

# Evaluation Helpdesk 2024 Summer School

## Agenda

Bologna 26-28 June 2024

This year's Summer School is a 3-day event and will be held in Bologna from the 26 to the 28 of June.

Based on suggestions from a survey of potential participants and insights collected from ongoing support to the Managing Authorities, three primary themes have been identified for the 2024 Summer School:

1. ***Evaluation and policy cycle – ensuring that evaluations are relevant and useful for the policymakers*** - This theme promotes the awareness of the role of MAs, or evaluation units, within the entire policy cycle rather than considering the evaluation as a series of separate activities, confined only to evaluation management at discrete moments in time, with the objective to connect the evaluation to the needs of the policymakers. Evaluations are embedded in a policy-making and policy delivery system that is not limited to the commissioning of evaluations. This theme spans the entire policy, programming and evaluation cycle and includes many different aspects (e.g. the alignment of policy-making and programming with evaluation design and commissioning; modes of engagement and consultation with stakeholders, intermediaries and beneficiaries). The focus will be on the use of evaluations and how to make evaluations useful throughout the policy cycle.
2. ***Making the Evaluation Plan operational – evaluability and design*** - In the current phase, MAs are moving from evaluation planning to evaluation implementation. This raises a series of issues: translating the evaluation design from theory into practice; identifying interdependencies between different evaluations in an evaluation plan; and identifying possible synergies with other ongoing and parallel regional and national evaluations where they exist. This has come up strongly as an issue in Helpdesk bilateral meetings and is a challenge for the 2021-2027 period, where NRRPs co-exist with cohesion policy programmes. Other key decisions that are not always considered are the way evaluations are 'packaged', whether a separate contractor is expected to conduct an 'evaluability' exercise or review data availability or prepare generic 'theories of change'. In the design of evaluations, the use of big data and AI is becoming ever more feasible, opening up new possibilities for collecting evidence of the outcomes of programmes and analysing it that were not available before, or only at substantial cost. They are, however, far from being widely available or applicable. This module will also identify common issues and pitfalls encountered in the implementation of evaluation plans and the main ways of mitigating risks and ensuring evaluation quality.
3. ***How best to evaluate different types of interventions, policy instruments and programmes*** - Considering the extensive library of past evaluations accumulated by the Helpdesk and reviewing the outputs of the ex-post WPs it is

striking how different the evaluation challenges raised by different evaluation 'objects' are. Infrastructure (of different kinds), territorial policy instruments, vouchers for consultants to support ICT or just transition are clearly not the same thing! However, MAs often design and manage evaluations of such varied 'objects' as if they were the same thing. Different 'objects' can address different evaluation questions, the methods chosen to answer them having implications for the way evaluations are designed, managed, and implemented. This has been highlighted in the ex-post evaluation where there has been a need to match evaluation approaches with the policy instruments and programmes being evaluated. In this respect, particular attention will be paid to the interventions for which it is possible to use quasi-experimental and Randomised Control Trial (RCT) methods and the questions which can be addressed by these.

In addition, a master class will be devoted to the use of **macroeconomic models** in impact evaluations, the issues which can be explored with them and their limitations.

## **The format**

The feedback received from the survey and interactions with several Managing Authorities (MAs) reaffirms the effectiveness of the format used in previous Summer Schools – i.e. of a series of modules comprising plenary sessions, discussions, and working groups. The focus remains on participants sharing their experience on the issues they have faced, supplemented by practical exercises and interactive activities.

Given the increasing maturity and expertise of many of the Summer School participants, the aim is to encourage a high level of engagement. Participants will be contacted in advance to facilitate their active involvement, including sharing their experience and reflections and highlighting issues for discussion. Each day will focus on a particular theme:

- Wednesday 26, on the evaluation and policy cycle;
- Thursday 27, on making the evaluation plan operational;
- Friday 28, on the different evaluation 'objects' and macroeconomic models.

On the first day, the Summer School will start with an introductory presentation on the challenges which have confronted cohesion policy (CP) evaluations in recent years, as a background to the three training modules. These include shifts in development policies, with more attention paid to climate change, and environmental aspects more generally, external shocks and uncertainties, socio-economic inequalities, and demographic change, along with upcoming policy milestones like the 2021-2027 mid-term review and the review of CP for the post-2027 period.

