-forestry-staff-working-document-rural-development_en.pdf

4. EUROPEAN MARITIME AND FISHERIES FUND (EMFF)

4.1. Evaluations completed by the Member States

Although the rate of EMFF programme implementation for 2014-2020 began to increase significantly in 2018, the volume of data available to inform evaluations has been limited so far. As with previous programmes, there should be a much higher concentration of operations in the programme's final years. Several Member States had not yet started evaluating their operational programmes at the end of 2018. However, most of them have either launched a public procurement process or already contracted an evaluator (e.g. Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia), or have performed internal/ongoing evaluations (e.g. Poland), or conducted other preparatory activities (e.g. Croatia, Romania, UK).

Most Member States were able to provide some information in their annual implementation reports on the evaluations. Common issues addressed by those evaluations include process evaluation, implementation of community-led local development initiatives and OP implementation progress, as well as several specific topics such as: (i) the assessment of aspects related to environmental authorisation procedures in the aquaculture sector (Italy); (ii) an impact assessment of the individual quota system for fisheries (Finland); (iii) a cost-benefit analysis of the permanent cessation of fishing activities (Ireland); and (iv) an assessment of the data reporting monitoring system (Poland).

The conclusions of internal evaluations and/or external evaluators were typically on the practical side of OP implementation. For example, the evaluators suggested: (i) reducing the administrative burden; (ii) improving IT systems; (iii) modifying the OPs; (iv) reallocating EMFF funding; and (v) identifying the support areas with the greatest potential.

4.2. Evaluation work by the Commission

A mid-term evaluation of the direct management component of the EMFF, accounting for around 10% of the EMFF budget, was conducted in 2018. It was carried out by an external consultant and included an open public consultation. Overall the evaluation found that the investments made had delivered good value for money. The evaluation recommended the preparation of a framework of indicators in line with those used under shared management to better monitor operations financed under direct management. This framework will be ready for use in the next programming period.

5. CONCLUSION

The monitoring of the ESI Funds shows that while project selection has accelerated and is currently higher than at the same stage of the 2007-2013 programming period, a meaningful impact evaluation for the current programming period is not yet fully feasible as most results have yet to materialise. The pace of programme implementation has influenced the type of evaluations carried out, as well as their number. Lengthier than expected public procurement procedures and complex management processes delayed implementation, which has had an impact also on the implementation of the evaluation plans. However, the number of evaluations has increased in the past year. The vast majority of evaluations for 2014-2020 are

on implementation processes and progress towards the targets. Most confirm the strategic nature of the projects selected and progress in line with targets.

The number of impact evaluations will grow significantly towards the end of the programming period. They will be a valuable source of information for preparing and implementing the post-2020 programmes. Their quality, therefore needs further improvement, *inter alia* by better attributing the results to the actions supported and improving data availability, in view of making a better use of their results for policy implementation and development. The Commission is committed to continuing to support the Member States in that process.

ANNEX

Summary of the main findings of the evaluations completed by the Member States

1. COHESION POLICY

This section summarises the findings of the evaluations completed so far by the Member States, concentrating on those that have been reviewed and assessed as fully reliable. More detailed summaries and a complete set of the evaluations' final reports are available in the evaluation library published on the 'Inforegio' website²⁷.

1.1. Findings from evaluations on the 2014-2020 period²⁸

1.1.1. Impact evaluations

Research and innovation, ICT and SME competitiveness

In **Lithuania** an evaluation on R&D and innovation (TO1) assessed the sustainability, effectiveness and impact of the Inogeb programme which aimed to increase RDI in SMEs by providing advisory services. Beneficiaries considered that, overall, both the 2007-2013 and the 2014-2020 programmes were implemented satisfactorily, and led to an increase in the productivity of the companies supported. However, the findings show that the Lithuanian system has two main problems: (i) overlapping functions between bodies; and (ii) a declining amount of funding allocated to R&D advisory services. As a result, a central body to eliminate overlapping functions should be established and the advisory services should follow a standardised model for all beneficiaries.

Another evaluation in **Lithuania** assessed the impact of 20 measures for the competitiveness of SMEs (TO3) aimed to promote entrepreneurship, develop new business models and support innovation and internationalisation. Findings show that these measures increased productivity and probably employment, and made SMEs more positive about investing in innovation and industrial development after the support ended. The measures supporting internationalisation had no significant impact (i.e. low impact on short-term export volume and low sustainability of the projects). Nor did the ones supporting eco-innovation (i.e. low participation of SMEs). The effects of the measures supporting new business are still not appreciable since insufficient time has elapsed from the completion of projects. However, the key role of financial instruments is recognised. The impact of consultancy initiatives on business performance is small. These initiatives are more costly than other measures such as grants to support SME competitiveness or financial instruments. Policy implications focused on the need in the future to: (i) strengthen investment in SME competitiveness; (ii) integrate measures to support internationalisation of SMEs into long-term and multi-stage business development programmes; (iii) consider reducing support for less effective measures such as eco-innovation and consultancy; (iv) increase the share of financial instruments; and (v) encourage the combination of different forms of funding sources (e.g. grants and loans).

²⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/evaluations/member-states/

²⁸ In some cases the evaluations are related to both programming periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020, with impacts mostly on 2007-2013, so their findings are reported in Section 2.1.2.

Placement into jobs

On promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility (TO8), a number of evaluations assessed the likelihood of finding a job after participating in the programmes. In **Latvia**, an evaluation of the effectiveness of the profiling system for unemployed created by the State Employment Agency found, through counterfactual methods, that those who had received profiling were not more likely to have found a job within 6 or 12 months than those who had not. However, training on the job was found to have a positive effect on job placement. On the other hand, vocational training, non-formal education and temporary public works were estimated to decrease the likelihood of finding a job. Employment measures linked to the labour market were found, on average, to be more successful in getting the unemployed into work — at least in the short term — than measures to develop of general skills and competences.

In **Lithuania**, an evaluation assessed the main results of ESF-supported training measures and suggested ways to improve them. It found that training measures funded under TO10 and TO11 are highly relevant, but those funded under TO8 and TO9 less so. For TO8 measures, there is a significant shortage of counselling and vocational guidance services and, more generally, the way that training resources are used is not assessed systematically. Most participants are satisfied with the quality of training, though innovative teaching methods are not used enough and participants' needs are not always fully taken into account. Moreover, between a third and half of participants surveyed reporting that they would have paid for the training without ESF support. The policy lessons are that there is a need to: (i) combine training with other activities (e.g. work-based learning); (ii) adopt innovative training methods; (iii) disseminate good practice guides; and (iv) improve the training monitoring and control system, and the quality criteria applied.

Employability

Two evaluations assessed measures that aim to improve the employability of specific target groups, such as young people at risk of social exclusion, disadvantaged people and skilled workers. In **Poland**, an evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the ESF operational programme on knowledge, education, and growth found that the support provided to young people helped them get a job. On average, the positive effects were greater among those who had been unemployed for more than 12 months (i.e. the long-term unemployed), the low educated and those from rural areas. Of the people who participated in the programme, 60% were in work within 6 months (slightly higher for men than for women) and 14% had started their own business. The main policy lessons are to set consistent targets for each indicator and to provide more support to disadvantaged people.

