

Webinar of 19 April 2023

on the key elements of the mid-term evaluation and evaluation plans

Home Affairs Programmes 2021-2027

Revised Background Note – May 2023

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Aim and structure of the note	2
Overview of the upcoming evaluations	2
Policy background and rationale	3
Legal basis	4
1. Mid-Term Evaluation of the 2021-2027 Programmes.....	5
1.1. Rationale and contextualisation	5
1.2. Scope of the evaluation.....	6
1.2.1. Objective scope, timeframe and granularity	6
1.2.2. Evaluation Questions and indicative judgement criteria	6
1.3. Who does what.....	12
1.4. Recommended methods and approaches	13
1.4.1. Reconstruction of the intervention logic.....	13
1.4.2. Evaluation matrix.....	14
1.4.3. Needs assessment, stakeholders mapping and consultation strategy	15
1.4.4. Analysis of financial and physical progress	16
1.4.5. Summing up and research limitations.....	17
1.5. Format and recommended structure.....	17
1.6. Terms of Reference.....	18
1.7. Procedural aspects and next steps	19
2. Evaluation Plan of the 2021-2027 programmes	20
2.1. Rationale	20
2.2. Scope.....	20
2.3. Structure.....	21
2.4. Who does what.....	23
2.5. Process and suggested approach to the first submission of the evaluation plan	24

This background note was prepared by the DG Home and does not commit the European Commission. Only the Court of Justice of the European Union is competent to authoritatively interpret Union law.

INTRODUCTION

Aim and structure of the note

This revised background note is intended to present and discuss with the Managing Authorities the key elements of the mid-term evaluation and of the evaluation plans for their 2021-2027 Home Affairs Funds.

In particular, it aims to outline a general framework of evaluation questions to be addressed as well as to provide methodological advice on the design of the evaluation activities, with a view to ensuring a sufficient harmonisation of the evaluation findings and their underlying methodological approaches at the Member State level.

Once consolidated, this note will be another block in the overall Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework 2021-2027.

The note discusses, in the introductory section, the **overall requirements and planning for the mid-term evaluation and the evaluation plans** laid out in the legal basis, as well as the **overarching principles of the [better regulation](#)** that should apply across the entire process.

In **section 1**, the note focuses on the upcoming **mid-term evaluations**, including the purpose of the exercise, the recommended evaluation questions and judgement criteria as well as providing methodological advice on how to carry the studies out.

Section 2 provides some methodological advice on the structure and contents of the **evaluation plans**, the role of the different actors, the next steps towards the submission of the plan and its specificities in light of the context.

In tailoring their evaluation plans and studies to the information needs at the Member State and programme level, Managing Authorities are invited to seek the maximum possible alignment to the core elements of the common evaluation framework described in this note.

It is worth recalling that in the 2021-2027 programming period, the mid-term review¹ and the evaluation process are two separate and different exercises. Therefore, **this note does not concern the mid-term review**.

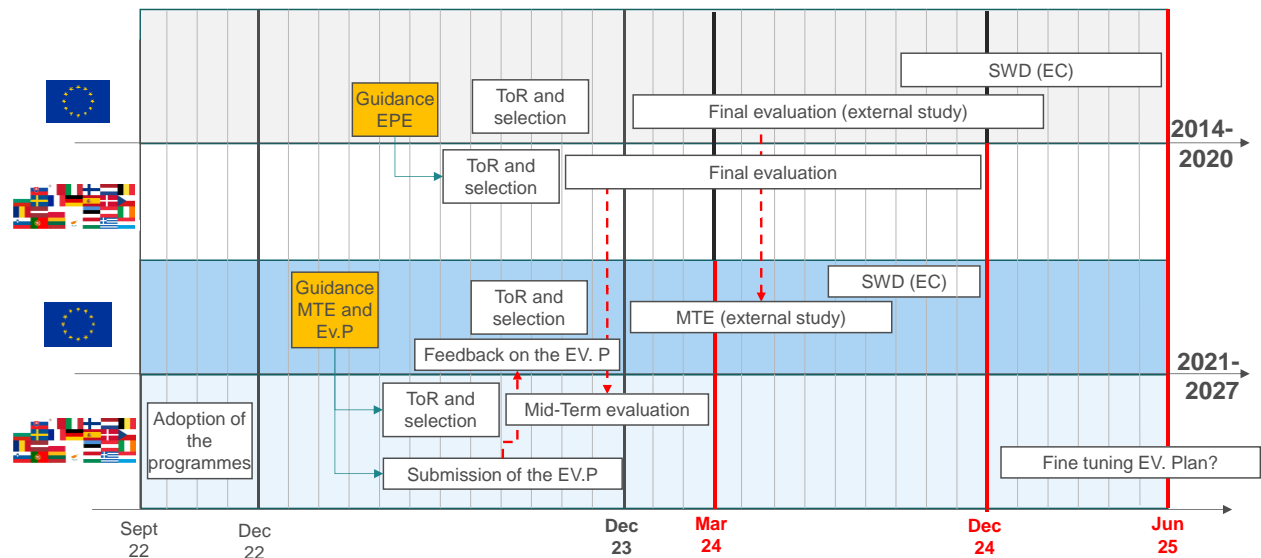
Overview of the upcoming evaluations

Figure 1 below provides a first graphic illustration of the overall evaluation framework.

The detailed steps and their underlying methods and arrangements are discussed individually in the relevant sections of the note below. Although technical advice on the ex-post evaluations of the 2014-2020 programming cycle is not addressed directly in this document, the ex-post evaluations are included in the illustration below (upper part of the chart) as part of the overall framework while discussing the 21-27 mid-term evaluations, and because the two exercises are interlinked, in line with the legal basis.

¹ As per Article 17 of the AMIF Regulation (EU) 2021/1147, Article 14 of the BMVI Regulation (EU) 2021/1148 and Article 14 of the ISF Regulation (EU) 2021/1149.

Figure 1 – Overview of the upcoming evaluations for the Home Affairs Programmes



Source: COM elaboration based on the legal basis and the state of play.

EPE stands for Ex-Post evaluation, Ev.P stands for Evaluation Plan. MTE stands for Mid-Term Evaluation, SWD stands for Staff Working Document. ToR stands for Terms of Reference.

As shown in the figure above, the ‘21-27 mid-term evaluation and ‘14-20 ex-post evaluation exercises largely overlap as a result of the amendment of the horizontal regulation² and are interlinked, in line with the fund specific regulations indicating that “the mid-term evaluation should take into account the results of the retrospective evaluation of the effects of the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund [likewise for BMVI and ISF] for the 2014-2020 period”. Whilst this requirement applies explicitly to the EU-level evaluation, it has implications also for the MS-level evaluations, which should feed into the EU-level assessment. Besides the legal requirements, evidence from the ex-post evaluation provides the most relevant background for a comparative assessment of the new regulatory framework, which is the focus of the mid-term evaluation ‘21-27. Hence the importance of making sure that the two evaluation exercises are carried out in a sufficiently synergic manner, so that early evidence from the ex-post assessment of the 14-20 programmes can feed as much as possible into the mid-term evaluations.

Policy background and rationale

It is important to recall from the outset the rationale for this work.

Prior to the preparation of the current Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the European Court of Auditors and the European Parliament requested to improve the quality of the monitoring and evaluations of the MFF programmes and funds. This conclusion was also reached by the Commission’s own [spending review](#).

