

Webinar: The new Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework for Partnerships

12 October 2022

Summary Q&A Session

On 12 October 2022, the European Commission and ERA-LEARN organised a webinar to familiarise partnerships and member state officials with the new requirements building on the guidelines (2nd Interim Report) of the Expert Group.

This document is a summary of the Q&A session.

General aspects

Q: When will the second mandate of the expert group start?

A: The selection needs to be approved currently. In a couple of weeks, the selected experts will be informed and contracts will be then signed.

Q: Is the expert group independent or directly linked to the Commission?

A: The expert group is independent but have a contract with the EC.

Q: Will the expert group provide a methodology for the common indicators not covered in the BMR 2022?

A: The previous round included explanations for the common indicators and the EU-survey on the common indicators. The recommendation of the expert group is that this is done also in the next round with clearly defined indicators (considering the feedback that was received) and increased opportunities for consultation/explanations in an 'adjustment' phase at the start of the process.

Q: What is the objective of the common indicators? Is it comparison or not?

A: The expert group advises not to benchmark on common indicators, given that not all common indicators have the same relevance for every partnership (a typical example is newcomers, some target smaller companies, others larger companies, or different stakeholder categories, which flaws any comparison. This is clearly explained in the expert groups Interim Report 1. Outright comparison is therefore not relevant and individual performance on a common indicator is not done, unless the partnership itself publishes it within e.g. the partnership fiche (if a common

indicator matches a strategic objective). Common indicators serve to monitor the partnership programme as a whole. Some benchmarking may be relevant between individual partnership, based on their own initiative (e.g. partnerships with similar objectives and/or set-ups may learn from each other).

From a country-perspective there is the same question raised if the fiches are for comparison: No, they are not. All are very different. There is no way to compare them.

Q: Are there specific templates we should use for the Monitoring and evaluation framework, logical Framework?

A: Yes, there are template for country and partnership fishes. All are available.

Q: How did you develop the indicators? Did you use a large or small group of participants? What type of participants? How many workshops/meetings were needed? How long per meeting/workshop?

A: The expert group reviewed the indicators the partnerships were using, also considering literature on research evaluation and the legal basis for partnerships, and developed 13 indicators. This went through a survey sent to partnerships and the EC officers in charge to assess the acceptance and relevance, and cost/difficulty of implementation. This was the second level of selection after which further finetuning was done. The resulting 11 indicators were reduced to 6 that were included in the EU survey,

In the end 9 very simple indicators were developed.

Q: Concerning the complementarity of the internal reporting processes of the partnerships with the process of the BMR: We have a legal requirement to send the annual report to the EU institutions by 01 July. As it includes the measurement of the common KPIs, it would be good if the planning of the BMR could be aligned to this so we measure the KPIs only once.

A: Yes, this was also pointed out in the expert group - to synchronise as much as possible the BMR requirements with other relevant requirements in the partnerships.

Requirements by Partnerships

Q: Which are the challenges in collecting data, both in terms of data availability and also taking into account the project pipeline? Is there a need for additional support and guidance from DG RTD?

A: With regard to KPIs specific to the partnership and reported on the partnership fiche, these challenges will be different for every partnership. However, just as we did as experts for the common indicators, similarly for individual partnerships, any indicator development needs to be assessed on relevance and acceptability in light of the objectives to be achieved (and supported by stakeholders), as well the cost/feasibility to calculate the indicator. A high score on both dimensions is needed for an indicator to be included or developed. We understand these are often complex discussions, which need time, also considering the time lags of data availability (e.g. project impacts etc.), the need for good baseline indicators (as mentioned by Biodiversa+ setting baselines is a tedious task) – hence in some cases the KPI could be “setting the baselines for ...”. From our point of view, we suggest that partnerships with similar challenges exchange good practices on indicator development, or even collaborate outright.