To ensure coherence across modules, common programme examples will be used in plenary sessions and working groups. This approach will enable participants to take on the roles of MAs and evaluation units in organising and implementing evaluations. The inclusion of various types of programme in the working groups will reflect the diversity of evaluation objects and their influence on the evaluation process.

The Summer School is not intended to be a place where beginners are taught the basics of evaluation but one where it is possible for those involved in commissioning and

managing evaluations to explore issues of interest, share experience and get advice on problems they face. In this respect, the different levels of knowledge among participants is a challenge, which is becoming increasingly acute as evaluation units across the EU gain experience and as more participants are 'returnees', in the sense that they have attended previous summer schools, in many cases two or three or more. The challenge is to retain the interest of more experienced participants, to enable them to broach more advanced issues and to get new insights from the Summer School without 'losing' the less experienced participants and ensuring that they gain from attending as well. However, the composition of participants in terms of their knowledge and experience is unknown until it becomes clear who is intending to attend and what their profiles are. If there are a significant number of participants with little experience or knowledge of evaluation, then an introductory session might be arranged for them at the beginning of the Summer School together with special assistance in the various sessions. Material to read will also be sent out in advance so that they can prepare and at least get some understanding of the basics beforehand.

## The agenda

A draft agenda is set out below. It is composed of a brief introductory session and three blocks on the themes listed above:

- **Introductory session** on the challenges of cohesion policy and cohesion policy evaluation
- **Block 1 Evaluation and policy cycle**
  - Module 1.1 Ensuring evaluations are relevant, useable and used in practice
  - Module 1.2 How to design and implement useful evaluations
- **Block 2 - Making the evaluation plan operational**
  - Module 2.1 Evaluability and feasibility, new tools (AI and big data)
  - Module 2.2 Commissioning and structuring evaluation portfolios
  - Module 2.3 Integrating related EU, ERDF and national evaluations
- **Block 3 - Evaluating different types of interventions, policy instruments and programmes: 'integrated' evaluations and methodological choices**

All of the above 'blocks' will be guided by Helpdesk inputs but will be participant-led, i.e. building on the experience of participants.

Participants will be divided into working groups of no more than 8 participants. Each group will be moderated by a participant with a relatively high level of evaluation experience. Helpdesk trainers will be available to give advice when needed.

<b>Tuesday, 25 June</b>		
<b>Time</b>	<b>Address</b>	
20:00: <b>Welcome drink and dinner</b>	Mercure Bologna Centro, viale Pietramellara 59, Bologna.	
<b>Day 1 – Wednesday, 26 June</b>		
<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Notes</b>
9:15	Plenary session – <b>Opening of the 2024 Summer school</b> (15 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Welcome and introduction to the Summer School (Host country, EC)</li> <li>– Helpdesk team introduces the agenda for the 3 days</li> </ul>
9:30 <b>Introductory session on the perspectives of the CP evaluation</b>	Plenary session – <b>Presentation</b> “CP evaluation in changing times” - Helpdesk (20 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Cohesion policy (CP) takes place in a context where major technological and socio-economic transitions are urgently required in the face of climate change, economic transformation and new geopolitical challenges. Cohesion policy itself is also likely to face calls for reform in the post-2027 period. These developments require a critical examination of evaluation priorities and strategies and how CP evaluations can contribute to policy learning.</li> </ul>
9:50	<b>Discussion Panel</b> (EC, Emilia-Romagna, Helpdesk and one participant) (25 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Comments and interventions by panel members</li> </ul>
10:15 <b>Block 1 - Evaluation and policy cycle</b>	Plenary session – <b>Presentation by 4 participants</b> of how evaluation contributes to the needs of stakeholders in local national and EU policy making (60 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Volunteer participants will share their experience of how evaluation can meet the needs of policy makers and other stakeholders at different stages of the policy cycle (e.g. when a programme is designed and launched, during implementation to inform programme governance, or to prepare for the post-2027 period)</li> </ul>
11:15	<i>Coffee break (15 min)</i>	

