

The implementation of ESIF communication strategies in 2014-20: Are they achieving expectations?



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IQ-Net (Improving the Quality of Programme Management) promotes exchange of experience on the management and implementation of Structural Funds programmes among managing authorities and intermediate bodies. The network is managed by the European Policies Research Centre (University of Strathclyde, Glasgow) under the direction of Professor John Bachtler, Stefan Kah and Dr Laura Polverari. The research for this paper was undertaken by EPRC in preparation for the 41st IQ-Net meeting held in Athens, Greece on 21-23 November 2016. The paper was written by Dr Carlos Mendez, Viktoriya Dozhdeva and Professor John Bachtler.

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France

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It should be noted that the content and conclusions of this paper do not necessarily represent the views of individual members of the IQ-Net Consortium.

Implementing ESIF communication strategies in 2014-20: Are they achieving expectations?

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1. INTRODUCTION

“One problem the policy faces is related to how we communicate about it”.

Commissioner Crețu, Bratislava, 15 September 2016

“Projects are changing the lives of their promoters and their communities, hence they constitute plenty of potential good news about Europe.....But these pieces of news need messengers...[which]... is a shared responsibility of everybody...at EU, national, regional or local level”.

Commissioner Crețu, Stockholm, 8 November 2016

In the context of the debate on the future of Cohesion policy, the communication of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) has acquired a new salience. With discussions underway about the relative value of different EU policies – and their results – the future structure of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) depends on a recognition among the EU institutions and Member States that continuing to spend a third of the EU budget on cohesion is good value for money. This is clearly not guaranteed: recent contributions to the debate on the next MFF are critical of the added value and performance of Cohesion policy and even suggest a double standard in the way different EU policies are being assessed.¹ As Commissioner Crețu points out, communication of the policy and its achievements needs to be improved significantly.

This is not just an issue for the politics of the EU budget debate. In the context of declining support for the EU and EU integration in some Member States, and rising concern about inequality, EU Cohesion policy is meant to be an explicit and visible expression of solidarity and have a direct impact on people's daily lives.² Cohesion policy provides funding to all European regions, especially less developed regions and countries, and aims to improve economic and social prosperity and quality of life. It has a multi-level governance model intended to bringing the policy 'closer to citizens' through programmes that address regional and local development needs and which involve a 'partnership' with local authorities, non-governmental organisations, socio-economic partners and civic society. However, there are questions about the awareness of the policy among citizens and whether and how its programmes and projects are recognised. In particular, it is not clear whether the publicity and communication strategies of EU institutions and national/regional authorities are effective, whether they are regarded as propaganda or whether they improve knowledge, understanding and affinity with respect to the Funds.

Over the past 25 years, successive reforms have increased the regulatory obligations for Managing Authorities and other bodies with respect to publicity and communication. Greater efforts have been made to improve the professionalism and sophistication of communication strategies, to ensure that they are embedded in programme management and project delivery and ensure effective engagement among stakeholders.

¹ Bachtler J and Mendez C (2016) *Reforming Cohesion policy: the communication paradox*, Cohesify Blog, www.cohesify.eu/2016/10/07/reforming-cohesion-policy-communication-paradox/

² Bachtler J and Mendez C (2016) *European identity and citizens' attitudes to Cohesion policy: what do we know?* Cohesify Blog, www.cohesify.eu/2016/10/26/european-identity-citizen-attitudes-cohesion-policy-know/

This is a multi-level, multi-layered task. As noted previously by IQ-Net:³ “Information is at the heart of Structural Fund programming. Given the intricate and constantly-evolving nature of the Structural Funds and the organisations involved in individual programmes, making sure that key information is sent to the right group at the right time can entail a daunting array of tasks. Applicants and project-holders need to understand what can and cannot be done with Structural Fund co-financing. Programme managers require information on the programme’s progress to make strategic decisions. The wider public should be informed and engaged about the role of the Structural Funds in local and regional development. In all these areas, the dissemination of information via publicity and communication is a central, not an adjunct, programme activity.”