With regard to common indicators, the expert group advised that attention is paid before each exercise starts to further improve clarity and simplicity of the common indicators to be collected. The list of the nine indicators suggested in the second interim report to be examined in the next BMR exercise is the result of several rounds of iterations and feedback and thus a good starting point for the ‘adjustment’ phase that is suggested as the start of each BMR process. Several challenges were reported in the first exercise including e.g. inability to set baselines due to lack of relevant data, inability to set targets due to limited relevance of certain indicators or lack of time as setting targets needed to go through a consultation process, lack of or insufficient data. The second Interim Report reports on these challenges in detail. The methodology for the preparation of the BMR, as suggested by the expert group, involves several occasions and means of supporting the partnerships in collecting the data needed.

Q: The case studies found the experience of the BMR useful/worth doing. Is there a broad set of data from all partnerships? As in a survey of the experience of monitoring and evaluating (workloads etc).

A: In the BMR you find the individual partnership fiches, showing their most significant KPIs. No source data are however presented. Partnership fiche content, including KPIs, are very different as they consider the specific context of the partnership (broader/smaller scope in terms of activities or sectoral focus for example; more or less emphasis on impacts, in particular new partnerships often have less hands-on or tangible ways to present or even measure impact).

The kind of data on the process we worked with is different. It was a close and interactive process for several months.

If you have issues the expert group can direct you for advice.

Q: It was shown that some common indicators were not straightforward or easy to calculate. What solutions did they find to resolve this issue? Will the Commission work on clarifying these indicators for future monitoring/reporting?

A: In the example shown there is no solution so far, but they had the opportunity to comment on each indicator so they could point to the difficulties encountered, and specify the way they interpreted, which might help to fine-tune.

Q: Are there any plans to "support the further development of partnership-based monitoring and reporting tools for collecting partnership level data, so that the partnerships will be able to fulfil the annual/biennial monitoring requirements by the European Commission." as proposed in the 1st interim report of the Expert Group, p44?

A: At this point, three reporting mechanisms have been used: the Partnerships' own monitoring systems in place, eCORDA for the Horizon Europe project level data, and the EU survey for the common indicators. The Commission is working on incremental improvements for the monitoring and reporting tools for collecting partnership level data (e.g. automatic prefilling, specific filters in the Horizon Dashboard), and will explore further improvements, notably building on discussions on specific needs.

Q: Do we have to distinguish also between Outputs and Outcomes? ...as "Outcomes are missing here in the causality of chain.

A: There indeed exist frameworks of 5 levels which develop indicators in the following layers: resources - actions - outputs - outcomes - impact; we chose to take only 3 layers and put some of these together (so resources/actions and outputs/outcomes each in one) to reduce the complexity and also interpretation problems.

Basically: what goes in (resources/actions), what is realized (outputs/outcome) and what's the impact of these realizations (which often is the real "lofty"/"ambitious" objective of the vision - vision being the aspirational longer term objective of the partnership e.g. reduce carbon emissions from activity x with y% ; "increase quality of life / expectancy in the EU with..." etc etc).

Q: What is recommended concerning impact?

A: A lot of people struggle with the impact. You have outcomes and want to put your ambition further to what does it mean on European and even global level in some cases- and in the end stakeholders often judge the success on impacts (while at the same time being critical on impact in terms of its calculation as there have been exaggerations around across society (be it private or public sector), and outright misconduct/greenwashing. Good impact indicators usually are very costly and difficult to define (e.g. employment impact studies often need to be survey based, and are difficult to replicate so creating time series is difficult; alternatively econometric approaches also need large datasets to be compiled manually e.g. based on annual accounts). Stick to that what you can control and objectively, causally measure, at an acceptable cost level. So be selective on impact indicators, design sound methodologies, and complement the quantitative measurements with well chosen qualitative evidence (case studies, best practices).

Q: How can you attribute a policy impact to a partnership, as it a convergence between different initiatives

A: Indeed, it converges to a certain extent (a partnership supporting part of the policy implementation agenda), but what we want as a qualitative connection is actually how partnership ambitions in terms of impact connect with higher level objectives. What happens in the partnership connects with EU and global aspirations (on a qualitative level). This can be at the level of UN (e.g. the UN SDG all put forward quantitative objectives to reach), OECD, EU, etc. In addition, this is why we can't talk about attribution but is fair enough to talk about contribution.

