



Challenges and opportunities in Evaluation: an EU perspective

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The views expressed are those of the author and cannot be regarded as stating an official position of the European Commission.

Status quo

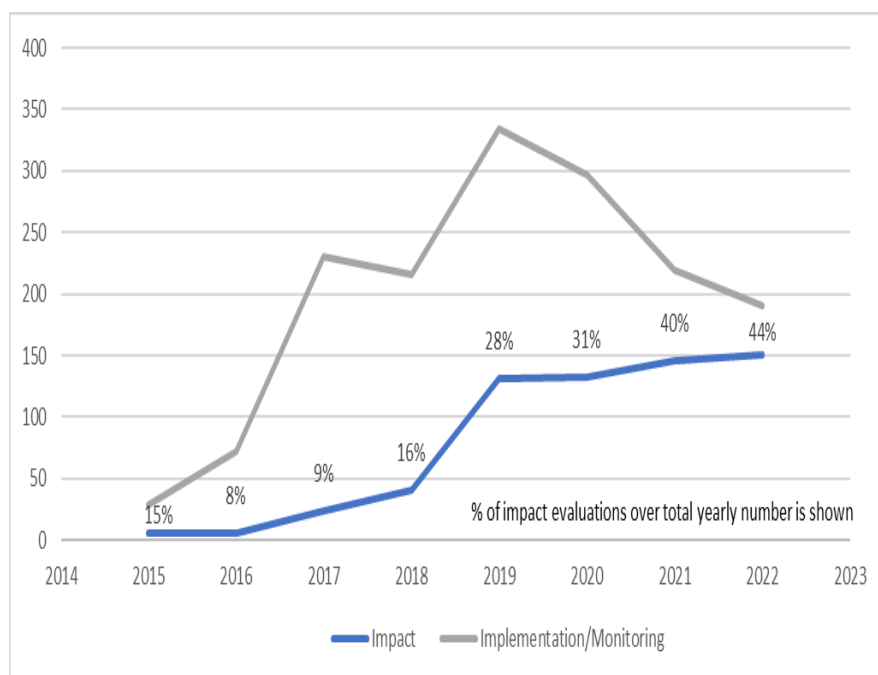
- **Steady improvement in ambition, quality and sophistication of evaluation work cohesion policy programmes over the past two decades**
 - a. stronger focus on **performance monitoring**
 - b. Availability of **better quality data**
 - c. More widespread use of impact assessment and ex post evaluation in the EU administration
 - d. introduction of **more sophisticated (ie quantitative) techniques**
 - e. Slow by steady shift of focus **from output** (e.g. money spent, projects completed) **to impact assessments**

Evaluation work by Member States

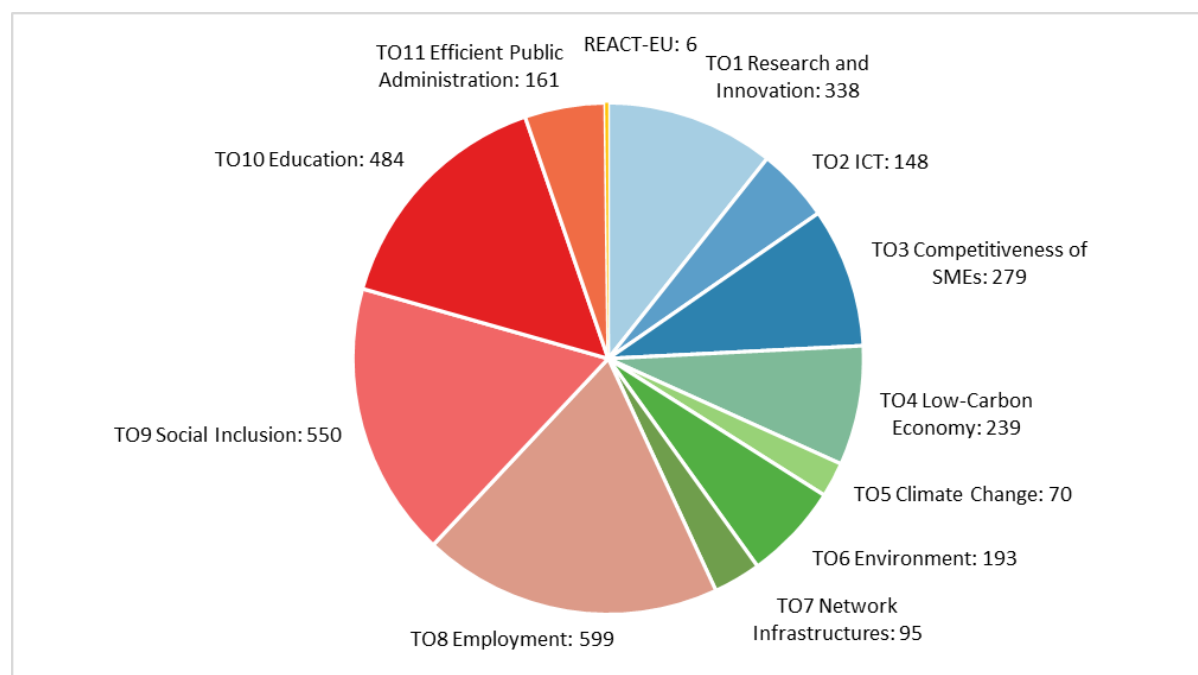
- Since January 2015, Member States carried out more than **2200 evaluations** of the 2014-2020 operational programmes co-financed by cohesion funds (350 in 2022 only)
- Impact evaluations keep growing in number and implementation-oriented evaluations are decreasing
- **Several shocks** (Covid-19 Pandemic, Russian war of aggression on Ukraine, energy crisis) makes evaluation challenging
 - - substantial programme modifications
 - - difficulty in disentangling impact (confounding factors)