In **Thüringen**, four measures financed by the ESF operational programme on recruiting and integrating skilled workers were evaluated. The measures relating to counselling services for SMEs and the creation of the regional agency for recruiting skilled workers either reached or exceeded their targets. The measures to support the involvement of international professionals (2.3) and to protect skilled workers (2.4) were successful thanks to the intensive support provided to the target groups, particularly because they reached SMEs with limited time and personnel to adequately recruit skilled workers and trainees. However, the evaluation

emphasised that external factors (such as knowledge of the language, individual characteristics, wage level and the attractiveness of the region) might have had an impact on recruiting international professionals. The measures were coherent both internally and externally and were managed efficiently. The main policy lessons were on how to improve some of the measures, and the need to increase coordination with complementary programmes to avoid overlaps and fully exploit potential synergies.

Impacts of the Youth Employment Initiative programmes

Six evaluations involved the second obligatory assessment of the YEI in Italy, Belgium, Sweden, France (two evaluations) and Croatia. In **Italy**, the effectiveness and impact of the youth guarantee and youth employment OP was evaluated, with a particular focus on the quality of job offers. Some 583,619 young people participated in active labour market measures. They were in general more educated and economically active than non-participants without jobs. The main measures were traineeships, recruitment subsidies and training. Of the participants, 75% had at least some work experience and half were in employment at the end of September 2018. Participation in the programme was found to increase the likelihood of finding a quality, stable job, though the positive effects tended to disappear over time. The proportion of trainees who had jobs 18 months after the end of their traineeship was higher than that of non-participants, but lower than that of education course participants. The 2015 reform of Public Employment Services (PES) was found to have improved the organisation of employment services and to have increased staff availability across the country. In this regard, a survey found that participants were generally satisfied with the professionalism of the staff, though they pointed to issues with the organisation of the PES and excessive waiting time.

In **Belgium**, the second YEI evaluation carried out by the Brussels Capital Region OP found that between 2014 and 2017, 2,284 young people (aged 18-29) participated in YEI activities in the region and that by end-2017, 33% of those aged 25-29 were in employment, training or education. The best-performing measures were the 6-month European traineeship abroad and subsidised jobs in public organisation for 2 years (first employment agreement), in which 83% and 67%, respectively, of participants were in employment 1 year after completing the programme. The education level of the young people concerned, however, was an important factor underlying the difference in results between measures. Building on this experience, traineeships and subsidised jobs were extended up to 2020 and the training provided by VDAB, the public employment service of Flanders, and Brussels Formation, which was set to end in 2016, was extended to all jobseekers through new public-private agreements (but without YEI funding).

In **Sweden**, the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of national and regional YEI actions under the investment in growth and employment 2020 OP was evaluated. As of May 2018, some 28,000 young people had participated in the programme and, in general, they had a higher probability of finding employment. Results varied, however, according to the time frame and to participants' characteristics. For example, women had higher wages 1 year after participation, and men 2 years after participation. The main policy recommendations were to consider applying the YEI model to other target groups in the future and include the relevant measures within the municipalities' standard activities.

France carried out a combined impact evaluation of the national YEI operational programme in mainland France and outermost regions, and the 12 regional operational programmes. The evaluation found that while actions focused on young people with low qualifications, many of them already received support from existing measures. In many cases, managing authorities used YEI funding to maintain ongoing activities rather than experiment with new measures for people not in employment or education (NEETs). By the end of 2017, the quantitative targets had been exceeded (369,000 people aged 16-25 had participated in 1,676 YEI-funded activities compared with the 360,000 target) and two thirds of participants in national OP activities were in employment or training after 6 months. However, the counterfactual analysis found that YEI had no significant effect on the employment of participants, though it reduced the long-term unemployment rate slightly. The main policy lessons are that it is necessary to: (i) maintain a NEETs-based approach instead of focusing on young people in general; (ii) analyse the situation of NEETs in depth to better understand their characteristics and needs; (iii) consider concentrating support on the most vulnerable groups and those furthest from the labour market; and (iv) promote integrated policies and innovative measures.

Another evaluation in **France** was on three specific national YEI measures accounting for 75% of all YEI participants and for half of the planned expenditure. It found that 6,655 young graduates having difficulties finding a job participated in the ‘Accompagnement renforcé de l’APEC’ programme between July 2014 and December 2016, that the average cost per participant (€396) was lower than for other similar measures and that participants were much more likely to be employed 1 month after the programme (63%) than the control group (37%). However, this difference disappeared after 6 months.

Of the 19,000 young people that participated in the Parcours autonomie measure in Nord-Pas-de-Calais, 40% were in employment immediately after leaving and 14% were in training, while of the 4,200 that participated in Champagne-Ardenne, the figures were 31% and 11%, respectively. However, the difference in the employment rate relative to the control group was small in Nord-Pas-de-Calais (32% against 28% after 6-8 months and 35% against 32% after 12-16 months) and was insignificant in Champagne-Ardenne which might be at least partly due to the lower intensity and duration of support, as reflected in the lower average cost per participant (€876 compared to €1,216).

Around a third of participants in the ‘Garantie Jeunes’ programme were in work immediately after leaving (18 months after registering for the programme), 9 percentage points (pp) more than the control group. Six months after leaving, this difference decreased to 7pp and 1 year after, there was no difference in the employment rate of the two groups.

An evaluation of youth integration measures in **Croatia** focused on actions for NEETs, including the long-term unemployed aged 15-29. It covered workplace training, employment subsidies and public works (those on education and self-employment are still to be implemented). The evaluation found financial continuity to be an important factor for achieving the objectives and that the heavy administrative burden and complex procedures need to be further alleviated. By the end of 2018, half of the target set (of 28,818 YEI participants) was achieved (almost entirely for measures financed by ESF). One third of YEI and a quarter of ESF participants were in employment after completing the programme and their number increased six months after (to two thirds of YEI participants and 50% of ESF

ones). The majority of those surveyed were satisfied with the job they obtained, though only half considered their wage to be in line with their expectations. Employment subsidies are estimated to be the most effective measure in getting young NEETs into employment, the proportion of participants in employment 6 months after completing the programme being 27% more than for the control group. Policy recommendations are to: (i) better identify the target group (in particular the inactive who were excluded from the current programme); (ii) reduce workplace measures, given the poor results of the counterfactual analysis; (iii) consider alternative financial sources in the absence of the ESI Funds; and (iv) carry out a further evaluation once all projects are completed to assess whether resources are directed to those most in need.

Another evaluation carried out in **Estonia**, although not part of the YEI, assessed the effects of wage and training subsidies provided under the 'My First Job' initiative, which aimed to help young people (re)enter the labour market. It was found to have significantly reduced youth unemployment, but there were many drop outs and relatively few of the participants continued to work for their original employer over the long term. Policy recommendations included: (i) organising awareness-raising campaigns for young people and employers to attract more participants and more companies in which they could train; (ii) broadening the programme's selection criteria to include unemployed people — parents in particular; (iii) stopping to exclude people with higher or vocational education from the programme; (iv) introducing criteria other than continuous unemployment for access to programmes; and (v) fostering closer cooperation between the bodies implementing them.