In this line, specific monitoring and evaluation clauses, including on the performance framework, have been provided in the Common Provisions Regulation³ (hereafter also CPR) and the Fund-specific regulations, which lay down the overarching principles for the evaluation of the Home Affairs programmes. To make sure that these basic arrangements are fit for purpose, **the Fund-Specific Regulations empower the Commission to adopt delegated acts to reinforce or amend the current requirements.**

² Regulation (EU) No 514/2014, as revised based on Regulation (EU) 2022/585 of 6 April 2022

³ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060

In order to minimise the administrative burden and with the purpose of gradually developing and harmonising monitoring and evaluation practices across the Member States in the area of the Home Affairs Funds, it was chosen not to adopt a delegated act reinforcing or amending the current requirements on monitoring and the mid-term evaluation. However, the quality and coherence of the evidence produced by the mid-term evaluations will be gauged with a view to understanding whether more is required to make sure that the impacts of the funds can be assessed in the ex-post evaluation to be carried out by 2031.

Importantly, in addition to the requirements directly embedded in the funds regulations and in line with the Interinstitutional Agreement between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on Better Law-Making,⁴ it is for the [Better Regulation Guidelines](#) and [Toolbox](#) to define the standards for the evaluation of programmes funded by the EU budget.

Accordingly, this note makes reference to both the legal basis and the better regulation framework in delineating the key elements to be covered by the mid-term evaluations and evaluation plans. It also calls for the cooperation of all actors involved in this exercises in following the methodological advice offered below.

Legal basis

According to **Article 44 of the Common Provisions Regulation**,⁵ the Member State or the Managing Authority should prepare and submit to the Monitoring Committee an evaluation plan within one year of the decision approving the programme. For the AMIF, BMVI and ISF, the evaluation plan should include a mid-term evaluation to be delivered by 31 March 2024.

Article 44 also identifies the criteria to be covered within the different evaluations identified in the evaluation plan, namely one or more among effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value,⁶ as well as inclusiveness, non-discrimination and visibility as relevant.

The legal basis also clarifies that evaluations should be entrusted to external or internal experts who are functionally independent, and that the responsibility to make sure that adequate data is available lies on the Member States/ Managing Authorities.

The requirements in the CPR for the Member States should be further read in conjunction with the obligation to produce consistent EU-level findings on the five mandatory evaluation criteria identified by the CPR, i.e. effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value. This is in line with article 128 of the Financial Regulation⁷, according to which, when carrying out the evaluation, the Commission should use to the extent possible information available within the relevant institutions including at the level of the Managing Authorities. In addition, the **Fund-specific regulations**⁸ go beyond the simple identification of the evaluation criteria and pinpoint relevant aspects to be targeted by the mid-term and ex-post evaluations, notably:

- progress towards the achievement of the milestones and targets of the performance framework, and the annual performance reports;
- the efficiency of the management and control system;
- the continued relevance and appropriateness of the implementation measures;
- the coordination, coherence and complementarity between the actions supported under the Fund and support provided by other Union funds;

⁴ [OJ L 123, 12.5.2016, p. 1–14](#)

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060

⁶ In line with the better regulation guidelines and the Fund-specific Regulations, effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value are normally the minimum set of evaluation criteria to be covered.

⁷ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046

⁸ Article 34 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1147, Article 28 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1148, Article 29 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1149

- the Union added value of actions implemented under the Fund;
- the evaluation of actions implemented with, in or in relation to third countries in accordance with Article 7, Article 16(11) and Article 24; and
- the findings of the ex-post evaluations of the 2014-2020 programming period.

The regulations specifically stress the importance of concluding the evaluations on time, so that they can properly feed the policy cycle. Article 44(1) also sets out that all evaluations should be published on the relevant programme websites (MS level) and Commission portal (EU level).

In addition to the specific articles in the legal basis which focus on the evaluations and evaluation plans, other important requirements are included in both the CPR and the Fund-specific regulations.

For instance, in defining the role of the monitoring committee, **Article 40(1)(e) CPR**, states that the monitoring committee “*shall examine the progress made in carrying out evaluations, syntheses of evaluations and any follow-up given to findings*”. In addition, the monitoring committee should approve the evaluation plan and its future amendments (Art. 40(2)(c) CPR).

In addition, as per **Article 8(2) CPR**, Member States/ Managing Authorities shall involve partners across the different stages of the programming cycle, including during the evaluation of the programmes. It is therefore good practice that partners are involved already at the design stage of the evaluation, and not only as actors providing info and data to the independent evaluators. They can play an important role, as described further below, in the supervision of the follow up of the recommendations, as part of the monitoring committee of the programme. The CPR also provides that the European code of conduct on partnership (ECCP)⁹ extends its application to the 2021-2027 period. In article 16 and 17, the ECCP stresses the importance of the involvement of the partners in the evaluation process – including their follow up – and the possibility to use capacity building to ensure their correct participation.

Article 9 of the CPR also lays down some requirements that extend to evaluation, such as the need to take into account and promote gender mainstreaming, as well as taking appropriate steps to prevent discrimination on all grounds across all stages of the programming cycle, including evaluations.

Article 36(1) clarifies that at the initiative of the Member State, the funds for the technical assistance may be used for the evaluations. This includes also training activities or technical support for the actors involved in the design of the evaluation.

The progress in the evaluation plan and studies carried out will also be subject of the performance review meetings in line with Article 41 of the CPR.

1. MID-TERM EVALUATION OF THE 2021-2027 PROGRAMMES

1.1. Rationale and contextualisation

The main purpose of the mid-term evaluation is to make sure that the regulatory framework, and the approved programmes thereof, are fit for purpose and will provide:

- contribution to the achievement of the stated objectives, at a reasonable cost;
- appropriate support to tackle evolving needs;
- EU added value, in coherence with other funding sources or modalities.

The mid-term evaluation is particularly concerned with the identification of issues which may affect the programmes and of ways to redress them. As per Article 44 of the CPR, they should be carried out “with the aim to improve the quality of the design and implementation of programmes”.

⁹ Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds - [here](#)

Given the early stage of the programme implementation, the mid-term evaluation will necessarily focus on procedural aspects, on the continuing relevance of the funds and of ways to simplify or streamline the implementation. Evidence on the progress of the operations will inevitably be insufficient for a sound investigation on the net effects or impacts of the funds. Therefore, the focus is on whether the current programming and implementation arrangements appear conducive to effectiveness as the programme implementation unfolds.

Nevertheless, it is also for the mid-term evaluation to pave the way for the ex-post evaluation, in particular by reviewing whether the current monitoring and evaluation arrangements will allow generating sufficient evidence to measure the impacts of the programmes by June 2029.

The ultimate goal of the mid-term evaluation is thus to provide evidence-based inputs and recommendations **with a view to informing the policy cycle and considering the future multiannual financial framework.** For this exercise to fulfil its purpose it is key that any lessons learned and suggestions/ recommendations stemming from the analysis:

- are clearly underpinned by supporting evidence, adequately triangulated based on traceable methods;
- are fully rooted into an assessment of the principles enshrined in the EU Treaties, and particularly on the proportionality and subsidiarity principles,¹⁰ acknowledging what is (not) possible within the remit of the funds;
- are realistic and take into account to the extent possible the external constraints; and
- are formulated in a way that identifies the addressees of the recommendations (who can and should take action, when and how).

1.2. Scope of the evaluation

1.2.1. Objective scope, timeframe and granularity

To properly inform the overall evaluation exercise and based on the rationale described above, the MS-level evaluations should:

- cover the entirety of the programme, including any specific actions/ top-ups from the thematic facility;
- cover the five mandatory evaluation criteria identified by the better regulation guidelines;
- encompass programming and implementation activities from the beginning of the programming period until December 2023 thus including monitoring data recorded until the cut-off of 31 December 2023 and transmitted to the COM by 31 January 2024;
- provide analysis and related findings at an adequate level of granularity, i.e. as far as possible by specific objective;
- do not limit themselves to “yes or no” judgements or replies to the evaluation questions, but offer a **critical analysis of the underlying evidence**, and include a description of “**how**” a certain result has been achieved, its enabling or hampering factors, etc.