11:30 <b>Block 1 - Evaluation and policy cycle - Module 1.1 Ensuring the evaluation is relevant, useable and used (continues)</b>	Plenary session – <b>Creating a 'user-friendly' environment, responsive to policymakers' needs</b> - Helpdesk (20 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Connecting the evaluation to the needs of policymakers is key to making it useful. Other actors, such as intermediary organisations, beneficiaries, or citizens at large, should also be considered.</li> <li>– Evaluators can help create an environment in which policy actors learn how evaluation can be useful to them and ask relevant questions.</li> <li>– Actors get more out of evaluation if they are continuously involved.</li> </ul>
	<b>Introduction to Working Group 1</b> – Helpdesk (10 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Presentation of the 3 case studies which will be used in the working groups: 1) innovation in SMEs; 2) climate adaptation infrastructure; 3) deep heat renovation of buildings.</li> <li>– Guidance on how to conduct the working groups.</li> </ul>
	Parallel Working Group 1– <b>Planning involvement of the stakeholders and use of the evaluations</b> (60 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Participants will be divided into subgroups and presented with a range of potential uses of evaluation by different actors. They will develop strategies for effectively involving actors in the process.</li> </ul>
13:00	<i>Lunch Break (1 hour)</i>	
14:00	Plenary session - <b>Reporting back on WG 1 discussions</b> (60 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– A rapporteur from each WG presents their approach to the problem discussed in WG1. Q&amp;A</li> </ul>
15:00 <b>Block 1 - Module 1.2 How to design and implement useful evaluations</b>	Plenary session - <b>Key elements for designing and implementing a useful evaluation</b> Presentation by Helpdesk and plenary discussion (20 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The presentation will focus on the key elements that determine usefulness and use of evaluations, such as good evaluation questions, capacity to answer them, a collaborative and responsive evaluation process, system in place for involving stakeholders, arrangements to following up on recommendations; policy context and governance; timing.</li> </ul>
	Plenary session – <b>Introduction to WG 2</b> - Helpdesk (10 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Guidance on how to conduct the working groups.</li> </ul>
	Parallel Working Group 2 (60 min) – <b>Managing the evaluation process to maximise usefulness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Participants will be presented with an evaluation scenario, in which they will need to find responsive solutions to a series of expectations and issues in the evaluation process, in order to make the evaluation more useful.</li> </ul>
16:30	<i>Coffee break (15 min)</i>	

16:45 <b>Module 1.2 (continues)</b>	Plenary session - <b>Reporting back on WG 2</b> (30 min)	- A rapporteur from each WG presents their approach to the problem discussed in WG2. Q&A
17:15	Plenary session - <b>Wrap up of the first day</b> (15 min)	- Reflections from Helpdesk and DG Regio

Day 2 Thursday, 27 June		
Time	Activity	Notes
9:15	Plenary session – <b>Introduction to the second day</b> - Helpdesk (15 min)	- Feedback on the first day of the Summer School and practical instructions on the second day
9:30 <b>Block 2 - Making the evaluation plan operational - Module 2.1 Evaluability and feasibility</b>	Plenary session – Evaluability Assessment: <b>Facing evaluability and feasibility challenges</b> - Presentation by Helpdesk followed by questions of clarification and sharing of experiences (60 min)	- For an evaluation to be useful, it is not enough to have good questions; one should also be able to answer them properly. Assessing the extent to which an intervention is evaluable, and the practical feasibility of an evaluation is key to translating an evaluation plan into a practical evaluation task. - Definition of the expected outcome and impact of the intervention, and review of existing information helps to shape the evaluation exercise. In this, a balance is sought in terms of answering evaluation questions, time, data and budget, as well as capacity available in-house or through external contractors. Concrete examples of the approaches used in ERDF evaluations will be discussed. - Big Data, and in particular the retrieval and analysis of large sets of unstructured data, offers fascinating perspectives for evaluation (e.g. measuring the change in modal share following the opening of a new train line using mobile phone data). Some of the implications of Big Data evaluation for feasibility and evaluability (planning, capacities, negotiations with new partners...) will be discussed.
10:30 <b>Block 2 (continues)</b>	<b>Introduction to Working Group 3</b> (10 min)	- Guidance on how to conduct the working groups.