Strengthening institutional capacity and efficient public administration

An evaluation of four specific activities in Poland under the **ESF's operational programme on knowledge, education and growth** that aimed to strengthen institutional capacity and efficient public administration (TO11) found no significant effect on international good governance indicators. The main policy recommendations were to: (i) support changes in the organisation of justice; (ii) reduce the workload of judges; (iii) promote out-of-court dispute resolution to improve the efficiency of the justice system; and (iv) extend the scope of actions to deregulation issues (including simplification and reduction of the administrative burden).

European territorial cooperation (ETC)

Another evaluation assessed the contribution of the **Northern Periphery and Arctic programme** actions to OP objectives, cross-cutting priorities and Europe 2020 targets. The programme involved Ireland, the UK, Finland and Sweden and supported measures on R&D, SME competitiveness, low-carbon economy, environment and resource efficiency. The evaluation found that the transnational dimension has enabled local stakeholders to access new know-how and to build capacity for change. In addition, successful cooperation between the various ETC programmes operating in the Arctic network has been established, as well as a positive link with the macro-regional and sea basin strategy.

In **Poland**, an evaluation estimated the overall effects of the regional **Świętokrzyskie OP** and its contribution to the national development strategy 2020 with an econometric modelling approach. Findings suggest that the development strategy has had a positive impact on regional development so far, in particular on transport and communications. Effects are not spread equally across the region but tend to be concentrated in the largest urban centres. In general, the OP actions are coherent with the strategy, though there might be measures, such as supporting the mobility of workers, which hinder the achievement of objectives in other areas. The evaluation concluded that funds allocated to transport infrastructure are still not adequate to meet the needs of the region.

1.1.2 Implementation- and progress-oriented evaluations

Although this document mainly reports on the effects of the actions supported and the extent to which cohesion policy has contributed to economic and social development, based on the most reliable impact evaluations from both periods, some highlights on the findings of process- and monitoring-oriented evaluations in 2014-2020 are also presented.

Most of the evaluations conducted so far for 2014-2020 do not aim to assess the impacts of the actions, but rather to address implementation questions and/or examine progress towards achieving the targets.

Process/implementation-oriented evaluations generally focus on decision making or implementation procedures to check that the action is consistent with the programmes' objectives and the effectiveness and efficiency of their implementation. Monitoring/progress-oriented evaluations mostly examine the advancement of the actions in light of the financial and physical targets set in the programmes. The two types of investigation are often integrated and sometimes combined with first or ongoing assessments of results.

It is difficult to generalise the results of the evaluations summarised because they reflect the context in which the programmes are carried out and the specific measures they contain. However, some general considerations can be drawn.

In many cases process- and monitoring-oriented evaluations demonstrate their importance and usefulness: they provide an updated picture of implementation issues, assist the managing authorities (MAs) by giving an independent viewpoint and identify the elements that need changing in programmes (financial allocation, implementation procedures, policy instruments). Some of the evaluations could have been planned better in terms of timing and content to provide comparisons at national or EU level. For instance, in some countries and for some programmes, process- and monitoring-oriented evaluations were carried out at the end of the performance framework phase or at the first 'n+3' deadline with little capability of influencing them.

The majority of the evaluations summarised come to the conclusion that the projects selected and implemented are consistent with the OP strategy and in many cases the progress made in implementation is satisfactory and in line with targets.

Nevertheless, delays in implementation are frequent, but their extent and the underlying reasons for them can vary significantly, as it is often very specific factors that cause delays. Nonetheless, public procurement procedures and complex management processes are very often found to be causes of delay along with the late start of programmes. While this finding is not new, as demonstrated by the Commission's ex post evaluations of previous periods, it indicates that further action is needed to reduce such delays. In this respect the evaluations should identify more precisely where, or to what extent, reforms of public procurement legislation or standard procedures are needed or, on the contrary, where the administrative capacity of the MAs has to improve to handle the existing legislation. Few evaluations, however, mention the limited staff or insufficient investment in ICT systems as major contributors to administrative capacity deficits.

From a methodological point of view, evaluations are often almost exclusively based on the perceptions of the beneficiaries and/or of MAs, which gives rise to an inherent risk of bias. The adoption of higher quality standards and good practice in respect of qualitative methods would markedly improve the reliability of evaluations findings.

Very few references to administrative data are included in the evaluations and a major commitment of national authorities to improve and diffuse their use would be a significant step in improving the capability of undertaking better evaluations. To this end, the Commission's proposal for the ESF+ Regulation 2021-2027 promotes the use of data already available in administrative registers and requires Member States to ensure that MAs get the data necessary for monitoring and evaluating the actions.

1.2 Findings from evaluations on the 2007-2013 period completed in the past year

Research and innovation, ICT and SME competitiveness

In **Portugal**, an evaluation assessed three incentive systems for investment in SMEs, relating to RTD competitiveness, internationalisation and innovation. It found them to have had a positive impact on investment, growth, productivity, human capital, innovation and internationalisation as well as on average wages and the number of employees with permanent contracts. Moreover, their positive effect was often found to increase over time. However, no significant positive effects were found for the financial situation of companies, their profitability or eco-efficiency. Recommendations include: (i) maintaining differentiated measures, as the types of enterprise supported differ; and (ii) to consider reducing the requirement that companies be financially robust in order to be eligible for support, since results show that the impact of support tends to be larger and more cost-effective for companies which do not have access to credit.

A **Polish evaluation** assessed the effectiveness and impact of equity investment financed by the innovation and economy OP to help business start-ups. This provided incubation support to 3,276 companies and capital to another 1,226 (among these, 44% in ICT, 15% with internet portals, 7% in healthcare and 4% producing high tech equipment) and mobilised around €154 million in private funding. This equity investment is estimated to have helped to create around 1,800 jobs in the companies concerned. However, the start-ups represented only a very small share of the new businesses created over the programming period and few remained in

operation at the end of the period, though those that did were among the most innovative. It was recommended to support incubators and firms in the early phases of their development, and to work with professionals with knowledge of the venture capital market.

Environmental protection and preservation

In **Romania**, an evaluation of projects to protect natural resources and improve tourism services found positive effects on the number of tourists and overnight stays and on the occupancy rates. The projects helped increase job creation and turnover in the supported tourist facilities as well as in related businesses. It was recommended to focus future investment in areas where tourist attractions are already in place and where tourism plays a strategic role for local development. Priority should be given to integrated measures combining accommodation and leisure infrastructure.

Transport

A **Polish evaluation** assessed both the factors that helped and hindered the implementation of railway projects supported in 2007-2013 to apply the lessons to the 2014-2020 programme. It concluded that there was a need to: (i) clearly define the division of roles and responsibilities; (ii) increase the financial decision-making power of project directors; (iii) organise training for staff; (iv) improve the preparation of projects (e.g. by agreeing a common interpretation of environmental regulations, establishing an ad hoc team responsible for preparing the documentation and including quality criteria in tenders) and their implementation (by carrying out feasibility studies and risk management assessment and ensuring more flexibility); and (v) increase interoperability of railway lines and rolling stock.