1.2.2. Evaluation Questions and indicative judgement criteria

As indicated above, the mid-term evaluations are concerned with the following evaluation criteria:

- **relevance:** this is a key criterion for this mid-term evaluation, as it focuses on whether the priority needs identified during the programming phase are still the most relevant and whether the programmes are sufficiently able to adapt to newly emerging or evolving needs. This analysis involves reconstructing the intervention logic, reviewing the key issues identified and their drivers

¹⁰ Article 5(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Protocol (No 2) on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. See also [here](#)

and can also call into question the continued relevance of the objectives identified in the legal basis. In fact, as per the legal basis¹¹ it is for the evaluations to contribute to the decision-making process “including, where appropriate, to the revision of the Regulation”;

- **effectiveness:** under this criterion, the independent evaluators will gauge the extent to which the programmes have progressed towards their objectives, and whether their design is likely to be conducive to their achievement by the end of the programming period. In this regard, factors affecting the implementation and any unexpected or unintended outcomes should be assessed. This criterion looks not only into the progress towards the specific objectives of the funds, but also any horizontal objective or principle established in the legal basis, including the effectiveness of the communication strategy and of the monitoring system, as well as any specific objective of the programme, beyond those set at EU level;
- **efficiency:** efficiency assesses the relationship between the resources used by an intervention and the changes generated by it. In the context of this evaluation exercise, the focus will lie on the extent to which the design of the programme is conducive to an efficient use of resources, and whether there is room for further economies or simplification. Early comparative evidence stemming from operation-level data will provide an indication of the state of play at the beginning of the programming period;
- **coherence:** under coherence, the evaluators will assess how well different interventions work together, both within the same domain or programme (internal coherence), as well as with other instruments and funds (external coherence). At this stage of the programming period, it will focus in particular on the existence and initial, effective use of procedure and arrangements for the cooperation of the relevant actors entrusted with the policy design and implementation, including the complementarities with the work of the relevant agencies;
- **EU Added Value:** under EU added value, the focus will be on the “additionality” of the support offered via the programmes compared to what could have been achieved at the national or local level, to make sure the EU budget is spent in areas where it can provide the widest benefits.

Table 1 below further breaks down and operationalise the criteria above into evaluation questions and indicative judgement criteria, taking into account the timeline of this exercise as well as the expected progress of the programmes until the end of 2023.

More specifically:

- **Evaluation questions:** define the information needs, the elements that the managing authorities and the Commission will need to know in order to evaluate the programme. They largely influence the way in which evidence should be collected and assessed. They should always be formulated in a way that avoids simple “yes or no” answers;
- **Judgement criteria:** clarify the logical underlying framework for the evaluation questions, outlining the assumptions to be demonstrated in order for the assessment to be positive, or statements to be confirmed by the analysis. Importantly, whilst the indicative judgement criteria should help define the scope of the evaluation and the main analytical goals, they do not cover the full extent of the evaluation design. In fact, the descriptive component (focusing on HOW rather than IF or TO WHAT EXTENT certain things have occurred) should be fully considered. For example, in describing the extent to which a certain measure is effective or efficient, the evaluation should always pay attention to the features which made it possible (or not). Judgement criteria are not compulsory, but highly recommended tools. The Managing Authority may develop additional judgement criteria, adapted to the specific features of the programmes, but it is recommended to keep the total number limited and proportional.

¹¹ See e.g. Article 34(3) of the AMIF Regulation (EU) 2021/1147.

Table 1 – Evaluation questions and indicative judgement criteria for the mid-term evaluations

EV. Criterion	Evaluation Question	Indicative Judgement Criteria (to be customised by the evaluators)
Relevance	To what extent does the programme address the evolving needs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The programme stakeholders¹² are correctly identified in line with the objectives established in the legal basis - The needs analysis¹³ that led to the definition of the programme and related distribution of resources is in line with relevant current and prospect needs of the relevant stakeholders - The strategy developed to address such needs, which is translated into concrete milestones and targets, aims to address the most relevant needs with proportionate resources - The list of implementation measures included in the legal basis and planned within the programme is suitable to address current and prospect needs of the target groups - ...
	To what extent can the programme adapt to the evolving needs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A needs assessment is performed and updated on a regular basis or whenever there are relevant contextual changes - The partnership / monitoring committee is able to provide timely input on evolving needs and relevant developments on the ground - There is an adequate degree of flexibility in the design of the operations - Where necessary, non-substantial changes to the programme strategy can be applied swiftly - There are rules and procedures in place that ensure that the substantial adjustments of the programme can be implemented in due time if new needs arise - If there have been changes in the needs after the programme adoption, the programme strategy or operations have been adapted in due time or, alternatively, the new needs have been duly addressed via the thematic facility - ...
Effectiveness	To what extent is the programme on track to achieving its objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementation has started with operations selected for support of the programme under all relevant specific objectives and types of intervention, except where a delayed start was planned by design - The early progress towards the achievement of the milestone and target values, account taken of the timing for the adoption of the programme, is in line with the expectations - Challenges that affect implementation and the progress towards the objectives of the programme¹⁴ are duly identified and linked with effective remedy strategies - The programme supports types of interventions and types of actions that are known to be effective as per the

¹² Stakeholders typically include actors involved in the design and implementation of the programme, potential and actual beneficiaries as well as end-users/ recipients/ beneficiaries among the population. Within the range of the different stakeholders and in line with the legal basis, the needs assessment should normally identify the needs that receive highest priority as well as the related target groups. Target groups are not necessarily or solely the end-users, as based on the intervention logic of the programme it may be that priority is given to the strengthening of a specific body, service, system etc. Whilst the general population is inevitably indirectly affected by the intervention, it may not represent its specific target group.

¹³ Needs should always be intended as relevant needs within the remit of the programme, in line with the EU treaties and the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity.

¹⁴ In line with section 1.2 of the templates for the annual performance report of the Home Affairs Funds 2021-2027 and the related categorisation of issues affecting performance.

EV. Criterion	Evaluation Question	Indicative Judgement Criteria (to be customised by the evaluators)
		<p>available evidence (including, e.g., relevant academic literature, the ex-post evaluation of the previous programme, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The programme makes use of available good practices where relevant and possible -
	To what extent is the monitoring and evaluation framework suitable to inform on the progress towards the achievement of the objectives of the programme?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A reliable electronic data exchange system (especially between Managing Authorities/ Intermediate Bodies and beneficiaries) for recording and storing data for monitoring and evaluation is in place - Monitoring requirements are duly understood by the actors involved in the data supply process and training or info-sessions are organised where relevant - The reporting on output and result indicators correctly reflects the level of implementation on the ground (no over/under-reporting) - The common indicators capture the main achievements of the programme in line with the intervention logic of the programme - Programme specific indicators are used to fill any substantial gap in the common indicators based on the intervention logic of the programme - The overall set of data recorded generates sufficient evidence to be used as a basis to estimate the impacts of the funds (i.e. impacts attributable to the programme with a clear causal link), thus paving the way for the ex-post evaluation -
	How was the involvement of the relevant partners ensured across all stages of the programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a strategy in place to identify, inform and reach the most relevant partners and which aims to ensure their balanced representation in the monitoring committee - Relevant partners have been identified and involved at the programming stage - Relevant partners participate in the monitoring committee in line with their role as defined by the relevant rules of procedure - Actions are put in place to enable the participation of the partners across all stages of the programme cycle - ...
	To what extent does the programme respect or promote in its implementation the horizontal principles?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are suitable organisational and procedural arrangements in place to ensure the respect of the charter of fundamental rights of the EU in the programme implementation - Art. 9(1) - There are suitable organisational and procedural arrangements in place which ensure that appropriate steps are taken to take into account and promote gender equality and gender mainstreaming across all stages of the preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the programme - Art. 9(2) - There are suitable organisational and procedural arrangements in place that allow taking appropriate steps to prevent discrimination on all grounds and across all stages of the programming cycle - Art. 9(3) - The programme has suitable arrangements that ensure that implementation is aligned with the objective promoting sustainable development, as set out in Article 11 TFEU, taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and the "do no significant harm" principle - Art. 9(4) - ...
	To what extent is the programme effective in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a communication strategy in place, with correctly identified target groups as well as relevant monitoring arrangements, including appropriate and measurable targets for the communication activities