The challenge for programme managers is that the opportunities for good communication are greater than ever before. The variety of media and tools has increased dramatically over the past decade: big data, open data, web platforms, social media, information graphics, mobile phones, tablets and other technology have radically changed the information and communication landscapes, and the way people and organisations interact. Yet, the volume and intensity of information flows and media present new difficulties in communicating messages – especially on complex subjects like Structural Funds programmes and projects.

Against this background, the following paper takes stock of how the publicity and communication of Structural Funds is being achieved in different contexts. Drawing on research from IQ-Net countries and regions, it identifies examples of good and interesting practice, and explores the factors contributing to the effective design and delivery of communication strategies and measures. Lastly, it identifies questions as a basis for discussion at the IQ-Net Conference in Athens.

The paper begins by summarising the regulatory context for publicity and communication. It then examines the communication strategies and plans for 2014-20, followed by a review of initial experiences with implementation focusing on challenges and opportunities. The paper concludes by summarising the key findings and raising questions for discussion.

³ Taylor S and Raines S (2003) ‘Getting the Message? Structural Fund Publicity and Communication’, *IQ-Net Thematic Paper* 12(2), European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.

2. THE REGULATORY CONTEXT FOR PUBLICITY AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

The regulatory context for publicity and communication has evolved significantly since the reform of the Structural Funds in 1988 with each set of reforms strengthening the obligations on Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies and beneficiaries (see Table 1).

At the outset, the provisions for publicity and communication were weak. In the first period, 1989-93, the regulatory focus was primarily on information. Provision was made for accompanying measures to be used for “technical assistance or information measures, including, in particular, measures to provide information for local and regional development agents”.⁴ In the next, 1994-99 period, the requirements were more explicit, although focusing more on publicity than communication.⁵ Structural Funds legislation required implementing bodies to “provide adequate publicity” so that potential beneficiaries were “aware of the opportunities offered by the Structural Funds and to raise public awareness of Community action”. Provisions included requirements for billboards, plaques, references to Community assistance in measures, and “the possibility of information and publicity measures jointly coordinated by the Member States, regions and the Commission”.

A specific regulation relating to ‘information and publicity measures’ was only introduced for the 2000-06 period.⁶ This contained a new requirement for a communication action plan for each programme, including strategy and budget, persons in charge at national and MA levels for monitoring and co-ordinating the plans. It distinguished for the first time between information for the general public about EU assistance, and information for beneficiaries on assistance offered. An informal network of communications officers, the Structural Funds Information Team, was also established. The availability of information acquired a new resonance following the strengthening of financial management, control and audit in the wake of the resignation of the Santer Commission; this included more transparency on the beneficiaries of EU funding, including access to funding data.

The requirements were strengthened again in the 2007-13 period,⁷ with provisions setting out requirements for the communication plan as well as the roles and responsibilities of those informing beneficiaries and the public. They also required the programme communication plan must be approved by the Commission, the publication of a list of funded projects/beneficiaries, and annual reporting on information measures and the results of communication.

⁴ Council Regulation (EEC) No 4254/88 of 19 December 1988, laying down provisions for implementing Regulation (EEC) No 2052/88 as regards the European Regional Development Fund (Article 7).

⁵ European Commission (1996) *Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund 1994-99: Regulations and Commentary*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

⁶ Commission Regulation (EC) No 1159/2000 of 30 May 2000 on information and publicity measures to be carried out by the Member States concerning assistance from the Structural Funds.

⁷ Commission Regulation (EC) No 1828/2006 of 8 December 2006 setting out rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and of Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Regional Development Fund.

