

SCOTLAND

GENERAL POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the relatively low share of EU funding in domestic expenditure and therefore the natural limitations to exerting any transformational effects and a strong impact on the regional economy, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) have proved to provide a valuable contribution to economic and social development in Scotland over years. Generally seen by the key stakeholders as well aligned with the local and regional development priorities, Structural Funds have played an important role in supporting reform and recovery in the Scottish economy over the 2007-13 funding period, contributed to increasing business competitiveness in the region, and are widely valued for having left a lasting legacy in improving citizens' day-to-day lives. The overall **assessment** of the value and effectiveness of Cohesion policy funds and their contribution to the development of the region is therefore largely positive, both by the key ESIF stakeholders and citizens.

Despite the limited financial **added-value** capacity of Cohesion policy, Structural Funds are noted to provide significant added value in strategic, administrative and democratic terms. Apart from providing a more certain, stable, reliable and long-term framework for regional policy planning and delivery than many domestic programmes, Cohesion policy has been praised for stimulating partnership work and mainstreaming new and more efficient ways of working, mobilising relevant local and regional stakeholders.

At the same time, the efficiency of ESIF delivery and performance have been affected by a number of **challenges**, related to policy architecture, Programme implementation arrangements or broader macro-economic conditions. The main reported policy implementation problems in the current period relate to excessive audit and control, as well as the complexity of EU rules and procedures determining access to ESIF funding, along with excessive reporting requirements. Furthermore, recent changes in management and implementation structures from the previous 2007-13 period are seen by a range of stakeholders as having had a detrimental effect on the effectiveness of programme delivery. The changing macro-economic conditions was one of the key challenges influencing programme performance in 2007-13, whereas the fallout from the recession and financial crisis



continued to impact on delivery in 2014-20, requiring programme adaptation, restricting the availability of local match funding and raising concerns about underspend and absorption.

The predominantly positive perception of Cohesion policy funds and their impact among the surveyed population in Scotland is, however, combined with a generally low level of public profile, visibility and **awareness** of Structural Funds in the region. Despite the perceived considerable achievements of the policy in the region, the level of awareness of 'Cohesion policy' or EU funded projects among the general public appears to be below the average awareness levels across the regions covered by the study, and citizens' understanding of the value of ESIF support for the local economies and communities is perceived by the key Programme stakeholders to be generally low.

Furthermore, the predominantly positive views of Scottish respondents on EU membership, EU integration and the benefits of EU funding for their region do not appear to translate into a strong sense of European **identity**. Overall, Scots appear to share a rather strong nationalist (national or regional) sentiment, exhibiting relatively low levels (when compared to COHESIFY averages) of attachment to and identification with Europe and the EU. Nevertheless, European attachment and identity have significant scope to be accommodated 'within' other self-identifications of Scottish people, demonstrated by a high share of people holding multiple identities.

Communication activities at programme and project level seek to address some of these issues, for instance by aiming to raise the awareness and understanding of the role of the EU and the contribution Structural Funds make to Scotland and publicise the activities and achievements of the ESIF programmes. Overall, there is continuity in the communication activities and measures for 2014-20, although with some changes reflecting the new programme structure or relating to the new emphasis on social media and online activity. Despite the stated efforts to ensure a more proactive approach to publicising and promoting the Programmes in Scotland, a number of constraints may be limiting the effectiveness of communication measures. Some of the key findings regarding Cohesion policy communication in Scotland are listed below.