EV. Criterion	Evaluation Question	Indicative Judgement Criteria (to be customised by the evaluators)
	communicating and disseminating on its opportunities as well as achievements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dissemination activities reach the target audience and are carried out through an appropriate mix of communication channels and platforms, including social media, and generate interactions - Funding opportunities are adequately advertised and reach the identified target group of potential beneficiaries - ...
Efficiency	To what extent does the programme support cost-effective measures?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The programme supports types of interventions and types of actions that are known to be cost-effective, based on available evidence, including relevant literature or the ex-post evaluation of the previous programme - The early evidence coming from the operations indicates that the cost per unit is in line or below existing benchmarks and estimates - The differences in the cost per unit among similar operations within the same programme can be explained and justified (e.g. by differences in the intensity or quality of the support offered, innovativeness, etc.) - ...
	To what extent is the management and control system efficient?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The management and control system, described as per the legal basis, aims to ensure efficiency in the selection of operations, management tasks, work of the monitoring committee, fulfilment of accounting function and recording and storing of data on each operation - The administrative burden is proportionate for all implementing actors (Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies), compared to the previous programming period/ similar services offered to comparable target groups without the support of the programme - The administrative burden is proportionate for all beneficiaries, compared to the previous programming period/ similar services offered to comparable target groups without the support of the programme - The administrative burden is proportionate for all end-users, e.g. compared to the previous programming period/ similar services offered to comparable target groups without the support of the programme - Absence of ‘gold-plating’ at the national level (e.g. from Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies, national Audit Authorities), i.e. requirements are not interpreted more restrictively than the legal basis or relevant documents providing methodological advice to the Member States and unless a justified reason exists - Absence of ‘gold-plating’ at the EU level, i.e. requirements are not interpreted more restrictively than in the legal basis and unless a justified reason exists - Simplified cost options used create simplification on the ground - Technical assistance is used to strengthen the management and control system when necessary ..
	To what extent is further simplification achievable? How?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is evidence of legal requirements, rules of procedures or practices that create disproportionate administrative burden at the EU or MS level, and concrete alternatives exist - There is room for additional use of simplified cost options and financing not linked to costs options - There is evidence of lack of coordination between the actors involved in the implementation of the programme, resulting in e.g. lack of coherence, increased administrative burden, etc. - There are issues with the electronic data exchange systems that create delays and can and should be addressed - ...

EV. Criterion	Evaluation Question	Indicative Judgement Criteria (to be customised by the evaluators)
Coherence	To what extent is the programme coherent with initiatives supported under its policy domain, in particular with support under the thematic facility across the different management modes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Structures, organisational arrangements or coordination mechanisms are in place which ensure coordination, complementarities and, where relevant, synergies across the different management modes of the same programme - Coordination mechanisms and arrangements are used regularly and to good effect - Alleged overlaps are in fact justified on objective grounds (e.g. same target group but different type of measure/ different need addressed/ different readiness of the type of funding support chosen) - The programme is coherent with the current policy agendas at EU and national level - There is evidence of inter-agency cooperation¹⁵ - ...
	To what extent is the programme coherent with other EU funds (including other Home Affairs funds), and in particular with EU's external action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Structures, organisational arrangements or coordination mechanisms are in place which ensure coordination, complementarities and, where relevant, synergies across other EU funds, in particular cohesion policy and EU's external action¹⁶ - Coordination mechanisms and arrangements are used regularly and to good effect - Alleged overlaps are in fact justified on objective grounds (e.g. same target group but different type of measure/ different need addressed/ different readiness of the type of funding support chosen) - The programme offers support to cross cutting policy agendas by complementing the support offered by other EU funds - ...
EU Added Value	To what extent is the programme generating EU added value?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The programme focuses on areas, interventions and target groups where the results at the EU level can go beyond what can be achieved by the Member States acting on their own. Amongst others: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o There is evidence of scope effects, i.e. of additional target groups addressed or additional types of intervention offered o There is evidence of scale effects, i.e. of a higher volume of services offered/end-users addressed o There is evidence of function effects, i.e. of learning and increased capacity to manage the provision of public support within the administrations involved - There is no evidence of dependency, i.e. of systematic lack of investment based on national resources for relevant services that are provided entirely through support from EU funds. - ...

¹⁵ Such as cooperation at EU level between the Member States, and between Member States and relevant EU bodies, offices and agencies, as well as cooperation at national level among the competent authorities within each Member State. Cfr also section 2(1) of the annual performance reports

¹⁶ In particular, e.g. the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe and the Instrument for Pre-accession assistance (IPA).

As explained further below, the evaluation questions and indicative judgement criteria cover a part of the so called “**evaluation matrix**”, which is the core of the evaluation exercise.

Further tailoring is expected by the Managing Authorities and independent evaluators in order to:

- reflect the policy context and intervention logic of each programme and policy domain;
- add any programme-specific aspects, in line with the evaluation plans and needs of the Managing Authority;
- match the indicative judgement criteria to the specific analytical methods, sources and indicators/descriptors identified.

An example of an **evaluation matrix** is presented in **section 1.4.2** below.

1.3. Who does what

As per the legal basis, the mid-term evaluation should be either carried out by external or internal experts that are functionally independent. So it is pivotal that the independence requirement is respected, i.e. that:

- evaluators are impartial and unbiased, as they are neither concerned with the implementation of the programme nor benefit from it, and are therefore able to draft the report based on a free and evidence-based assessment; and
- evaluators are functionally independent from the actors involved in the implementation of the programme.

In addition to the Managing Authority, several stakeholders are directly and indirectly involved in the evaluation process. In the table below, a standard and indicative distribution of roles is presented, across the different stages of the evaluation process. Whatever the specific arrangements at the Member State level, it is important that a balanced representation¹⁷ of the different stakeholders is ensured by design across the evaluation process.

Table 2 – overview of main actors and their role across the different phases of the mid-term evaluation

Actors/ Phases	Planning (Jan – Sept 2023)	Implementation (Sept 23 – Mar 24)	Follow up (mid ‘24 – mid ‘25)
European Commission	Provide methodological support on the definition of the general framework	Follow up and methodological advice	Ensure that the finding of the MS level evaluations feed into the EU level mid-term evaluation and future Impact Assessment Monitor on the follow up on the recommendations at the MS level

¹⁷ The possibility for partners, especially small organisations, to take an active role in the evaluation process may be limited by external constraints. It is however good practice to try to support them in this process.

Actors/ Phases	Planning (Jan – Sept 2023)	Implementation (Sept 23 – Mar 24)	Follow up (mid '24 – mid '25)
Managing Authorities ¹⁸	Prepare the terms of reference Select the independent evaluators Ensure the involvement of the partner in the design of the evaluation	Validate the intervention logic Provide data and feedback Monitor that the requirements of the Terms of Reference are fulfilled	Take into account any recommendation stemming from the evaluations and report to the monitoring committee on the programme implementation, or substantiate the reasons not to do so
Monitoring Committee/ Partners	Provide input and suggestions into the evaluation design Highlight their evaluation needs	Offer information or provide feedback to the independent evaluators as necessary Provide an opinion of the deliverables produced by the evaluation	As part of the monitoring committee, remain vigilant on the follow up of the recommendations
Independent evaluators	Prepare a methodological approach to the evaluation and submit it to the Managing Authority	Carry out the evaluation in line with the quality standards defined in the Terms of Reference and any requests for clarification from the Managing Authority	May be asked to disseminate the findings or clarify aspects (within the scope of their assignment and the timeframe of the contract).
Beneficiaries		Should be included in the consultation strategy and provide feedback (e.g. questionnaires, request for operation level data where necessary) Carry out their data provider role as per the legal obligations	Should be involved in the dissemination activities as relevant. May be a target group of a recommendation (e.g. capacity building)
Other stakeholders		Should be included in the consultation strategy, according to their different roles	Are involved in dissemination activities

As described further below in section 2.3, the evaluation plan will also clarify the roles and responsibilities of the different actors across the evaluation process. It may be that the leading role on the mid-term evaluation is assigned to a Steering Group/ Committee, normally chaired by the Managing Authority but which can also include other members of the Monitoring Committee by virtue of their role or expertise.