Employment, social inclusion and education

Some evaluations assessed the impact of actions for specific target groups such as young people or older workers. An evaluation carried out in **Wales** (for the ESF convergence and competitiveness OPs) assessed the effectiveness and impact of the 'Jobs Growth Wales' programme which had many initiatives on *youth unemployment*. It found that 14,984 jobs and 392 business start-ups were supported — both more than the targets set — and that participants and employers were generally positive about their experience. Young people gained valuable work experience and improved their skills, and the programme accelerated the recruitment process for many companies. Nevertheless, there is limited evidence of any longer-term gains. While the programme's return on investment is relatively modest (£1.22 for every £1 of expenditure) it compares favourably with similar programmes. The evaluation recommends focusing future measures on more specific target groups and avoiding beneficiaries that would have been supported by other means.

A Polish evaluation aimed to identify the main needs and barriers to the employment of *older workers* in the **Lubelskie region** and to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the support provided. Findings showed that while the share of those aged 50 and over was increasing, their activity rate remained low and many lacked qualifications, especially women. Although the measures supported appeared to increase employment in the age group concerned, some beneficiaries could have been supported without using ESI Funds. The main policy

recommendations concerned the need to tackle the target group's common problems, particularly their low level of education and poor health. To this end, it was suggested to remove any barriers that limit their participation in training and to improve healthcare programmes.

Two evaluations assessed the impact of *self-employment and business creation* actions in Italy and Slovakia. The former was for the MIP ('*mettersi in proprio*') measure, financed by the regional **ESF Piemonte OP**, to support business creation through tutoring and helping to prepare business plans. The evaluation found that businesses benefiting from such support are more likely to survive than those that are not, and even more so in the case of industrial firms, though for those providing services the effect disappeared after 4 years. The latter concerned two active labour market policy measures — 'graduate work experience' and 'self-employment' of the **employment and social inclusion OP in Slovakia**. It found that the first measure was successful, with a positive effect on the national budget, whereas the second was not. Recommendations focused on improving the 'self-employment' measure, suggesting regular surveys to assess the quality of the services and ensure that the training programme is more closely tailored to participants' needs.

An evaluation on healthcare infrastructure actions in **Lithuania**, co-funded by both the ERDF and ESF, concluded that EU funding helped to improve the quality of healthcare services across the country, as evidenced by a range of indicators (such as the mortality rate, the suicide rate, infant mortality, early diagnosis and oncological treatment). The healthcare system, however, was still in need of improvement as regards, for example, the training of staff, the development of e-health systems and the refurbishment of buildings. The main policy recommendation was to encourage cooperation between different MAs to increase the impact of actions and to attract specialists to those regions lacking qualified medical staff.

An evaluation in **Lithuania** assessed *equal opportunities and combating discrimination* measures implemented under the **human resource development OP**. It found that including gender equality as a requirement in calls for tender was not sufficient to ensure this, and that there was also a need to properly assess the likely compliance during the selection of projects. It concluded that gender equality actions need to be better specified when agreeing to finance projects and differences between target groups need to be more explicitly taken into account when defining the nature of the activities to be undertaken.

A **Polish evaluation**, which assessed effects on *education and training* supported by all OPs in 2007-2013, found that the actions had a positive impact on the proportion of 3-5 year-olds attending pre-primary education and improved the quality of the education system. However, there was no evidence of an impact on student results or on participation in continuing training or graduate courses. Policy recommendations were to improve the quality of pre-primary education and to focus more on students' needs.

An **Italian evaluation** assessed the impact of the 'work experience for graduates' project (WELL) supported by the Umbria ESF OP. The results of the counterfactual analysis showed that the likelihood of WELL participants finding a job is higher than those with similar characteristics who did not participate (16 percentage points more on average). They are also significantly more likely to get a fixed-term contract or an apprenticeship, but not to get a

permanent employment contract. The evaluators recommended verifying the findings by repeating the analysis using more up-to-date data, enlarging the data used and improving the model specification by including other factors which might affect the results.

Two evaluations assessed the effectiveness of the *national* ESF OP in Cyprus and Germany. In **Cyprus**, the evaluation of the employment, human capital and social cohesion OP found that it was generally effective in achieving its objectives. Advice to enterprises and the training of women were found to be more efficient — in terms of results relative to costs — in 2007-2013 than in the previous period, but measures to get participants into work, especially those from socially-vulnerable groups, were less efficient. The evaluation identified a need to design actions in a way that they also help businesses to improve the qualifications of their work force, and to develop the skills required in high value added sectors.

In **Germany**, an evaluation of the measures co-funded by the federal ESF OP highlighted their overall consistency with other regional labour market policies and with specific local needs. Regions with high unemployment, therefore, focused mainly on improving employability and easing the transition from school to work, while those where it was low, focused more on lifelong learning and assisting disadvantaged groups. The decentralised management and control model used was found to be successful in enabling the active participation of employment agencies, job centres and municipal offices providing social services and in ensuring effective coordination with federal authorities. The policy recommendations were to: (i) improve and strengthen the role of partnership in the implementation phase; (ii) maintain the close cooperation between federal and regional authorities; and (iii) ensure that actions were sustainable.

Strengthening institutional capacity and efficient public administration

A **Romanian evaluation** assessed the effectiveness, sustainability and impact of 95 *technical assistance OP* projects to support the implementation and management of cohesion policy funds. It found that the measures supported helped to improve general skills and knowledge, and to increase administrative capacity and motivation of the staff involved in implementing the cohesion policy. This is demonstrated e.g. by the reduction in staff turnover achieved through financial incentives, with support to wages constituting almost 80% of the total budget allocated to the projects. Progress is more evident at the central rather than local or regional level. Projects aimed to increase and strengthen the capacity of beneficiaries and those developing the support tools, but their effectiveness was limited. Policy recommendations include: (i) introducing more effective systems for assessing the performance of the staff involved; (ii) developing ways to detect the potential lack of competence in central and local institutions; (iii) making the tools produced by technical assistance projects available to all relevant stakeholders (e.g. online); and (iv) organising dissemination events.

The findings of **another evaluation** on measures supported under the **same OP** — measures on cross-cutting training for staff implementing ESI Funds to be specific — showed that participants gained new competencies and skills and felt more motivated and efficient at work. A functional network was created among participants and facilitators, who continued to share information even after the completion of training. This training development and

coordination mechanism played an important role in ensuring an efficient and coordinated training programme. Nevertheless, the need for further training was pointed out, in particular in the areas of public procurement and use of new IT systems. Therefore, the recommendations stressed the need to continue this type of support and sustain the networks created by developing e.g. an online platform.

European territorial cooperation

The evaluation of the **Central Europe OP** aimed to assess the impact of measures supported under the 2007-2013 programme and identify the needs and challenges for projects to be implemented in 2014-2020. In 2007-2013, most of the funding and projects concerned the environment, with pilot projects and training being the main types of measure supported. An estimated 1,870 new jobs were created, and governance and the institutional framework were improved. Most projects were also judged to be sustainable. The main recommendations were to: (i) ensure the long-term sustainability of the projects supported and continue cooperation between partners after the completion of projects; (ii) concentrate funds on innovation and the low-carbon economy; and (iii) support the development of the region after 2014-2020.