Q: For many partnerships, the intermediate KPI targets in 2023/2025 or 2027 are unclear. Are you expecting these targets to be filled in during the next BMR? Is there any approach you would recommend to set up these intermediate targets?

A: Intermediate targets: it depends. You are not obliged to have intermediate targets for all indicators. Typically for most a 2027 target is set forward and then it is a matter to look at (1) whether intermediate targets are necessary and (2) feasible (e.g. an employment impact measurement is not feasible every 2 years but maybe twice over the lifetime).

Q: If a common indicator is not considered relevant for a PPP, it should not be included among the set of PPP KPIs. However, is there still an obligation for the PPP to report (e.g. in the Annual Activity Report or in the BMR) on this "less relevant" common indicator?

A: Yes, you need to report on common indicators even if they are less relevant (towards the BMR). You need to provide data for the aggregated level in the BMR. How you treat the common indicators in your AAR or partnership fiche, respecting legal obligations to report in the

AAR aside, is the responsibility of the partnership. So non relevant common indicators, provided they are not legally required in the AAR, are not compulsory to be published. But they need to be reported to the BMR to make the aggregation possible.

Q: Concerning the common indicators with many missing/incorrect answers, do you have an overall of the feedback by partnerships on why is this the case?

A: Sometimes the baseline could not to be defined. But there were efforts to get the best guesses possible. Hopefully we will have a better indicator survey in future and time will allow to improve the monitoring system from one report to another based also on your help.

Q: What about indicator #4?

A: This was about how many international partners you have. It was decided to delete the indicator, as international visibility was kept in terms of qualitative assessment as indicator 9.

Q: Does indicator 6 include also associated members?

A: Nr 6: Measures ensuring continuous openness and transparency: Here it is difficult to define a target. Good guesses are welcome with identification.

Description: mixed (qualitative/quantitative). Newcomer partners/members are those entities that have joined the partnership after its launch. Co-programmed and institutionalised partnerships with associations representing the private or public members should report on the members of the association. (EC data?)

** How many newcomer partners/members do you have in your partnership after its launch? xx% SMEs, xx% RESEARH, xx% UNIVERSITY, xx% PUBLIC, xx% INDUSRY, xx% SMEs, xx% OTHER*

** From where do the newcomers come from (both EU and non-EU countries)? Definition: Newcomer countries are those that are not currently represented as partners in the European Partnership.*

Associated members of the partnership counts as well.

Requirements by Member States / Associated Countries

Q: Do we (the private side of the partnership) need to collect all this data for the country fiches? Or can we find (part of it) somewhere already?

A: *The country fiches are filled in in collaboration with Member States/Associated Countries. No requirements from the Partnerships*

Q: Is the collection of data for Member States / Associated Countries different?

A: *The process is similar. We work with MS Teams space and provide pre-filled in templates with the available quantitative indicators. With the help of the Partnership Knowledge Hub Members (PKH) the templates are distributed to national actors and reviewed. There is a second and sometimes a third round of consultations (via, emails, office hours, etc.) with consistency and quality check until we have the final revised version.*

Further information

The guidelines of the Expert Group on support to the Strategic Coordination Process that prepared the BMR 2022 (2nd Interim Report): <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8c558fae-ec57-11ec-a534-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

Recommendations on the future support of the strategic coordinating process - Final report of the Commission expert group on support for the strategic coordinating process for partnerships: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1b8980fc-ede6-11ec-a534-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-259619094>

European Partnerships website: https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/european-partnerships-horizon-europe_en

ERA-LEARN Database on Partnerships: <https://www.era-learn.eu/network-information>

H2020 Participation – EC dashboard:

<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/dashboard/sense/app/93297a69-09fd-4ef5-889f-b83c4e21d33e/sheet/PbZJnb/state/analysis>