1.4. Recommended methods and approaches

1.4.1. Reconstruction of the intervention logic

In line with the [better regulation tool #46](#), section 2.3, the starting point for an evaluation is the reconstruction of the 'log frame' or 'intervention logic' of the programmes. An intervention logic is

¹⁸ As described below this table and in section 2.3, this role may be played by a dedicated steering group/ committee tasked with evaluation activities within the Monitoring Committee.

typically illustrated in the form of a diagram outlining the links between the needs identified, the support offered, its output and results and the policy objectives.¹⁹ It should therefore delineate the key “causal pathways” which characterise the programme. It is also normally accompanied with a narrative adding any necessary explanations for the chart, describing for instance the actors that are expected to be involved, the sequence of certain strands which may or may not run in parallel, alert on possible unintended effects or the nature and relevance of external factors.

In essence, the intervention logic aims to illustrate how the intervention is expected to work, including identifying possible external factors which may help or hinder the achievement of the objectives.

The intervention logic not only is a communication and analytical tool that helps discuss with stakeholders about the relationships between all relevant aspects of the policy intervention. But it also allows to identify key interdependencies, assumptions and factors that may have an impact on the implementation and achievement of the expected outcomes. In particular, the intervention logic is:

- a starting point for the definition and fine tuning of the evaluation questions and evaluation matrix;
- an analytical tool that can help logically identify:
 - o any drivers of the problems to be tackled by the programmes that are not addressed by the current set of inputs/ supported interventions;
 - o any factors that may have a bearing on the implementation of the programme, and whether these are accounted for by the programme strategy;
 - o related policy interventions which may concur to the achievement of the same policy objective or simply insist on the same/ similar target groups;
 - o any gaps in the monitoring system.

In connection to the last point, in the context of the mid-term evaluation, it is recommended that the intervention logic is also used to identify possible areas where more or different data may be needed to measure the progress towards the specific objectives of the programme, including possibly indicators complementary to those in the performance framework defined in the legal basis. For instance, the intervention logic may identify expected outcomes/ results that should result from the activities supported by the interventions and would contribute to the achievement of the objectives, but are not measured by the monitoring system. This is likely in the context of the 21-27 Home Affair Funds as certain result indicators (e.g. on training of staff) are not meant to capture a change that can allow to directly conclude on the progress towards the achievement of the related policy objective, but rather the direct and immediate outcome of the support offered on those who receive it (i.e. not the society as a whole).

1.4.2. Evaluation matrix

The core component of any methodological approach to an evaluation is the evaluation matrix. An evaluation matrix clarifies the link between the questions, the judgement criteria, the supporting indicators or descriptors to be used, the sources to be used and the related methodological approach.

A theoretical example of an evaluation matrix is outlined below, based on one of the evaluation questions presented above.

¹⁹ There is no mandatory structure for it, but a good practice is to consider the following: needs, objectives, inputs, activities, expected outputs, results, impacts, external factors, other relevant policies in the field

Table 3 – theoretical example of an evaluation matrix

Eval. Criteria	Evaluation question	Judgement Criteria	Descriptor or Indicator	Methodological Approach	Sources
Effectiveness	How was the involvement of the relevant partners ensured across all stages of the programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation?	<p>There is a strategy in place to identify, inform and reach the most relevant partners and which aims to ensure their balanced representation in the monitoring committee</p> <p>Relevant partners have been identified and involved at the programming stage</p> <p>Relevant partners participate in the monitoring committee in line with their role as defined by the relevant rules of procedure</p> <p>...</p>	<p>Existence of a strategy with dedicated outreach activities</p> <p>Number and types of stakeholders included in the list of MC members</p> <p>Attendance of partners to the MC meetings</p> <p>Normative judgements from potential and actual partners</p> <p>Share of relevant organisations responding to the survey that they were aware of the possibility to be part of the MC</p> <p>....</p>	<p>Mixed approach covering documentary evidence and normative judgements from stakeholders.</p> <p>Based on the intervention logic and legal basis, a range of potential partners will be identified.</p> <p>A survey/ ad-hoc interviews/ a focus group will be carried out to gather the feedback from the relevant actors.</p> <p>....</p>	<p><u>Primary sources</u></p> <p>Interviews/ Survey/ focus group with potential and actual partners, or relevant experts</p> <p>Interview with the MA</p> <p><u>Secondary sources</u></p> <p>MS programme</p> <p>MA website (list of committee members)</p> <p>Annual performance report submitted in 2023 and 2024, section 1.1</p> <p>Documentation from the monitoring committee</p> <p>....</p>

A preliminary or partial evaluation matrix may be included by the Managing Authorities in the Terms of Reference for this assignment, in order to define in more concrete terms the expectations for the evaluation. It remains, of course, for the independent evaluators to complete/ complement and finalise the evaluation matrix. In any event, this tool will allow the Managing Authority to gauge any methodological choices made by the evaluators and thereby the quality of the evidence-base for the conclusions and recommendations.

1.4.3. Needs assessment, stakeholders mapping and consultation strategy

The mid-term evaluation occurs at a time where most of the effects generated by the programme are yet to materialise. However, it can and should be a convenient opportunity to verify whether the strategy defined during the programme design and negotiations is still fit for purpose.

The starting point to assess the adequacy of the strategy is the reconstruction of the intervention logic.

In turn, the intervention logic is rooted in a review of the most important needs that the programme should address, as well as their root causes.

Whilst a needs assessment entails a combination of different sources and analytical techniques, it is inherently interlinked with the identification of any third parties that may or should be directly or indirectly concerned by the programme, given their role or condition in the policy domain that is covered by the programme.

A stakeholders mapping is thus essential to the proper review of the needs that the programme is set to address, but it is equally important to make sure that those who could contribute to the success of the policy intervention (as well as its failure) are correctly accounted for and involved as necessary. Within the pool of relevant stakeholders, the programme strategy normally also identifies the groups that should be addressed with highest priority, i.e. the so called “target groups”.

For the purpose of the mid-term evaluation study, the stakeholder mapping and a critical review of their needs and motives is also instrumental to the definition of a consultation strategy, and should notably allow:

- sorting the stakeholders by their level of interest, influence, and expertise on the subject;
- a correct triangulation of the normative judgements. Different actors may respond strategically to questions on the programme (i.e. have vested interests), or simply present the same matter from complementary or opposing angles;
- reducing the risk of omitting ‘underserved’ groups; and
- the identification of existing networks, existing stakeholders lists, expert groups, to enrich the evidence basis.

Thus, mapping and consulting the stakeholders is an integral component of a needs assessment, together with a review of the relevant literature and available evidence on the theme, socio-economic indicators, etc. Specialised techniques can be considered by the independent evaluators where relevant (e.g. social network analysis methods). Further methodological advice on the stakeholder consultation can be found in the [better regulation toolbox, especially the tool #52](#), section three. Some inspiration could also be drawn from tool #53 and #54.