Macro-economic effects of cohesion policy

Some evaluations, mostly in **Poland**, estimated the effects of the 2007-2013 programmes on the economy by using econometric models which implicitly cover all thematic objectives but which do not provide any specific findings in relation to these. The reliability of the findings in these cases largely depends on the validity of the model used and the underlying assumptions, which generally are not included in the evaluation report.

A number of evaluations assessed the impact of cohesion policy at regional level in Poland. In the **Pomorskie region**, two evaluations were carried out. The first found that the support provided by the regional OP has increased employment, GDP growth, SME development and innovation. Projects to support the development of SMEs and innovation were found to have contributed to an increase in exports, the development of clusters and the number of people with broadband coverage. In addition, projects for expanding tourism resulted in an improvement in tourist infrastructure and the restoration of cultural heritage in the region.

The second evaluation found positive effects on economic competitiveness, and the effective (and cost-efficient) implementation of the funded projects. ERDF initiatives improved the innovation capacity and competitiveness of firms but were mostly concentrated on large and medium-sized enterprises. ESF-funded activities played an important role in reducing unemployment and improving training for both the employed and the inactive. It was suggested to carefully monitor in future the effects of these types of measures (especially on the adaptation of education to labour market needs and e-government services). Infrastructure for water and waste management, preservation of natural assets and flood control were all improved. Measures to increase energy production from renewables did not fully meet the targets. They need to be better coordinated with other means of support. Transport accessibility in the region was strengthened (road, railway, airports and ports) though some areas need further investment and better links between modes of public transport.

In the **Warmia i Mazury region**, measures were found to have increased business competitiveness, regional socio-economic development and employment, although the region remained less developed than others in Poland. Policy recommendations were to involve local labour offices more in the implementation of future actions, to improve the education system and the business environment and to reduce the extent of the shadow economy.

A meta-analysis showed that cohesion policy had an overall positive effect in almost all policy areas in **Poland**, though the actions supported were not all equally successful and the effect in some areas was limited, especially in improving people's skills and employment. On the other hand, there were positive effects on R&D, transport, environment and energy, as well as broadband development, ICT in public institutions and e-services.

An evaluation found that cohesion policy had positive effects in most policy areas of the **Visegrad countries**, but concluded that further investment was needed, particularly in respect of the trans-European transport network, airport and port infrastructures.

2. EAFRD

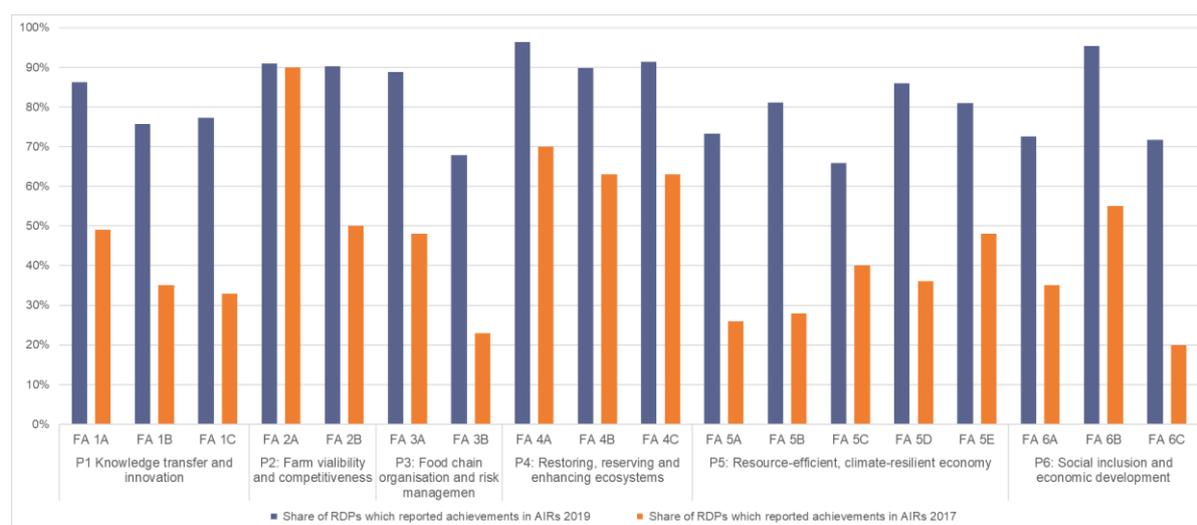
The 2014-2020 rural development programmes (RDP) provide support under six priorities and 18 related focus areas. The achievements under these priorities contribute to the three general objectives of the common agricultural policy (CAP), namely fostering competitiveness in agriculture, ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources and achieving a balanced territorial development.

On priorities and focus areas, most of the RDPs systematically assessed progress and reported achievements by answering the related common evaluation questions (see Figure A.1). Compared to the annual implementation reports (AIRs) for 2017 (orange line), there has been a significant increase in the level of reporting in almost all the focus areas, except for focus area 2A *'Farm restructuring and modernisation'*, where a high number of RDPs already reported achievements in enhanced AIRs submitted in 2017.

Achievements reported in the answers were expressed by means of various common and additional indicators. When achievements were not reported, this was often explained by the low level of RDP uptake or the absence of measures programmed primarily under the respective focus areas.

Various RDPs also assessed the complementarity between different priorities and focus areas, showing positive synergies through their interaction. This was particularly evident for Priority 1 *Knowledge transfer and innovation*, which contributed to the other RDP priorities. The contribution of national rural networks and technical assistance in achieving RDP objectives was assessed in numerous reports.

Figure A.1: Share of RDPs reporting achievements in the common evaluation questions, per focus area, AIRs 2019 (blue) vs AIRs 2017 (orange)



Source: Screening of AIRs 2019, European evaluation helpdesk for rural development

On CAP objectives and impacts, almost all RDPs provided an answer to the related common evaluation questions. However, the number of RDPs able to report already in 2019 on the RDP **net contributions** to the CAP objectives, as expressed with the common CAP impact indicators, was still modest but expected to increase for the ex post evaluation. Among those RDPs applying robust evaluation methods (e.g. counterfactual analysis, modelling techniques, etc.), the general trend observed in the answers shows that the RDP net contributions to the EU-2020 headline targets and CAP impacts are positive but still minor. The assessment of net impacts was considered difficult in most of the RDPs, mainly because of the low uptake, the lack of updated data at regional level, or because a sufficient level of implementation is needed for carrying out more robust analyses with quantitative methods.

The next sections provide more detailed information on the RDP contributions towards the CAP objectives.

2.1. RDPs contribution to fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in rural areas (Priority 1)

Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation is a cross-cutting priority of the RDPs. A flexible package of measures supporting vocational training and information actions, farm advisory services, and cooperation contribute to the development of knowledge and innovation in rural areas.