MSs Evaluations – Overview

Evaluations of 2014-2020 cohesion policy operational programmes published since January 2015 – by type and year.



Evaluations of 2014-2020 cohesion policy operational programmes published since January 2015 – thematic coverage



EC Expost evaluation of 2014-2020

Wide and complex exercise to cover all 14-20 thematic objectives

- Follows **five Better Regulation Evaluation Criteria** – effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, Union Value added
- As in 07-13, mix of **cross-cutting** and **thematic work packages**
- Mix of **quantitative and qualitative analysis**
- Based on **improved data** compared to previous periods
 - i. 2014-2020 monitoring data on categorisation of investment and common indicators (Open Data Platform)
 - ii. Project level data collected across all Member States (Work Package 2)
- Stronger **theoretical basis**
- Deliver policy learning (at least interim results) to be used for the conception of the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework
- Final results to be expected in 2025

EC Expost evaluation of 2014-2020 period

- Mix of **qualitative...**
 - Case studies,
 - Survey,
 - focus groups,
 - **Seminars/webinars**
- **.. And quantitative work**
 - Descriptive statistics;
 - Econometric analysis (differences-in-differences, regression discontinuity design, etc) for impact of specific policies);
 - Modelling (general equilibrium models)

EC Expost evaluation of 2014-2020: status

Work Package	Tender	Award	Inception	First interim	Second interim	Third interim	Draft final
1 - Synthesis				N/A	N/A	N/A	Q3 2024
2 - Data study							
3 - Modelling	In progress: internal work						
4 - RTDI				Delivered			June
5 - ICT					Delivered		January
6 - SMEs					Delivered		February
7 - Green					Q4 2023		February
8 - Transport					Delivered		February
9 - Social					Q4 2023		February
10 - Institutional capacity & reform				Q4 2023			April
11 - Interreg					Delivered		April
12 - Crisis							Q3 2024
13 - Integrated terr. development					Delivered		May

Outstanding Challenges

1. Balance between accountability and policy learning

- a) So far, focus so far has been mainly on accountability
- b) Need to move towards better use of evaluation results for policy learning
 - i. Timing issue (when results become available, next programming already done or underway)
 - ii. Importance of timely/preliminary results

2. Stronger **focus on impact** of the policy seems necessary, not just funds disbursement/implementation

3. **Our indicator system could and should be better exploited** for evaluation purposes

4. **Capacity** to carry out evaluation still **uneven across administrations**

- a) Support provided by the EC (Evaluation Helpdesk)
- b) Exchanges of best practices
- c) Development of an EU evaluation community

Need to make better use of available data

- through integration of implementation data with other data sources
 - example: data by national statistics including info on beneficiaries
- through the **full use of the data available to capture policy impact**
 - example: use of reduction in travelling time for assessing impact in transport infrastructure investments
- Making, where relevant and possible, **more consistent use of quantitative impact evaluations**
 - using more sophisticated techniques for the definition of counterfactual scenario (propensity score matching, synthetic controls) and the assessment of the impact (randomized control trials, regression discontinuity design)

Role of the Commission

- **The Commission strives to improve evaluation skills across the MSs public administrations and to create a sound evaluation culture**
 - Carrying our **state-of-the-art evaluation work**
 - Through the dedicated support provided by the **Evaluation Helpdesk** (new contract just started – call for interest for support to be launched soon)
 - Through **exchanges of best practices** (Evaluation Network, conferences and seminars, etc.)
 - Development of an **EU-wide evaluation community**

Going Forward

- Important to keep on developing **evaluation systems that allow policy learning**
- Move away from evaluation as a tick-box exercise, towards a **more integrated results-based approach**
- Think of ways in **which the Commission could support Member States further in evaluation**
- Dare to use more **quantitative techniques and experimental approaches**

Thank you



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