1.4.4. Analysis of financial and physical progress

In addition to the review of any relevant evidence generated outside of the programme implementation (e.g. academic and grey²⁰ literature, normative judgements from the relevant stakeholders), all evaluations should fully leverage on the data that is generated by the monitoring system of the Home Affairs Funds, in line with the requirements laid down in the legal basis. These sources include, as a minimum:

- information on financial progress²¹, as stored in the monitoring system of the Managing Authorities and reported in SFC2021;
- information from the common output and result indicators (also referred to as indicators on “physical progress”) laid out in Annex VIII of the fund specific regulations and reported in SFC2021;
- information from any programme-specific output and result indicators stored in the monitoring system of the Managing Authority;
- information included in the annual performance reports; and
- any thematic study, survey or research activity carried out in the context of the programme implementation.

When assessing quantitative data and information on the progress of the programme measured by the standard monitoring system, it is critical that such a review be fully informed by knowledge on the functioning of the monitoring systems, its rules, practices and, particularly, any related limitations. Amongst others, it is worth recalling:

²⁰ Research and materials developed and published outside of peer-reviewed journals, e.g. by institutions, practitioners, non-governmental organisations etc.

²¹ This includes the total eligible cost of the operation selected for support, the total eligible expenditure declared by beneficiaries and paid but also data coming from the payment applications and accounts.

- the importance of contextualising the information on performance based on qualitative information on the programme implementation;
- the need to take into account the time lag between the start of the operations, the generation of outputs and results and the materialisation of effects;²²
- the need to critically assess the quality of the information generated by the monitoring system, including e.g. due to the fact that the categorisation by type of intervention is based on the logic that only the “dominant code” is used²³; and
- need to look at the progress towards the milestones but more broadly at the adequacy of the target setting to make sure that the picture coming from the data reflects reality and can inform policy making²⁴.

The annual performance reports and any discussions held during monitoring committees can be used to contextualise the analysis of quantitative data. Triangulation with qualitative information, especially from actors directly involved in the implementation of the operations traced by the monitoring system, should always be ensured.

1.4.5. Summing up and research limitations

In coming to the studies’ conclusions, the independent evaluators should always aim to produce a balanced assessment highlighting:

- the main findings, rooted in the intervention logic of the programme and stemming from a full triangulation of qualitative and quantitative evidence, as well as a critical review of the normative judgements from the consultation activities. The evaluators should also account for the impact of non-response on the possibility to draw representative conclusions;
- any caveats and limitations to the findings based on a critical review of the methodological approach, e.g. sources that are not available on time or not fully reliable, any missing information that would be necessary to draw certain conclusions; etc.
- lessons learned, based on the critical reflections above.

It is also recommended that the mid-term evaluations are used to identify good practices, particularly so if these are connected to any policy suggestion/ recommendation/ lessons learned, to make the evaluation more informative and offer tangible examples of what could be done.

1.5. Format and recommended structure

A degree of standardisation in the presentation of the evaluation reports is highly recommended, to allow the use and comparison of the evidence generated by the studies (e.g. in the context of meta-analyses). Therefore, even though the evaluation module in SFC2021 will be unstructured²⁵, it is recommended that the final evaluation reports for the mid-term evaluations follow the structure presented below:

²² Any attempt to calculate unit costs or success rates of the interventions should be done by making reference to a comparable reference population. For instance, if the 100% of the operation has been funded and only 50% of its outputs or results have been recorded until now, a simple comparison between the total costs and the total output and results would be misleading and should be avoided.

²³ More granular information in possession of the Managing Authority may be used to account for this.

²⁴ The achievement ratio (or target achievement) of milestone and targets can be a key indicator of the progress of the operations towards the objectives of the programmes. However, the information is only helpful if the assumptions and methodology used to calculate the milestone or target values are of good quality. Therefore, any analysis of target achievement should be backed by consideration to the quality of the milestone and target values.

²⁵ As per the case of the submission of the annual performance reports

- executive summary, by evaluation criteria, covering key findings and suggestions/ recommendations;
- background, including:
 - o policy background (literature review, needs assessment and description of the fund);
 - o summary of the methodological approach, delineating the main features of the consultation strategy, analytical methods used and main limitations (the full methodological approach, evaluation matrix, bibliography etc. should normally be placed in an Annex);
- reconstruction and description of the intervention logic;
- state of play (progress of operations, from a procedural, financial and physical point of view);
- evaluation findings, by criteria, question and Specific Objective;
- conclusions, covering lessons learned and related policy suggestions/ recommendations; and
- examples of good practices.

Since evaluation studies normally collect, review and assess an extensive amount of information, it is paramount that the independent evaluators make their best efforts to:

- draft a report that is clear, well structured and concise (the body of the report should not exceed 100 pages. More detailed information should be included in the Annexes, if relevant);
- cross-reference any policy suggestions/ recommendations with the related evaluation findings, to help the reader gauge the type, quality and coverage of the underlying evidence;
- draft a concise and decision-oriented executive summary, covering any lessons learned and their supporting evidence; and
- avoid the use of jargon and acronyms to the extent possible, particularly in the executive summary.

1.6. Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference (ToR, but also ‘Task Specifications’) are a key document defining all aspects of how an evaluation will be conducted. ToR are developed during the planning phase of the evaluation process and are used to hire the evaluator on a competitive basis. Ensuring a high quality evaluation depends on how accurate and well-specified the ToR are.

They should normally stay within a length of 10-15 pages and cover:

- the background, objectives and audience of the evaluation, explaining the links among them;
- the evaluation questions (and indicative judgement criteria, for further customisation);
- any required or recommended methodological approach, also specifying, where relevant²⁶, what are the main tasks expected from the evaluators (e.g. reconstruction of the intervention logic, focus groups, interview or surveys, dissemination webinars, data mining/ analysis, social network analysis, etc.) and the main deliverables;
- the available sources (e.g. monitoring data, annual performance reports, documents of the monitoring committees, previous evaluations or studies, ad-hoc surveys etc.);

²⁶ The Managing Authority is free to decide whether to draft a rather prescriptive or more open section on the required tasks and methodological approach, hence relying on the judgement of the independent evaluators for the identification of the most appropriate mix of analytical tools and sources necessary to respond to the evaluation questions. Whatever the choice, the Managing Authority should always have an sound understanding of the reasonable methodological approaches which could be used to generate good quality evidence to address the evaluation questions. This is necessary not least for a proper assessment of the technical offers received by the candidate independent evaluators.

- the timeline for the main tasks, deliverables²⁷ and meetings;
- the management arrangements (e.g. role and responsibilities of the evaluator and evaluation client, the role and involvement of other parties);
- composition of the evaluation team and required competencies; and
- the resources available to conduct the evaluation and the arrangements for the payment.

In order to provide an additional safety net and ensure that the contractors' final report is of high editorial quality, it is recommended to consider including the following clause in the ToR: *"In view of its publication, the final report by the contractors must be of high editorial quality. If the contractor does not manage to produce a final report of high editorial quality within the timeframe defined by the contract, the contracting authority can decide to have the final report professionally edited at the expense of the contractor (e.g. by deducting these costs from the final payment)."*

1.7. Procedural aspects and next steps

As per Figure 1 at the beginning of this note, the Managing Authorities are invited to:

- provide feedback to this draft note during and/ or as a follow up to the webinar;
- take note of any revisions included in this document as a result of the discussions and shared with the Home Affairs Funds committee;
- work on the Terms of Reference of the mid-term evaluations, leveraging upon the methodological advice contained in this note and its forthcoming consolidation;
- refer to their Geographical Desk Officers across all phases of the preparation and implementation of their mid-term evaluations in case of doubts or need for clarification;
- assess their internal needs also in terms of administrative capacity and expertise to manage the evaluation studies as well as the possible need to rely on technical assistance for training or methodological support.