10:40	<i>Coffee break (20 minutes)</i>	
11:00 <b>Block 2 (continues)</b>	Parallel Working Group 3 (60 min) – <b>Assessing evaluability and feasibility risks and opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants will work with scenarios to identify challenges in answering evaluation questions in terms of the evaluability of the intervention or feasibility of the evaluation. They will consider strategies that could be used at the commissioning stage, including: making better use of existing knowledge; focusing data collection on critical issues; suggesting selected methodological approaches, etc. The end result will be an action plan detailing inputs to the Terms of Reference to mitigate the main risks identified.</li> </ul>
12:00	Plenary session <b>Reporting back on WG 3</b> (60 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A rapporteur from each WG presents their approach to the problem discussed in WG3. Q&amp;A</li> </ul>
<i>13:00</i>	<i>Lunch Break (1 hour)</i>	
14:00 <b>Block 2 Making the evaluation plan operational – Module 2.2 Commissioning and structuring evaluation portfolio</b>	Plenary session - Participant-led input – <b>Commissioning and structuring an evaluation portfolio</b> – (60 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategies for improving evaluability and feasibility are better applied at the level of the evaluation plan than at the level of the single evaluation. Volunteer participants will describe strategies relying on the portfolio of evaluations and studies to do so.</li> </ul>
15:00 <b>Block 2 Making the evaluation plan operational - Module 2.3: Integrating related EU, ERDF and national evaluations</b>	Plenary session moderated by Helpdesk - <b>Participants' experience of overlapping evaluations</b> (30 mins)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The potential for overlap between evaluations is increasing. This is for several reasons, including: the growing proportion of evaluations funded by national budgets; National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) allocating significant resources to the same areas as the ERDF, or the 'EU added-value' criterion which calls for a contributory analysis of the effect of ERDF investments in relation to other funds or policies.</li> <li>After a brief 'scoping' introduction by the Helpdesk, participants will be invited to share their experience of such overlaps and how they have been dealt with in their country.</li> </ul>



15:30 <b>Continuing Block 2 - Module 2.3 Integrating related, EU, ERDF and national evaluations</b>	Presentation by Helpdesk followed by Q&A - <b>Relevance and possibilities of 'integrated' evaluations</b> - (40 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Different models of integrated evaluation are presented, including evaluation of multiple instruments leading to the same expected outcomes or target groups; thematic evaluations (considering a specific issue across different instruments, e.g. the EU Horizontal Principles); and synergistic evaluations, which look at how different instruments are working together towards significant changes.</li> <li>- Commissioning such evaluations provides different perspectives on the programme and responds to the strategic needs of policy makers. Advice is provided on how to scope these evaluations and carry them out.</li> </ul>
16:10	Coffee break (20 min)	
16:30 <b>Block 2 (continued)</b>	Plenary session - <b>Scope for improvements and 'Creative Solutions'</b> (45 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helpdesk will pick up on issues raised by participants during the two first days. Q&amp;A</li> </ul>
17:15	Plenary session - <b>Wrap up of the second day</b> (15 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflections from Helpdesk and DG Regio</li> </ul>
17:45: Departure for social event	<b>18:30 Guided tour of the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara</b> followed by <b>20:30 Dinner at the restaurant Cucina e Butega</b>	

Day 3 – Friday, 28 June		
Time	Activity	Notes
9:15	Plenary session <b>Introduction to the third day</b> (15 min)	– Feedback on the first two days of the Summer School and practical instructions on the third day
9:30 <b>Block 3 – Impact evaluation methodologies - Module 3.1 Evaluating different types of interventions, policy instruments and programmes</b>	Presentation by Helpdesk followed by Q&A – <b>Why it is important to tailor the evaluation to the different characteristics of the interventions</b> (50 min)	– Policy areas covered by ESIF evaluations are very diverse: SME support, transport infrastructure, RTD programmes or urban policies typically have different stakeholders, their impacts cannot be observed at the same time, and the respective roles of the intervention’s design and implementation in the results are obviously not the same. <i>What</i> methods are appropriate, <i>when</i> results are available and <i>how</i> causal explanations are justified differ. – Typical examples of ERDF instruments and programmes, and the approaches that are relevant to them, will be presented. The choice of approaches includes counterfactual approaches (RCTs, quasi-experimental methods), configurational approaches (e.g. QCA) and generative approaches (Realist Evaluation, Contribution Analysis) – MAs have a crucial role to play in making the use of some of these approaches possible. Opportunities, conditions and risks will be discussed.
10,20 <b>Block 3 – (continues)</b>	Parallel Working Group 4 – <b>Considering the features of interventions in methodological design</b> (50 min)	– Participants will consider the characteristics of the three interventions studied (stakeholders involved, causal pathways involved, time horizon, expected learning...) and how these affect the array of approaches available for impact evaluation.
11:10	<i>Coffee break (20 min)</i>	
11:30	Plenary session - (40 min) <b>Reporting back on WG4</b>	– A rapporteur from each WG presents their approach to the problem discussed in WG4, followed by Q&A