Numerous RDPs demonstrated positive achievements in terms of improving the knowledge base and skills of agricultural and forestry workers in different fields, such as agri-environment and climate actions (e.g. Murcia, Spain); animal health (e.g. Northern Ireland, UK); ICT (e.g. Baden-Württemberg, Germany); mechanical pruning and harvesting, and water irrigation systems (e.g. La Rioja, Spain); decision tools and precision farming (e.g. Emilia Romagna, Italy); sustainable use of phytosanitary products (e.g. Andalucía, Spain);

and grassland management (e.g. Centre, France). An online survey in Bourgogne, France showed that 81% of beneficiaries changed their farming practices after attending the trainings.

Farm advisory services helped Member States share and apply new knowledge and skills. Surveys of beneficiaries showed that the skills and knowledge transferred through farm advisory services helped them adopt innovative farming, food processing, and forestry-related activities (e.g. La Rioja, Spain, and Croatia). Farm advisory services were provided to various target groups, for instance agricultural and forestry holdings (e.g. Austria), and conventional and organic farms (e.g. Niedersachsen/Bremen, Germany).

Information and demonstration actions contributed to the dissemination of knowledge. Farm visits, meetings, workshops, and seminars helped the dissemination of technical information in various fields, such as environmental performance (e.g. Aquitaine, France); organic farming and agro ecology (e.g. Midi-Pyrenees and Languedoc Roussillon, France); health and safety, ICT, nutrient management & soil analysis interpretation (Northern Ireland, UK).

RDPs increased the innovation capacity of rural bodies by creating operational groups running under the European innovation partnership on agricultural productivity and sustainability (EIP-AGRI) (e.g. Brandenburg-Berlin and Schleswig-Holstein, Germany); supporting networking under LEADER (e.g. Bayern, Germany); carrying out field experimentation in farms (e.g. Thüringen, Germany and Aquitaine, France); or organising training courses (e.g. Bolzano, Italy and Andalucía, Spain).

Several RDPs reported a great interest of rural bodies to engage in projects tackling practical issues in agriculture and forestry, such as bio-based production, agro ecology, or precision farming. EIP-AGRI operational groups involved a large variety of partners. As reported in National and Galicia, Spain, operational groups were successful in mobilising a wide network of stakeholders that would not have interacted without support. Emilia Romagna, Italy pointed out that multiplier effects on the transfer of knowledge and skills can be achieved by involving partners representing multiple stakeholders in the EIP-AGRI operational groups (e.g. farmer cooperatives).

Main limitations and areas of improvement:

- Low awareness of the specificities of the EIP-AGRI interactive model to design appropriate methodologies and indicators
- Conceptual difficulties in the definition and measurement of innovation
- Lack of baseline data to measure progress and outcomes from RDPs support in fostering innovation
- The lack of updated official statistics on innovation (secondary data)
- A longer timeframe needed to capture the RDP effects on innovation

2.2. RDPs contribution towards the CAP objective: fostering the competitiveness of agriculture (Priorities 2 and 3)

Two specific RDP priorities contribute to the CAP general objective of fostering the competitiveness of agriculture, namely: Priority 2 *Enhancing farm viability and competitiveness* and Priority 3 *Promoting food chain organisation*.

At macro-level, positive RDP net contributions were reported on the economic performance of the agricultural sector. These were expressed with the common CAP impact indicators, which showed an increase in the agricultural entrepreneurial income (e.g. Austria; Veneto, Italy; Castilla Leon, Spain; Hungary), agricultural factor income (e.g. La Rioja and Murcia, Spain; Latvia), and total factor productivity in agriculture (e.g. Castilla La Mancha, Spain; Poland; Lithuania).

Furthermore, RDPs were able to demonstrate positive effects on the competitiveness of agriculture by means of various indicators, such as family farm income, change in agricultural output on supported farms per annual working unit (complementary result indicator R.2), gross value added per annual working unit, production costs, sales revenues, share of farms adopting food quality schemes (e.g. protected designation of origin, organic farming), cost savings from reduced use of pesticides and fertilisers, entry of farmers with acquired knowledge and skills, or better infrastructure in the agricultural sector.

The agricultural sector was modernised thanks to RDP support, especially in the field of livestock (e.g. Czechia; Austria; Flanders, Belgium; Cyprus; Cataluña, Spain; Bourgogne, France; Slovenia) and to a lesser extent in the crop production (e.g. Ile de France, France). RDP support for modernisation contributed to the update of electricity networks, facilities, technologies, roads (e.g. Lombardia, Italy). A few RDPs reported achievements in terms of farm restructuring (e.g. Greece; Castilla Leon, Spain; Poland; Slovakia).

RDP investments supported the diversification of the agricultural sector, with positive effects on farm turnover and revenues (e.g. Wallonia, Belgium; Madrid, Spain; Alsace, France). Examples of farm diversification concerned food and energy production, and the delivery of environmental, social, and tourism services.

The RDP helped adequately skilled farmers enter the agricultural sector. For instance, Estonia reported that 40.4% of young farmers receiving RDP support had obtained higher education, secondary education, or vocational training qualifications in agriculture. To ensure a minimum level of qualification, several RDPs provided vocational training and information to workers entering the agriculture sector (e.g. Austria, Cyprus and several RDPs in Spain).

The entrance of adequately skilled farmers had positive effects on farm viability, especially on farm productivity (e.g. Asturias, Spain), employment (e.g. Languedoc Roussillon, France), farm structure and technologies (e.g. Austria). Several RDPs reported positive contributions to the generational renewal in agriculture (e.g. Wallonia, Belgium; mainland Portugal).

RDP investment for farm modernisation contributed indirectly to other socio-economic and environmental objectives, such as decreasing the agricultural pressure on the environment,

maintaining employment in rural areas, and or improving animal welfare and farmers' living conditions. In Slovakia, an average of 5.8 jobs were maintained in each farm receiving RDP support for farm modernisation and competitiveness. In total, RDP support under focus area 2A maintained 1,164 jobs in Slovakia during 2014-2018.

Positive contributions to the improvement of primary producers' competitiveness were frequently reported across the RDPs, especially support for processing and marketing activities (including direct selling), which in turn generated added value (e.g. Austria; Wallonia, Belgium; Czechia and several French RDPs).

The introduction of processing and marketing activities diversified farm income and increased production volume (e.g. Wallonia, Belgium; Alsace, Lorraine, Auvergne and PACA, France). Andalucía, Spain reported that the better presentation and promotion of agricultural products helped to increase farm competitiveness on the market. In several reports, it was not possible to assess major achievements due to the small number of completed projects (e.g. Schleswig Holsten and Thüringen, Germany).

RDPs introduced quality schemes and promoted the quality of agricultural products to increase market competitiveness. A high adoption of quality schemes was observed in Wallonia, Belgium (potatoes), Cyprus (halloumi), many Spanish regions (e.g. Balears, Castilla La Mancha, Cataluña, Extremadura, Galicia, Valencia and Navarra) and Italian regions (e.g. Piemonte and Toscana). In Greece, Abruzzo, Italy and several French regions, the certification of high-quality products was linked to organic farming. Molise, Italy reported that quality schemes improved the branding and marketing of food products, thus reaching higher selling prices in international markets.