Table 1: Communication of Cohesion policy – evolution since 1989

Programme period	Evolution of requirements to inform the public
1989-93	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commission to be ‘informed’ by Managing Authorities (MAs) about information towards beneficiaries and general public.
1994-99	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publicity must be addressed in ‘development plans’. A Commission Decision laid down arrangements for ‘a coherent set of measures’ to be implemented by ‘competent national, regional and local authorities in co-operation with the Commission’, including billboards and plaques for infrastructure projects.
2000-06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulation is introduced on ‘information and publicity measures’ containing a new requirement for a communication action plan for each programme, including strategy and budget, persons in charge at national and MA levels for monitoring and co-ordinating the plans. An informal network of communications officers, the Structural Funds Information Team (SFIT) is established. In 2002, European Transparency Initiative (2005) requires access to funding data.
2007-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication provisions included in the Commission Implementing Regulation, setting out requirements for the communication plan, roles and responsibilities for informing beneficiaries and the public Programme communication plan must be approved by the Commission. A list of funded projects/beneficiaries must be published. Annual Implementation Reports must include examples of information measures and a chapter evaluating the results of communication (in 2010 report and 2017 final report) INFORM (DG REGIO) and INIO (DG EMPL) become formal networks of communication officers including annual meetings.
2014-20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A seven-year communication strategy to be accompanied by annual action plans adopted by the Monitoring Committee (not the Commission). Designation of information and communication officer Single website for all EU Cohesion policy programmes at national level; Definition of lists of beneficiaries more detailed and updated every six months. Annual Implementation Reports must include a chapter evaluating the results of communication (in 2016 and final report in 2018)

Source: EPRC.

For 2014-20, the main EU requirements on communication for Member States and the Managing Authorities of Operational Programmes are:

- designing and implementing a communication strategy for operational programmes, with annual updates (Box 1);
- establishing a website providing information on all operational programmes;
- informing potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities;

- publicising to citizens the role and achievements of Cohesion policy;
- publishing a list of project beneficiaries, to be updated at least annually;
- carrying out one major annual information activity; and
- designating an information communication officer to coordinate coordination activities

Box 1: Communication strategy requirements in 2014-20

The CPR for 2014-20 requires the following elements in the communication strategy:

- a description of the approach taken, including the main information and communication measures aimed at beneficiaries, multipliers and the wider public;
- a description of materials that will be made available in formats accessible for people with disabilities;
- a description of how beneficiaries will be supported in their communication activities;
- the indicative budget for implementation of the strategy;
- a description of the administrative bodies, including the staff resources, responsible for implementing the information and communication measures;
- the arrangements for the information and communication measures for the public and beneficiaries (in Annex XII Point 2 of CPR), including the website or website portal at which such data may be found;
- an indication of how the information and communication measures shall be assessed in terms of visibility and awareness of policy, operational programmes and operations, and of the role played by the Funds and the Union;
- where appropriate, a description of the use of the main results of the previous operational programme; and
- an annual update setting out the information and communication activities to be carried out in the following year.

Source: Adapted from CPR.

Project beneficiaries are required to:

- acknowledge support from the Funds in communication activities by displaying the EU emblem, with a reference to the EU and the specific Fund(s);
- provide information about the project on the beneficiary's website, including a short description of the aims and results, and highlighting the support received from the EU;
- describe communication activities at the project application stage, if requested by the Managing Authority;
- place at least one poster with information about the project at a location readily visible to the public;
- for educational projects support by the ESF, ERDF and CF, the beneficiary shall inform participants of this funding; and

- for infrastructure projects receiving more than €500,000 by the ERDF/CF, billboards and permanent plaques must be set on project sites, including the EU emblem, a reference to the EU and specific Fund concerned.

The evolution of the regulatory approach means that publicity and communication are now seen as strategic functions, requiring a clear set of objectives, specification of institutional responsibilities, resources and tools, as well as operational actions. It reflects the growing professionalisation of the communication field at EU and Member State levels, with active engagement between those responsible for Cohesion policy and the communications industry. The question for the next section is how these expectations are being translated into practice on the ground.

3. COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND PLANS FOR 2014-20

3.1 Planning arrangements

The Member State or the Managing Authorities are required to draw up a communication strategy for each operational programme (OP) or a common communication strategy for several OPs (CPR, Art.116). Most IQ-Net partners have prepared communication strategies for each OP, although a number have adopted a common communication strategy for multiple programmes.