12:10 <b>Block 3 – Module 3.2 Big Data and AI in evaluations</b>	Plenary session – Presentation and Q&A – <b>Opportunities for the use of new technologies in evaluations</b> (50 min.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– This session will continue the discussion started on day 2 on Big Data and AI in evaluation.</li> <li>– The possibilities of using new technologies, such as Big Data analytics and generative AI will be discussed, with a number of examples. The practical implications in terms of planning, methodological design, capacity of the actors, risks, and causality, will be presented.</li> </ul>
13:00 <b>Review and conclusion of the summer school</b>	Plenary session – <b>Review and wrap-up session of the 2024 Summer School:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Making evaluations useful;</li> <li>– Making plans operational;</li> <li>– Adapting to different policy interventions in different territorial and national contexts</li> </ul> (30 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Summary of the 3 days by Helpdesk and the EC</li> </ul>
13:30	<i>Lunch break (1 hour)</i>	
14:30 <b>Master Class - The use of the macroeconomic models in evaluation</b>	Presentation by EC (40 minutes) <b>Macro-economic models in evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The use of macroeconomic national and regional models in evaluations, what they can contribute and their limitations, as well as some practical examples of their use.</li> </ul>
15:10 <b>Master Class - The use of the macroeconomic models in evaluation</b>	<b>Q&amp;A, discussion and exchange of experiences</b> – Moderated by the Helpdesk – (50 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Open discussion of the points raised in the presentation.</li> </ul>
16:00	<b>End of the 2024 Summer School</b>	

## **Online participation**

Links to join the plenary sessions:

### **Wednesday June 26**

[https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting\\_ZDI1MzgxMGEtNjdiZC00MWZiLWI3NjEtMGIXNGU3ZDk3Y2Zk%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22f45c8468-d416-4da9-aadb-9ab75944617b%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%2244600810-72fa-4a83-b036-6d94f03c00a6%22%7d](https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_ZDI1MzgxMGEtNjdiZC00MWZiLWI3NjEtMGIXNGU3ZDk3Y2Zk%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22f45c8468-d416-4da9-aadb-9ab75944617b%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%2244600810-72fa-4a83-b036-6d94f03c00a6%22%7d)

### **Thursday June 27:**

[https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting\\_OTU3ZTJhYTctYmI4OS00NDFlLThlNzctZmQ5OTlmN2JiOWFj%40thead.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22f45c8468-d416-4da9-aadb-9ab75944617b%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%2244600810-72fa-4a83-b036-6d94f03c00a6%22%7d](https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_OTU3ZTJhYTctYmI4OS00NDFlLThlNzctZmQ5OTlmN2JiOWFj%40thead.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22f45c8468-d416-4da9-aadb-9ab75944617b%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%2244600810-72fa-4a83-b036-6d94f03c00a6%22%7d)

### **Friday June 28:**

[https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting\\_OGQ4MGI0ZjItZjlhNy00NGIzLTkyZWUtZjViNjdkZjZiYWew%40thead.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22f45c8468-d416-4da9-aadb-9ab75944617b%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%2244600810-72fa-4a83-b036-6d94f03c00a6%22%7d](https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_OGQ4MGI0ZjItZjlhNy00NGIzLTkyZWUtZjViNjdkZjZiYWew%40thead.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22f45c8468-d416-4da9-aadb-9ab75944617b%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%2244600810-72fa-4a83-b036-6d94f03c00a6%22%7d)