General Programme "Fundamental rights and justice": specific programme "Civil Justice", 2007-2013

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The Commission presents an ex post evaluation report on the civil justice (JCIV) programme (2007-2013).

The main aspects evaluated are:

relevance;

coherence and compatibility;

effectiveness;

sustainability and transferability;

efficiency;

the scope for simplification and EU added value.

An independent external evaluator assisted by the Commission’s staff carried out the evaluation.

To recall, the programme had the following **general objectives**:

promote judicial cooperation with the aim of contributing to the creation of a genuine European area of justice in civil matters based on mutual recognition and mutual confidence;

promote the elimination of obstacles to the good functioning of cross-border civil proceedings in Member States;

improve the daily life of individuals and businesses by enabling them to assert their rights throughout the European Union, notably by fostering access to justice;

improve the contacts, exchange of information and networking between legal, judicial and administrative authorities and the legal professions, including by way of support for judicial training, with the aim of better mutual understanding among such authorities and professionals.

The total budget earmarked for the programme from January 2007 to December 2013 was **EUR 109.3 million**.

Main conclusions:

1) Relevance of the programme: overall the priorities and funded actions can be considered relevant to the objectives of the programme. However, the process put in place to select the programme's priorities left little room for manoeuvre. This meant that in some cases, if a priority changed during the implementation of a project, its results were less useful.

Conversely, with regard to training, for example, needs could arise that did not fall under the set priorities. **Grant beneficiaries found that the calls and selected actions identified the needs of the target groups** , although the extent to which they adequately identified these needs varied.

2) Coherence and complementarity: overall, the JCIV achieved a certain degree of complementarity with other EU programmes in terms of certain objectives and thematic areas, the nature of the programme and the target groups, especially with the JPEN and FRC. At the same time, however, there is a risk of overlap with these programmes.

3) Effectiveness: the actions funded made a contribution to the programme objectives. However, **it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the programme** because of the limited information on outcomes and impacts provided in the projects final reports and the interviews. Most of the projects were able to achieve their planned results on time and reach the expected target group.

4) Sustainability and dissemination: regarding short-term sustainability (i.e. through dissemination of project results), the Commission's efforts to disseminate (and monitor) project results have been limited, overall. In general, the JCIV programme generated sustainable results in the medium and long term (i.e. through the transfer of projects' results to other contexts, organisations and Member States with little or no additional funding). Most projects were considered innovative, particularly in targeting groups or tackling issues that had not been researched or addressed before, or through the development of new methodologies, approaches or tools.

5) Efficiency: the financial resources have been used efficiently overall, judging by the comparison of inputs and outputs between projects' budgets, and the total outputs and results produced. In the first years of implementation, absorption rates were relatively low, pointing to a lack of financial and administrative capacity of the potential beneficiaries, but this increased to an acceptable level after two years.

There is some scope for simplifying procedures for applicants and beneficiaries (e.g. improving technical /IT systems or simplifying accounting procedures and financial reporting). The Commission's monitoring arrangements were considered useful overall.

6) EU added value: the JCIV programme had a strong transnational dimension. The transnational partnerships resulted in specific benefits for the organisations involved in implementing JCIV activities.

The geographical coverage of action grants and operating grants was uneven, with a few Member States overly represented (Belgium, Germany, France and Italy) and others involved little or not at all.

Key recommendations: amongst the main recommendations made by the Commission following the evaluation of the programme are the following:

better define the priorities in order to ensure that the priorities can be adequately achieved within an earmarked budget;

make realistic assessments of **project risks** and better risk mitigation strategies, for example by asking for brief progress reports that identify any potential risks as they arise during the implementation of the project;

increase focus on assessment of impacts at all levels and not merely on outputs, as regards monitoring and evaluation;

explore ways of enhancing the uptake of project outputs, results and best practices by other organisations, including in other Member States, including **more resources for dissemination of results**;

sharpen the programme's intervention logic.