

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF) and Cohesion Fund, 2007-2013

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This Staff Working Document covers the ex post evaluation of Cohesion Policy programmes financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund over the 2007-2013 programming period.

The 2007-2013 programmes were implemented in a context of various challenges such as the deep global economic and financial crisis and the need to build the economy, infrastructure and administrative capacity of 13 Member States joining from 2004 onwards (and for most of whom this was the first full programming period).

Although implementation started slowly due to problems regarding public procurement and management systems, most programmes soon caught up. Administrative burdens were also highlighted as being a problem.

On the other hand, according to the evaluation, Cohesion Policy responded effectively to those challenges and delivered a wide range of positive results. It is estimated that around 1 million jobs were created.

Increased efficiency: the report noted that there was scope for increased efficiency. The revolving nature of financial instruments makes them more cost efficient in the long run, but 90% of ERDF financial instrument spending in 2007-2013 was concentrated in just one field – enterprise support. The 2014-2020 regulations have now extended the possibility of using financial instruments to all thematic objectives.

Relevance, effectiveness and coherence: the report noted that a lesson emerged from across the evaluation. The focus on delivering results was not strong enough. Although results were delivered by the programmes, only a minority had a clear intervention logic.

New framework obligations in the 2014-2020 regulations are needed to improve relevance and coherence.

The evaluation concluded that there were **clear indications of the EU added value** of Cohesion Policy:

- through trade effects, Cohesion Policy has a net positive impact on the GDP of every region of the EU, even the net contributors. This effect is clear in 2016, (just after the end of spending) but lasts into the longer term (2023);
- Cohesion Policy enabled **SMEs to keep afloat** and even expanding during the crisis, as well as investment in transport and in waste and waste water infrastructure to meet European goals;
- Interreg is an instrument which is unique in its field, crucial for ensuring continuity and linkages of common projects across borders and, for some projects, across the EU.

The 2007-2013 ex post evaluation brings a **greater analytical depth to the issues dealt with** and looks at several thematic areas not examined in depth before. It also provides a reference framework for judging over the coming years if the issues are being tackled in an effective and proportional way – as well as which elements will need to be maintained or reinforced post 2020.