- **Common communication strategy or guidance and OP-level strategies/plans** (Czech Republic, France, Greece, Poland, Portugal, the United Kingdom).
 - In the Czech Republic, the approach to publicity and communication is defined by the Common Communication Strategy of ESIF for 2014-20 and further interpreted in the Methodological guideline for publicity and communication of ESIF in the 2014-20 period. At OP level, the Integrated ROP produced its own Communication Plan for 2015-23.
 - In France, ESIF communication is based on the 2014-20 national communication strategy. Applicable to all ESI Funds (ERDF, ESF, EAFRD, EMFF), the national strategy is articulated with regional OPs strategies, as is the case in Portugal with the addition of the Cohesion Fund.
 - In Greece, a dual approach is taken: the National Coordination Unit provides central guidance and coordination to sectoral and regional OPs, which are responsible for planning and implementing their Communication Strategies and their annual plans.
 - Strategies cover a varying number of OPs for UK partners, from two OPs in England and Scotland (one strategy in each, covering both the national ERDF and ESF OPs) and four in Wales (one strategy covering two ERDF and two ESF OPs).
- **OP-level communication strategies** (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Finland, Croatia, Slovakia). This is the most common approach followed. In some cases, there is no need for a common strategy given the small number of programmes and/or decentralised approach to implementation (Belgium, Germany, Spain); or because there is only a single OP at national level (Austria, Finland, Slovenia).
- **Mixed approach with a common communication strategy for some OPs and individual strategies for others** (Sweden). In Sweden, the MA (Tillväxtverket) prepared three separate communication strategies: a joint communication strategy for the eight regional OPs; a communication strategy for the national OP; and a communication strategy for the cross-border programme Öresund-Kattegat-Skagerrak.

3.2 Strategic objectives

The objectives for ESIF publicity and communication are, according to EU regulatory requirements, to improve the visibility of the contribution of the EU to supporting economic and social development and promoting the image of the EU; and improving information to applicants about available funding opportunities and how to access them to ensure transparency and to enhance programme delivery and performance. In line with these regulatory objectives, a review of IQ-Net programme

communication strategies reveals four main objectives addressing effectiveness and efficiency, transparency, public awareness, and regulatory compliance.

- **Effectiveness and efficiency.** A key objective of communication strategies across the majority of programmes is to support effective and efficient implementation and performance. The emphasis is on encouraging potential beneficiaries to apply for funding, mainly by publicising funding opportunities and conditions. Wider and related strategic objectives in Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW) are to support a “discussion process in the fields of politics, public administration, business and the general public about the goals, content, results and effects of the NRW ERDF OP” as well as support exchange of experience by diffusing information about successful strategies and project examples. A focus on learning is apparent in the English strategy, which aims “to continually improve information and publicity measures through effective analysis and evaluation of outputs, data and customer feedback, and instigating changes as necessary”.
- **Transparency.** A second objective is to ensure transparency in the use of public funding, particularly in terms of the delivery and progress of EU funds. This is closely related to the effectiveness/efficiency goals in terms of informing potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities.
- **Public awareness.** A third objective is publicising to citizens the role and achievements of Cohesion policy and the specific Funds through information and communication actions on the results and impact of the policy and on the benefits for the daily lives of citizens.
- **Regulatory compliance.** While compliance is an EU legal requirement and implicit in all communication activities, an explicit objective in several strategies is to ensure compliance with EU regulatory provisions on communication (England, Scotland, Wales, País Vasco). In other cases, compliance-related objectives include informing beneficiaries of their obligations and funding conditions (Greece, Slovenia, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Wales); and the integration of cross-cutting principles and themes such as non-discrimination (Sweden, Nordrhein-Westfalen), gender equality (Wales, País Vasco) and sustainable development (Sweden, Wales).