The Commission will follow up with the Managing Authorities on a forthcoming webinar on the ex-post evaluations '14-20, on which occasion further doubts can be shared and a state of play on the preparatory works will be gathered.

As per the legal basis, the formal deadline for the submission of the mid-term evaluation is March 2024. If, due to the specific situation of certain programmes or objective difficulties in the contracting out of the study in the early stages of the programme implementation, Managing Authorities were unable to meet such deadline for the final report, ad-hoc exchanges with the Commission should be launched to assess the possibility of a revised schedule as well as the sharing of any intermediate deliverables by the legal deadline.

The transmission of the mid-term evaluations will occur via SFC2021. An unstructured module is planned – hence the Managing Authorities should be able to upload the report and any relevant annexes directly into the SFC2021 system. Further communications will follow on this subject, to cover any additional practical instructions on the upload of the evaluations.

²⁷ It is always recommended to plan intermediate deliverables such as: (i) an inception report, presenting a fine-tuning of the methodological approach and a consolidated reconstruction of the intervention logic/ assessment of possible information gaps and remedy strategies (ii) an interim and/ or a draft final report, where the intermediate findings can be reviewed with those responsible for the evaluation in due time.

2. EVALUATION PLAN OF THE 2021-2027 PROGRAMMES

2.1. Rationale

The main purpose of an evaluation plan is to make sure that adequate evidence for the policy makers and programme managers is available to them in time to make well informed policy and management decisions. In essence, the evaluation plans aims to make sure that there is information available on what works well or less well, and recommendations on how to improve on that, by the time this information can be used to good effect.

The evaluation plan is a strategic document, outlining the “evidence gathering” strategy in line with the intervention logic of the programme, which evolves along with the new knowledge generated by the monitoring and evaluation activities progressively being carried out.

The evaluation plan is also meant to increase the quality and standardisation in the evidence produced across programmes and Member States, so that it is possible to run meta-analyses²⁸, comparing and contrasting findings coming from different policy and implementation context, identifying patterns and devising evidence-based proposal for improvements.

It is worth mentioning that, over recent years, the Home Affairs Funds have seen a substantial revision and strengthening of their monitoring arrangements, with increasing efforts on data collection, data quality and the performance-orientation of the funds. This followed the recommendations included in the interim evaluations ‘14-20 and subsequent reports, including from the European Court of Auditors, as well as the inclusion into the framework of the Common Provisions Regulation.

In this context, the evaluation plan comes as a novelty for the Home Affairs Funds. This can require, amongst others, to follow a gradual and iterative approach to the planning of the evaluations, as the knowledge on evaluation methods, questions, techniques and data availability is likely to evolve with the finalisation of the set-up of the monitoring systems and, especially, the mid-term evaluations. Therefore, in presenting the structure and contents of the evaluation plan in the sections below, attention is also paid to areas where Managing Authorities may need to wait until the mid-term evaluation to finalise their overall evaluation strategy.

2.2. Scope

To fulfil its purpose, an evaluation plan should:

- **include a conceptualisation of the evaluation strategy**, as good quality evaluation can only be done based on:
 - o a sound review of the intervention logic of the programme and the related existing evidence, to identify areas where knowledge gaps may exist;
 - o relevant and timely data, which, in turn, needs to be identified and gathered via monitoring activities according to the specific methods envisaged to address specific evaluation needs;
 - o adequate techniques, tailored to the evaluation questions and data availability. To name but one, the ex-post evaluation 21-27 will require an assessment of the impact of the programmes. Impact evaluation may require the application of experimental or quasi-experimental techniques that aim to identify a control group and reconstruct a hypothetical situation – the so called ‘counterfactual’ scenario, i.e. a fictitious representation of what would have happened had the intervention not taken place. These

²⁸ A meta-analysis is essentially a study that uses other studies as its unit of observation. It is a comparative review that aims to generalise context-specific findings with a view to drawing common lessons.

techniques may need to rely on micro-data or other quantitative and econometric approaches that, in turn, are based on specific assumptions and require advance planning;

- adequate resources and expertise: time constraints and market conditions can affect the generation of evidence that is of good quality and can really provide input in the policy cycle. Data protection issues may also impact the possibility to apply certain techniques, therefore support may be planned also to tackle such issues.
- **be updated as new needs are identified and / or gaps appear**, as informing the policy cycle is an iterative process and research carried out can identify gaps to be filled in subsequent studies;
- **clarify the distribution of roles and responsibilities**, to make sure that all the actors involved in the evaluation process are aware of their respective roles and can plan their activities accordingly;
- **pay heed to the follow up and dissemination of the evaluation findings**, as knowledge generated via evaluation is only useful if it contributes to better awareness and improved decision making.

In terms of the objective scope of the evaluation plan, as per the legal basis:

- it can cover more than one programme;
- it should cover at least the mid-term evaluation and retrospective impact evaluation (and the entire timeframe of the programme);
- it can cover additional elements, such as:
 - dedicated thematic studies (e.g., the evaluation of communication and visibility activities, studies on simplification measures, studies on the implementation of horizontal principles, ad-hoc surveys; etc.);
 - sampling methods to fill in the data for the result indicators collected 3 months after the exit from the operation;
- for each evaluation or study included in the evaluation plan, it should provide adequate information on the aim and scope of the study, methods and data requirements, duration and tentative date, estimated budget etc., as per section 2.3 below.

As already anticipated, and further explained in section 2.3 and 2.5 below, **it is not expected that the evaluation plans will cover impact evaluations in great detail at the time of their first submission.** The focus will thus lie on the organisational arrangements and evaluation framework and, in terms of the planned studies, the mid-term evaluation, any thematic or ad-hoc studies, as well as methods to collect data for the “longer-term” result indicators (i.e. those collected three months after the participants left the operations) or surveys to fill in gaps in the standard monitoring systems²⁹.

2.3. Structure

Therefore, and in line with the practice in the other programmes covered by the CPR, an evaluation plan should typically be organised around three main elements:

- **Objectives, coverage and coordination.** This section should normally describe:
 - the **purpose** of the plan, so that all the involved stakeholders are aware of it;

²⁹ It may be that, based on the review of the intervention logic, certain relevant outcomes are not fully measured by the monitoring system of the programmes (e.g. placement outcomes of migrants in integration measures, user satisfaction for system developed, trainings offered etc.). It is natural that not all the relevant data can be collected on a systematic basis due to the cost and burden related to systematic data collection activities. This is where ad-hoc surveys (e.g. once or twice during the programming period) may help generate relevant knowledge on important outcomes of the programme, at a proportionate cost.

- its **coverage**, thus specifying which programmes and studies it covers, what are the evaluation criteria to be addressed, what are the priority areas of research. This is an important element as it implies reviewing the currently existing evidence (e.g. from previous evaluations or relevant studies) and focus the plan on any existing gaps;
 - **coordination** and exchange with other managing authorities on planning of evaluations, methods, exchange of findings. Coordination with relevant partners such as universities and research centres should also be considered in this context.
- **Evaluation Framework:**
- **responsibilities and governance:** to clarify who is in charge of the implementation of the plan,³⁰ whether specific sub-groups tasked with evaluation activities exist within the monitoring committee, what is the involvement of the partners (including in the sub-groups concerned with evaluation activities, and in line with Article 16 of the European Code of Conduct on partnerships³¹), what is the source of evaluation expertise.
 - **overall budget and timetable:** this is to identify appropriate resources as well as the timeliness of the information, including in the case of dedicated data-collection exercises.
 - **criteria to select the independent evaluators or technical assistance:** this is to clarify the arrangements used to make sure that the evaluators are functionally independent from the authority responsible for the implementation of the programme and that there is no bias, i.e. that they are free to present their results without undue interference while still taking into account the comments from the steering group leading the evaluation; it should also serve to outline any quality requirement for the individuals or companies contracted out for this exercise;
 - **other:** whether a training programme for those involved in the evaluation work is foreseen, communication and dissemination activities, a quality management strategy.
- **planned evaluations, studies and data collection activities:** this section should list the planned evaluation, studies and data collection activities and provide more detail into them. As a minimum, the list will cover the mid-term evaluation and the retrospective/ex-post evaluation, but thematic studies and other ad-hoc research activities can be included (and should be included whenever they are planned). For each study/ evaluation/ related activity, this section should clarify:
- **The rationale, scope and evaluation/research questions**
 - **Methods and data requirements:** particular heed should be paid to the area of impact evaluation, to identify possible data gaps (e.g. micro-data on participants or on a valid control group)
 - **Duration and tentative date**
 - **Estimated Budget**

³⁰ It is good practice to nominate a responsible of the evaluation within the Managing Authority and a back-up in order to ensure the continuity of the service. It is also good practice to include a steering group for the evaluation work, which could be a sub-group of the monitoring committee. The SG should normally be balanced in terms of the technical expertise as well as the different stakeholders that may be represented within it.