RDPs reported improvements in animal welfare in agriculture (e.g. Cyprus; Extremadura and Valencia, Spain; Valle d'Aosta, Italy; Slovakia). More specifically, consumers' awareness of animal welfare standards was raised (e.g. Balears, Spain), quality schemes supporting native breeds and extensive or semi-extensive systems with higher level of animal welfare standards were adopted among farmers (e.g. Extremadura, Spain), and physical assets were upgraded in order to introduce more animal-friendly husbandry (e.g. Slovakia). However, the RDP effects on the competitiveness of primary producers (e.g. higher added value from animal-friendly husbandry) or on improving animal welfare conditions, were rarely reported.

Producer groups and inter-branch organisations supported the integration of primary producers in short supply circuits and the development of local markets, although long-term effects on their competitiveness were difficult to calculate (e.g. Flanders, Belgium; Aragon, Spain; Liguria and Toscana, Italy; Slovenia). For example, in Emilia Romagna, Italy 55 producer organisations were involved in 51 RDP-supported innovation projects and 37% of the primary producers involved in these organisations introduced innovations into their farming activities. In Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France 61% of the 150 respondents in a survey reported that RDP investments increased their turnover, while 50% reported an increase in the added value generated in the farm.

RDPs contributed to risk prevention and risk management in agriculture, although several RDPs stressed that the proportion of supported farms or areas was relatively small compared to the total in the region or country (e.g. Croatia; Emilia Romagna, Liguria and Lombardia, Italy; Latvia; mainland Portugal). Protection from flooding was mainly thanks to RDP investment in infrastructure, for example for constructions, renewals, extensions of dykes to protect agricultural areas from flooding (Brandenburg/Berlin, Niedersachsen/Bremen and Schleswig-Holstein Germany); or improvements in the runoff capacity of water (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany).

Main limitations and areas of improvement:

- Lack of updated data from FADN and small sample size to carry out robust counterfactual assessment, especially in regionalised RDPs
- The netting out of RDP effects on generational renewal was challenging due to multiple intervening factors
- The experience and number of RDPs assessing the support to animal welfare in terms of ‘effects’ was overall limited

2.3. RDPs contribution towards the CAP objective: ensuring sustainable management of natural resources and climate action (Priorities 4 and 5)

Two specific RDP priorities contribute to the CAP general objective of ensuring sustainable management of natural resources and climate action: Priority 4 *Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems* and Priority 5 *Promoting resource-efficient, climate-resilient economy*.

An improvement in water quality in supported agricultural and forestry land was reported across numerous RDPs (e.g. Campania, Italy; Wallonia, Belgium; Bulgaria; Cyprus; Hessen, Germany; Estonia; the Netherlands). This was often achieved through a more sustainable use of fertilisers and pesticides (e.g. via vocational training, farm advisory services, organic and integrated farming, management contracts to improve water quality), as well as through investments in physical assets to better manage the discharge of by-products from the livestock sector. For example, in Veneto, Italy the assessment of the gross nutrient balance on agricultural land showed a decrease in nitrogen (-42.2%) and phosphorous content (-20.7%) in supported compared to non-supported farms.

An increase of efficiency in water use by agriculture was observed in various RDPs (e.g. Castilla Leon and La Rioja, Spain; Hungary; Sardegna, Italy; Romania). For instance, Hungary calculated a 33.4% increase in water efficiency for 2015-2018. In Austria, water efficiency increased thanks to a reduction in water consumed (-6%) and there was also an increase in the standard unit of output (+12%). In Czechia, supported farms used less water but water-use efficiency declined, mostly due to a decrease in the standard unit of output.

In many cases, RDPs assessed achievements in terms of water savings in agriculture. For instance, water savings arising from RDP projects were reported in Slovenia (26%); Brandenburg-Berlin, Germany (25%); Castilla La Mancha (17.86%), Cataluña (17.16%), and Castilla Leon, Spain (13.34%); Umbria, Italy (11%); and mainland Portugal (4-9% depending on the RDP measure). These achievements were especially thanks to agri-environment

climate measures, the adoption of more efficient irrigation systems and technologies, and investments to reduce the losses in water infrastructure. La Rioja, Spain reported that the losses in water infrastructure ranged from 5% to 55% of the water supplied to agricultural activities, and after RDP investments, these ranged from 0.05% to 31%. Greece and Cyprus explained that water efficiency increased because of better field management under agri-environment climate schemes.

Several RDPs helped prevent soil erosion (e.g. Austria; Bayern and Baden Württemberg, Germany; Spain; Greece; Croatia), especially through management contracts for improving soil management and preventing soil erosion in agriculture and forestry. For instance, Austria reported that soil erosion by water was reduced by an annual average of 1.6 tonnes per hectare (i.e. from 7.5 to 5.9 tonnes), particularly in endangered regions, due to the higher proportion of field crops with high soil protection and to organic farming. Other measures, such as farm advisory services, vocational trainings, and support to organic farming, played a significant role. Some RDPs highlighted the importance of using management contracts in areas with poorer water quality or higher soil erosion risks (e.g. Cyprus, and Valle d'Aosta and Toscana, Italy).

RDP contributions to carbon conservation and sequestration in agriculture were often assessed in terms of agricultural land covered under management contracts (e.g. conversion of arable land into grassland or maintenance of semi-natural habitats). Some RDPs assessed also the effects in terms of CO₂ stored in agricultural land (e.g. Flanders, Belgium; La Rioja, Spain; Bourgogne, France; Lazio, Italy; Poland; Slovenia). For instance, La Rioja Spain estimated that 15,394.73 tonnes of CO₂/year were maintained in supported agricultural land, whereas mainland Finland estimated a storage of 134,700 tonnes of CO₂ in 2018. In addition, management contracts covering forestry areas contributed positively to carbon conservation and sequestration (e.g. Cyprus; Czechia; Castilla Leon and Balearic Islands, Spain; Bretagne, France). For instance, La Rioja, Spain reported a sequestration of 72,520.67 tonnes of CO₂ in forest land under RDP support.

RDP beneficiaries increased energy efficiency, particularly in the agriculture and food processing sectors (e.g. Austria; Estonia; Abruzzo and Sardegna, Italy; Sweden). For instance, Austria reported that investments in processing and marketing of agricultural products increased its energy efficiency by 11%. In Sweden, energy efficiency increased by 26.3%.

In terms of energy savings, positive achievements were reported in RDP support projects (e.g. Nord-pas-de-Calais, France; Greece; Wales, UK). For instance, Flanders Belgium reported total savings of around 260 million kWh per year following RDP projects. In Castilla Leon, Spain, energy savings were mainly made by adopting pumping technologies for irrigations based on renewable energy sources (e.g. natural pressure, photovoltaic, or electric facilities). In several French RDPs, energy savings were gained by upgrading buildings and livestock facilities.

RDPs contributed to the generation of energy from renewable sources (e.g. Austria; Bayern, Germany; Estonia; Navarra, Spain; Croatia; Hungary; Campania, Italy; Sweden; Slovenia). For instance, in Navarra Spain, energy production comes mostly from forest biomass and the main RDP contribution was the purchase of forestry machinery projects for the extraction or

transformation of biomass. These created an additional energy capacity of 18,681 tonnes of oil equivalent (TOE), corresponding to 18% of the production of renewable energy in Navarra from the primary sector. Several RDPs facilitated access to and the use of renewable energy, especially by creating and adapting infrastructure and services in forestry areas (e.g. in Hessen, Germany; Navarra, Spain; Rhone Alps, France).