Table 2: Objectives in IQ-Net programme communication strategies

Country/region	Effectiveness and efficiency	Transparency and visibility	Public awareness of ESIF, role and achievements	Compliance
Austria	X		X	
Belgium (Vla)	X	X	X	
Czech Republic	X	X	X	
Denmark	X	X	X	
France	X	X	X	
Finland	X	X	X	
Greece	X	X	X	
Poland (Pom)	X	X	X	
Portugal	X	X	X	
Slovakia	X	X	X	
Slovenia	X	X	X	X
Sweden	X	X	X	
Spain (PV)	X	X	X	X
UK (England)	X	X	X	X
UK (Scotland)	X	X	X	X
UK (Wales)	X	X	X	X

Source: IQ-Net research.

3.3 Measures and target groups

Communication strategies are required to describe the main information and communication measures aimed at potential beneficiaries, beneficiaries, multipliers and the wider public (Annex XXII, CPR). The MAs should also ensure that information and communication measures and dissemination involve the partnership actors (e.g. economic and social partners; urban authorities; civil society bodies etc.), information centres on Europe (including European Commission and Parliament offices in the Member States) and educational and research institutions. The Regulation also includes provisions on specific responsibilities for information measures targeting the public, beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries (summarised in Table 3).

Table 3: Required communication measures for the public and beneficiaries

Targets	Information and communication responsibilities and measures
Public	<p><i>Member State and Managing Authority</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OP launch event • one major information activity a year promoting funding opportunities and achievements • display the Union emblem at the premises of each managing authority • publish list of operation • give examples of operations by OP on the website in a widely spoken official language • update implementation information including achievements on the website <p><i>Beneficiary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • display the EU emblem and reference, and a reference to the supporting Fund/Funds on information measures • provide on website a description of the operation, aims and results, and EU support • place at least one project poster (including the financial support) at a publicly visible location (e.g. building entrance) • for ESF operations, ensure participants have been informed of the EU funding support • all project documents for the public/participants should state that the OP was supported by the Fund/Funds • put up a temporary billboard during implementation of ERDF/CF infrastructure/construction operations above €500,000 and a permanent plaque/billboard after completion
Potential beneficiary	<p><i>Managing Authority</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disseminate OP strategy, objectives and funding opportunities widely • ensure access to relevant information, notably: funding opportunities and calls • eligibility conditions; project selection procedures, criteria and periods; relevant contacts; the responsibility of potential beneficiaries • may request indicative communication activities, proportional to the size of the operation, in the applications
Beneficiary	<p><i>Managing Authority</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inform beneficiaries of inclusion in the published list of operations • provide tools, including templates in electronic format, to help beneficiaries to meet their obligations

Source: adapted from CPR.

A review of IQ-Net communication strategies reveals four main types of target groups, although there are variations in the categorisations used in the communication strategies, and a wide range of communication measures that vary according to the target groups.

- **Programme management bodies, partners and stakeholders.** One of the most fundamental tasks is management-related communication between a number of groups including the managing authority and programme partnership, notably members of the monitoring committee, intermediate bodies and implementing bodies. The main measures include events and seminars, meetings, electronic newsletters and bulletins, implementation reports and evaluations.

- **Beneficiaries.** Comprising potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries, which have been awarded funding, this is the primary target group for the communication strategies of most programmes. Potential beneficiaries require information on the objectives of the programme, the co-financing opportunities and conditions, as well as on issues such as calls for proposals and selection criteria. The beneficiaries in turn require information on regulations and on specific project requirements, timetables, where they can find support and information as well as communication obligations.
- **Multipliers and opinion builders.** In the press, radio, television and digital media nationally, regionally and locally can help to disseminate information on programmes and their benefits to the broader public. Typical measures include press conferences, briefings, press releases, websites, social networks, events, project visits for journalists.
- **General public.** Awareness of Cohesion policy among the general public is a key regulatory objective and has become a key priority for EU institutions more generally as part efforts to re-connect with citizens in a context of increased anti-EU public opinion. Beneficiaries and their communication activities play an important role and are required to publicise the funding received from the EU. Managing authorities invite projects to disseminate information about their activities and achievements. The use of national or programme websites for communicating about programmes, projects and their achievements is considered the key communication tool by most programme authorities. Other tools include events, publicity materials (brochures, factsheets and videos), mass media campaigns (in some cases on TV and radio), press releases and, increasingly, use of social media.