- The approach to communication can be overall characterised as minimalist, although compliance with communication requirements is always ensured and there are specific efforts to pursue a more proactive approach to communication
- Communication activity is overall given a relatively low priority in the chain of implementation priorities at programme and project level, with main focus being on compliance above other considerations such as performance or publicising achievements
- There appears to be lack of real encouragement for ESIF delivery bodies to go beyond mere compliance with regulatory requirements on communication
- Communication activity is often not evenly spread throughout the implementation cycle, becoming more of a priority only towards the end of the programming period
- There appears to be a weak approach to indicators to measure progress and effectiveness of communication activity, at programme and, consequently, project level



- Interest of the media in Cohesion policy–related topics appears to be limited: the media is largely indifferent to 'Europe' and Cohesion policy, with stories being rarely picked up
- Regional and local media tend to present positive Cohesion policy-related news more often than national media, although the European perspective is lacking in all types of media
- Close cooperation with local and regional media is important: Work with press officers and liaising with the local media is often viewed as an efficient way of ensuring communication on EU funded project at local level, and maintaining 'good relationship with journalists' is often easier locally at project level
- Citizens and the media are interested predominantly in the results rather than funding sources: the media is largely indifferent to the source of support and, instead, interested in its effects (the outcomes and achievements of policy and human interest aspects)
- There is a tendency to down-play European dimension and contribution in announcements and media stories: The EU dimension of support is often omitted or downplayed, while there is a tendency to highlight the actions, achievements and impact of domestic actors; very few articles frame Cohesion policy from a 'European' perspective emphasising the EU dimension implying that national and local interests and priorities dominate the news stories of Cohesion policy
- The changing nature of support (towards intangible investments) reduces visibility and presents a challenge in terms of ESIF communication

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- Pursue a more proactive approach to communicating the ESIF and their benefits by the MA and the European Commission, and more active encouragement to delivery bodies to go beyond mere compliance with regulatory requirements on communication
- Ensure communication is not just about acknowledging European funding but showcasing and promoting its benefits and achievements
- Ensure permanent and continuous communication activity over the whole programming period: Communicate during all period rather than concentrate all effort at the last stage, show what is happening on an on-going basis; even if no results are available as yet, communicate the expected results, announce new tranches of EU funding
- Establish common output/result indicators with baselines to ensure strategic approach to communication



- More proactive role of the European Commission in communication, including in providing examples of efficient and proactive communication measures – rather than leaving it to national governments
- Ensure stronger EU/Commission presence in regions (to deliver the message to citizens and recipients)
- Set common criteria for selecting good practices, as well as communicate and promote best practice examples
- Set a clear budget for communication activity from the outset, ring-fence funding for dedicated and professional staff who can understand marketing tools better than general day-to-day programme managers, and overall strengthen budget allocations for communication
- Ensure a coordinated approach to communication across all levels: Ensure effective cooperation of delivery bodies (the MA, lead partners) and beneficiaries to support clarity and consistency of messaging across communication channels, to maximise media coverage about the awarding of funding, to strengthen partnership communications activity
- Extend the scope and improve the quality of evaluations, and improve the uptake of their results: Conduct more, and more timely, quality evaluations of programmes and improve the uptake of their results, as well as use the case studies produced by evaluations for communication purposes
- Highlight the European dimension of support, emphasise the EU added value and additionality of European funding in public announcements, press releases and through other means
- Build and strengthen cooperation with the media, particularly through closer work with local press officers and liaison with the local media as an efficient way of ensuring communication on EU funded projects
- Increase and improve use of social media, providing coverage to a wide audience, highlighting individual success stories, the human dimension and raising awareness of the EU in the lives of individuals
- Focus communication at a 'lower level' – by highlighting small concrete success stories through case studies and personal accounts
- Use simple and accessible language and deliver simple messages; focus on key, captivating messages delivering the value of the ESIF work in a way that would capture people's imagination; create an attractive and strong story-line; collect together evidence from different cases and demonstrate the EU value in a comprehensive way; build a brand that is understandable and meaningful for people
- Focus more on visual elements (e.g. infographics, maps): Promote a wider use of visuals such as infographics as an efficient and attractive communication tool



- Involve high-profile figures to attend and speak at events: Invite 'celebrities', high profile personalities, famous politicians to attend and make speeches at events promoting EU funds, e.g. launch events, launch of new big funding tranches etc. as an efficient way of raising interest and awareness among stakeholders, the media and consequently (potentially) the wider public.