Several RDPs reported positive effects on the reduction of emissions from agriculture, both in terms of greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions (e.g. Austria; Castilla La Mancha, Spain; Lombardia and Veneto, Italy; Niedersachsen/Bremen, Germany). In some cases, investments in livestock production were reported to lead to a slight increase of GHG and ammonia emissions (e.g. Austria; Czechia and Wallonia Belgium). However, this trend was balanced with investments in manure management (e.g. Flanders, Belgium; Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany) or the use of measures like M10 agri-environment climate commitments and M11 organic farming to mitigate the effects of higher livestock capacity (Austria; Wallonia, Belgium; Niedersachsen Germany).

A few RDPs reported evidence of contributions towards biodiversity and ecosystems. For instance, some RDPs estimated net increases of the farmland bird index (e.g. Castilla La Mancha, Spain), whereas others mainly helped to stabilise the population trends for some species (e.g. Cyprus). RDPs were successful in maintaining and improving high nature value (HNV) farming areas (e.g. La Rioja, Spain; Lazio, Italy; Latvia; Slovakia; Slovenia). Genetic resources in plants and animals were also preserved through RDP support (e.g. Slovenia).

Various measures had positive effects on biodiversity, for instance RDP support to organic farming (e.g. Czechia; Luxembourg; Slovakia), the maintenance of extensive farming practices such as pastoralism (e.g. PACA, France; Bolzano, Italy), fire prevention actions (e.g. Murcia, Spain; Corse, France), or the conservation of genetic species in agriculture (e.g. Toscana, Italy; Northern Ireland, UK). Castilla La Mancha, Spain reported that biodiversity was enhanced through the maintenance of 89,615 beehives in HNV areas. Some RDPs reported the effects on biodiversity to be rather limited (e.g. Valencia, Spain; Sachsen and Baden Württemberg, Germany; Alsace, Lorraine and Reunion, France) due to the limited extension of covered land (especially in forestry areas), or the overall negative trends in biodiversity.

Main limitations and areas of improvement:

- Lack of data to monitor the use of pesticides and fertilisers in beneficiaries vs non-beneficiaries, before and after RDP support.
- Lack of evaluation resources to collect significant samples on soil and water quality and carry out more robust evaluations
- Lack of a strong monitoring system collecting water and energy consumptions for beneficiaries vs non-beneficiaries, before and after the RDP support
- The collection of data for both numerator (TOE) and denominator (standard output) was challenging for the complementary result indicators R.13 'Efficiency in water use' and R.14 'Energy efficiency'

2.4. RDPs contribution towards the CAP objective: achieving a balanced territorial development (Priority 6)

The RD Priority 6 *Social Inclusion and Economic Development* contributes primarily to the CAP general objective of achieving a balanced territorial development.

At macro-level, socio-economic indicators measuring the net contributions to the rural employment rate, degree of rural poverty, and rural GDP per capita were assessed only by a few RDPs. Most of the RDPs faced data challenges when assessing these indicators (e.g. lack of data at LAU2 level or the low level of implementation of Priority 6 measures). Nevertheless, some RDPs used quantitative methods to estimate the effects, namely counterfactual analyses (e.g. PSM-DiD), dynamic retro regional computational generic balance models, or input-output models. Among those that were able to calculate the effects, significant net contributions to the rural employment rate I.14 were reported in Czechia, Poland, and Castilla La Mancha and La Rioja, Spain. On the degree of rural poverty I.15, positive net contributions were estimated in Greece, Estonia, Czechia and Poland. On the increase of rural GDP per capita, positive net contributions were reported for instance in Poland, and Castilla La Mancha and Navarra, Spain. In Greece, the analysis based on modelling techniques showed that RDPs' net contribution to the increase of rural GDP per capita I.16 amounted to 0.081% per year for 2015-2017 compared to 2014. A similar estimate was reported by Cyprus (0.07%). Slightly higher positive contributions were observed in Czechia and Andalucía, Spain.

RDPs contributed to the development of a broad variety of services and local infrastructures, which increased accessibility and mobility (e.g. biking paths or roads to access remoted farms or heritage and cultural sites) and social and health service provision in rural areas. Projects for *village renewal* played an important role in the modernisation of public buildings, with positive contributions to *energy efficiency and use of renewable energy* (e.g. Austria; Aragon, Spain; Corse, France). RDP support was provided for the building and upgrading of *tourism, recreation and leisure facilities* in rural areas (e.g. Cyprus; Thüringen, Germany; several Spanish regions; Corse, France; Piemonte, Italy; Hungary and Slovakia).

LEADER played an important role for the local development in rural areas, especially by providing training (e.g. in ICT, business development and energy), networking, and animation activities. LEADER involved various local stakeholders, who were actively engaged in the design and implementation of local development strategies. Animation and networking activities were strengthened and generated social capital among entrepreneurs, business start-ups, farmers, policy makers, and citizens (e.g. Bayern, Germany; Estonia; mainland Finland). For instance, Marche Italy reported that the local population was involved in various ways (e.g. surveys and other participatory techniques) in around 80 meetings to design the local development strategy based on territorial needs.

Local development strategies created employment opportunities. Several RDPs reported on the creation of jobs, for example: mainland Finland (1,089 jobs); Greece (741); Estonia (258); and Slovenia (46). In Greece, the 741 jobs created were equally occupied by women (380) and men (361), and 16% of the total jobs created were covered by young people (up to 25

years old). In contrast, Slovenia reported that most of the newly created jobs were occupied by men.

RDPs contributed to the economic diversification of rural areas. In Austria, 265 diversification projects were supported in areas such as catering, farm holidays, community services, horse riding, social care, and food processing/direct marketing. Baden-Württemberg, Germany reported that RDP support to business development contributed to the economic diversification in rural areas (e.g. tourism, recreation, food selling, health and prevention/therapy), while maintaining and creating jobs.

Several RDPs stated that the level of uptake of the measures improving the accessibility, use and quality of ICT in rural areas was generally low. However, more significant progress could be observed in some RDPs (e.g. Hessen and Niedersachsen/Bremen, Germany; mainland Finland). In Rhineland Westfalen, Germany, RDP support for expanding broadband was mainly targeted to areas where telecommunication companies are not interested in covering. Using the geographic and information system, mainland Finland reported that 1,014,440 beneficiaries (households) will benefit from the supported rural broadband projects, which corresponds to the 65.2% of the rural population.

Main limitations and areas of improvement:

- Lack of updated data at LAU2 level to calculate common CAP impact indicators, e.g. I.14 'Rural employment rate'
- Inconsistencies in the definitions of data collected by EUROSTAT and national/regional statistical offices
- Lack of data for measuring RDP effects on broadband expansion and improvement of ICT infrastructure and services
- Time needed for capturing long term effects of LEADER (e.g. social capital, innovation)
- In some RDPs, the contributions to EU2020 headline targets were assumed to be negligible