Flash report on the 2019 Meeting of the Community of Practice on
Counterfactual Impact Evaluation of ESF interventions
(CoP-CIE-ESF)
Dublin, 7 June 2019

This year the Community of Practice focused on the theme of data provision for evaluation. This topic is a natural continuation of the discussion on the different steps of the policy cycle, started in the previous Community of Practice to highlight the importance of the policy design for evaluation. In particular, this year the meeting was devoted to discussing the following points: (i) which evaluation questions can be answered about the policy to be evaluated; (ii) what are the ideal data needed to address such questions; and (iii) which are the main limitations that the Managing Authorities encounter in the data provision process. These topics also allowed focusing on future data needs and issues related to the use of different types of data (survey and admin registers) so as to prepare best for the evaluation of future interventions. In several sessions participatory leadership techniques steered group discussions and reflections on the issues.

Highlights

- How to evaluate

  Evaluation in reality can face many challenges. First of all, the choice of evaluation methods needs to take into account the existence of different approaches for evaluation, which can answer different evaluation questions.

  > *Conclusion: All stakeholders involved in the evaluation process (from policy-makers to MAs and evaluators) have to (i) ensure independence and replicability of evaluation, (ii) facilitate the research work of relevant actors, and (iii) ensure innovation on policy development based on evaluation results.*

- How to select interventions for evaluation

  There is still room for increasing the number of CIEs and improving their quality and relevance.

  > *Conclusion: In order to improve the overall quality of evaluations, it is crucial that personnel with competence on CIEs: (i) make contact with the project manager at an early stage; (ii) supervise the procurement process; (iii) provide quality assurance while the CIE is carried out.*

- How to prepare data for evaluation

  All types of evaluation questions have specific data requirements and need preliminary work for data preparation. Research work has to meet two main goals, namely policy relevance and good quality. Availability of detailed data can help to improve the quality of evaluations,

since detailed data allow addressing detailed questions. Depending on data availability, the evaluation project may need fine-tuning during the process, implying an adjustment of the evaluation questions that can be addressed.

> **Conclusion**: *The importance of administrative data is unquestionable, since its use for evaluation purposes makes it much easier to: (i) follow individuals over time (especially when compared to survey data, which is more costly and normally does not follow individuals in the long run), (ii) capture effects on a wider range of possible outcomes, (iii) find and exploit quasi-experimental variation, and (iv) handle selection process issues.*

The data collection constitutes a relevant building block in the preparation work for evaluation. The process of building data infrastructure is normally long, and Member States differ with respect to data collection tools used for evaluation purposes. In particular, as regards administrative data, challenges for its use relate to (i) data protection, (ii) collection purposes other than analysis, and (iii) cleaning /recoding.

> **Conclusion**: *Relevant evaluation questions and, accordingly, relevant data have to be identified to facilitate the data preparation process.*
> *Anonymisation procedures (e.g. pseudo-anonymisation) can help overcome challenges related to data protection and therefore provide relevant data for evaluation and research purposes.*
> *Planning ahead to ensure availability of data required for evaluation can ensure feasibility and quality of the evaluation of interventions.*

The meeting took place in Dublin (IE), on 7 June 2019. It was organised by the European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC) Centre for Research on Impact Evaluation (CRIE) together with DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), and kindly hosted by the Irish Managing Authority of the ESF and EGF Policy and Operations Unit in the Department of Education and Skills. The organisation of the meeting highly benefitted from the cooperation with the CoP-CIE Steering Group, established in June 2017 in order to better tailor the content of the CoP-CIE-ESF meetings to the needs of the ESF Managing Authorities from all Member States. 46 representatives from ESF Managing Authorities and Research Institutes attended from AT, BE, BG, CZ, DK, EE, EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE and UK.

Presentations used for this meeting can be found here.