3.4 Institutional responsibilities, tasks and capacity-building

The institutional responsibilities and scope of communication activities are defined in EU regulations. Article 117 of CPR stipulates that each Member State should designate an information and communication officer to coordinate information and communication actions in relation to one or more Funds, as well as to inform the Commission accordingly. The officer is responsible for the creation and maintenance of the single website providing information on all the OPs, and the provision of an overview of communication measures undertaken nationally. Where the national network of Fund communicators exists, the information and communication officer is responsible for its coordination. In addition, each MA designates one person to be responsible for information and communication at OP level, although where appropriate, one person may be designated for several OPs. Institutional responsibilities, tasks and capacity-building arrangements for ESIF communication in IQ-Net partner programme authorities are described below.

3.4.1 *Dedicated staff resources*

The majority of partner regions and countries have **dedicated communication staff**. In such cases, at the national level, at least one person is responsible for the implementation of the communication strategy – normally a full-time information and communication officer (most partners), who may be supported by an additional member of staff or a dedicated team. All ESIF-related communication activities at the national level are the responsibility of a **single communication officer** for instance in Austria, Denmark and France, as well as in Finland (supported by another staff member working on

more technical issues), Hungary (supported by a part-time substitute) or Sweden (assisted by an IT team). At the same time, communication activities are often performed by a **dedicated team** (unit), led by the communication officer or manager at national level or regional level (e.g. Czech Republic, Greece, Pomorskie, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Wales). The number of people in the communication team and their functions vary. For instance, in Portugal, most of the conducted work is done by the team, consisting of nine members, with diverse responsibilities; the EU publicity division in the Czech Republic consists of around seven people, covering various publicity and communication tasks, while in Slovenia, the unit responsible for the implementation of the communication strategy consists of only two employees. In some cases, the information and communication officer is assisted mostly in more technical tasks – for instance, in website / social media maintenance by an IT team in Sweden and on content-related issues with regards to the website by one additional staff member in Finland.

A comparison of reported numbers of communication staff dedicated to communication activity in place and the numbers foreseen in the programming documents / communication budget reveals discrepancies. For instance, in Sweden, the communication budget should fund three information and communication officers, whereas currently Tillväxtverket has only one; similarly, a minimum of three people should be in place to run the information and communication tasks at the MA-level in Finland, while only one is currently appointed. While the English Communications Strategy mentions 4 FTE dedicated to communication activity, there are currently 1.5 staff working on communications within the ERDF MA.

In most cases, the **dedicated information and communication officers work full time** (e.g. Croatia, Greece, Finland, France, Portugal, Scotland, Sweden, Wales). In Austria, the Communication Officer works at 0.7 FTE. ‘Assisting’ members of staff may work less than full time (e.g. in Sweden, the IT team staff work c. 0.5 FTE; in Slovenia, one person works at 1 FTE and another at 0.9 FTE). In some cases, the whole communication team works full time (e.g. in the Czech Republic, all 7 people at the division of EU publicity work full time). In some cases, dedicated communication staff has been employed only recently, being absent in the previous programming period, including due to a different governance structure (Austria), or a more limited budget for communication activities (e.g. Denmark). In Greece, the Communication Guide for 2014-20⁸ provides thorough instructions which, among others, take the form of job description for ESIF communicators.

In other instances, there are **no dedicated communication staff**, the responsibility for information and communication activities being shared among the different staff and actors involved in the ESIF implementation in addition to their normal activities (Flanders, Bizkaia). This is mainly because of the relatively low level of ESIF funding available in these regions.