³¹ As per Article 16 (1) of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds “*Managing authorities shall involve the relevant partners in the evaluation of programmes within the framework of the monitoring committees and, where appropriate, specific working groups established by the monitoring committees for this purpose*”

There is no minimum or maximum length for an evaluation plan. Practice shows that it can normally range from 5 to over 50 pages, including annexes. In any event, the evaluation plan should be intended as a sufficiently flexible tool, that can and should be updated as new needs arise.

In addition, the extent to which certain evaluation questions or methods for evaluations that happen at a distance in the future can be detailed should be proportionate to the status of the programmes and level of knowledge on the evaluation needs. See in particular section 2.5 for a description of the expectations on the first submission of the evaluation plan.

However, to ensure good quality evaluations **planning is pivotal. Evaluation** is only useful to policy making if it focuses on the main knowledge needs but, to do so, it **requires adequate arrangements to collect systematically data from the ground, or plan in advance specific research strategies.**

The drafting of the evaluation plan is the **opportunity to reflect on the needs and necessary steps to address them**, with the support of the monitoring committee, partners and the European Commission.

2.4. Who does what

The different actors involved in the drafting, assessment, implementation and review of the evaluation plan are summarised in the table below.

Table 4 – overview of main actors and roles across the different phases of an evaluation plan

Actors/ Phases	Preparation (Up to 12 months from the decision approving the programme)	Review and Acceptance (From 2 months before the presentation of the EV.P to the MC for approval)	Implementation and follow up (From the approval of the MC, until the end of the programming period)
European Commission	Provide methodological support and define the structure	Provide comments on drafts	Monitor implementation of the plan at the performance review meetings Can request or recommend reviews according in case of substantial contextual changes
Managing Authority	Draft the plan, with the help of technical assistance if necessary	Submit the plan to the EC via SFC and adjust where necessary	Monitor the implementation, report on it at Monitoring committees and performance review meetings Draft action plans if necessary
Independent evaluators/ Technical assistance	May support the drafting or review of the evaluation plan	May assist MAs in the review of the evaluation plan	Carry out the evaluations/ thematic studies/ data collection activities
Monitoring Committee	May provide inputs and comments on drafts	Approve the first version and any subsequent revisions of the evaluation plan	Monitor that the evaluation plan is advancing according to plans, in the context of the monitoring committee meetings and performance review meetings, in line with the European Code of Conduct on Partnership ³² Can contribute to the drafting of action plans that are based on the findings/recommendations from the evaluations

³² <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/93c4192d-aa07-43f6-b78e-f1d236b54cb8>

Actors/ Phases	Preparation (Up to 12 months from the decision approving the programme)	Review and Acceptance (From 2 months before the presentation of the EV.P to the MC for approval)	Implementation and follow up (From the approval of the MC, until the end of the programming period)
Stakeholders	May be consulted ad-hoc to gather feedback on evaluation needs.		Provide ad-hoc input in the evaluation activities Are informed about the conclusions and follow up of the evaluations Should be able to consult or download the latest approved evaluation plan on the Managing Authority website.

2.5. Process and suggested approach to the first submission of the evaluation plan

The evaluation plans need to be submitted to the Monitoring Committee within one year of the decision approving the programme.

The Commission services do not formally approve the plan. However, in order to allow the COM to carry out its advisory role and provide suggestions on the plan, Managing Authorities are kindly invited to submit, whenever possible, a draft version of the plan via SFC2021 in the dedicated module under Evaluation/ Evaluation Plan³³ two months before the planned Monitoring Committee for its approval. The module in SFC is unstructured, and allows uploading files in different formats. Managing Authorities should upload a word version of the document for the review of Commission Services.

Whilst there are no strict deadlines as there is no formal procedure for the review of the plan by the Commission, the Commission should provide feedback within one month to allow the Managing Authority to take into account the comments and to send a version for approval to the Monitoring Committee according to the dedicated rules of procedure.

If, due to time constraints, it is not possible for the Managing Authority to upload the evaluation plan in SFC2021 two months ahead of its submission to the Monitoring Committee, the plan will be submitted to the Monitoring Committee and uploaded in SFC2021 concurrently. The Commission should normally provide suggestions within one month.³⁴

The evaluation plan should already formally cover the impact evaluation to be carried out by June 2029. However, the specific features of an impact evaluation³⁵ mean that further work may be necessary to develop a standard framework for such purpose, including based on the findings of the mid-term

³³ The document type to be selected is “Evaluation Plan – Article 44”. The document created by the Managing Authorities should be “sent” to the Commission for it to be visible, otherwise it will only be visible to the Managing Authority. As the module is unstructured, there is no versioning applied (e.g. 1.0, 1.1 etc.). The fields “Version approved by MC” and “Approval date” should remain blank for the versions that have not been yet approved.

³⁴ The Managing Authority and Commission services should normally liaise to agree on a suitable schedule for the drafting of any suggestions, as well as submission of any revised evaluation plan for the approval of the Monitoring Committee.

³⁵ For example, the need for an assessment of the funds contribution to the policy objectives³⁵ and an investigation into the “attribution” question, i.e. to what extent the observed changed can be ascribed to the programme and not to external factors. It is worth recalling that Contribution analysis is a typology of evaluation that focuses on the theory of change, investigating the logical links between the different elements of an intervention logic and should respond to the question of “why” certain changes have happened with the contribution of the programme. It relies mostly on qualitative evidence and cannot precisely disentangle the extent to which the observed changed can be ascribed to the intervention or to contextual factors.

evaluations 21-27 and the review of the monitoring systems. Notably, one of the questions of the mid-term evaluation refers to the suitability of the current monitoring arrangements to generate adequate evidence for an assessment of the impacts by the end of the programming period. The evaluation findings are expected to provide input into the design of the impact evaluation. Important experience on the assessment of the impact of the programmes will also be gained in the context of the ex-post evaluations 14-20, to be submitted by the end of 2024.

Therefore, Managing Authority are suggested to use the opportunity of the first version of the evaluation plan to start reflecting on their overall evaluation needs, framework and dissemination strategy. The detailed list of evaluations will include the ex-post evaluations as per the legal basis, but will cover in greater detail: (i) the mid-term evaluation; (ii) any thematic or ad-hoc studies; as well as (iii) dedicated data collection activities (e.g. in the case of result indicators to be collected three months after leaving an operation). Managing Authorities are invited to wait until methodological advice on the impact evaluation is produced by the Commission, also based on the evidence stemming from the mid-term evaluation, before detailing their full methodological approach to it in the evaluation plan.

Finally, Managing Authorities are invited to upload the consolidated and approved version of the plan in SFC2021, ticking the box “Version approved by MC” and indicating the approval date.