The degree of **centralisation of the communication functions** differs across partner regions and countries, reflecting different implementation and resource allocation arrangements and the emphasis placed on communication. Regions and IBs may have more or less significant communication responsibilities and dedicate different amount of time and staff effort to this activity. For instance, in Finland (see Box 2), the IBs have a wide range of communication tasks, being responsible for the regional communication networks, as well as for drafting their annual communication plans, disseminating information on the calls, informing and guiding project applicants, and disseminating

⁸ See Communication Guide, Partnership Agreement 2014-20, April 2015.

information on project results. The coordinating ELY-centres and the coordinating regional councils are required to name at least two persons responsible for communication.

In other instances, IBs may have relatively more limited communication responsibilities. For example, Slovenia has a centralised system for Structural Funds, and information and communication activities are implemented by the MA, not the IBs (however, IBs can be involved and the communication budget can be used to support these, e.g. when organising an event). Dedicated information and communication staff can be appointed at the level of IB/regions. For example, in Croatia, each IB has nominated at least one person for information and communication. In Greece, one or two persons per MA are responsible for communication activities; similarly, in France, at the regional/OP level, one full-time staff is in charge of communication, sometimes assisted by an additional staff member.

3.4.2 *In-house vs outsourced tasks*

Most of the conducted work is done internally. However, some tasks are outsourced, with different degree of frequency. In some instances, all work is kept in-house (e.g. England, Czech Republic – Integrated ROP) or only outsourced in exceptional cases (Portugal). The key tasks that are outsourced include advertising campaigns and some applications (Greece), website development (France), layouts and design for different brochures, leaflets, posters, advertisements, photographers, etc. (Slovenia, Slovakia, Helsinki-Uusimaa region in Finland), document printing or desktop publishing (France – although partly performed in-house too), or media buying (Slovakia). In Helsinki-Uusimaa region in Finland, expertise is outsourced with respect to the organisation of workshops (e.g. focussed on web-based writing techniques) and for various other tasks (e.g. drafting messages and helping with design issues in relation to communication).

Box 2: Distribution of communication responsibilities in Finland

The Managing Authority (MA) has the overall national responsibility for the communication activities. It is responsible for coordinating the communication network, for setting up and maintaining the website, as well as providing an overview of the implemented communication activities at the national-level (including reporting to the monitoring committee). The MA also appoints the information and communication officer, who is the chairperson of the national ESIF communication network and a member of the Commission's networks.

The Intermediate Bodies (IBs) are responsible for the regional communication networks and for drafting their respective annual communication plans. The coordinating ELY-centres (the four ELY-Centres responsible for Structural Funds management) and the coordinating regional councils (e.g. the regional council of Helsinki-Uusimaa region is responsible for coordinating the communication in the south, while the regional council of Tampere region is responsible for communication activities in the west) are required to name at least two persons responsible for communication, who are also members of the national communication network and work as part of the regional communication network. For instance, in the south, the respective communication network meets c. 1-2 times a year to plan their communication activities for the forthcoming year. In the regional council of Helsinki-Uusimaa region, there is one representative who is responsible for the coordination of communication in the south and one additional person who works part-time on various communication activities. In addition, each region has its own person responsible for communication.

The IBs are responsible for disseminating information on the calls, and on informing and guiding project applicants. All calls are notified to the website. The IBs are also responsible for disseminating information on the results of the funded project, which is done primarily through the website. IBs inform beneficiaries on their communication responsibilities at the initial meeting and in the annex of the funding decision. The beneficiaries use EU logos in all publicity and communication activities, as well as the logo used in the documentation of ESIF activities in Finland 'vipuvoimaa EU:lta 2014-20'. The beneficiary describes in the project plan all communication activities planned in the project.

All authorities involved in ESI-funds contribute to the content of the website and its maintenance. However, the MA's information and communication officer takes the overall responsibility for coordinating this work. The MA is responsible for the national section, while the ELY-centres (the four ELY-centres responsible for Structural Funds) and the coordinating Regional Councils are responsible for the regional sections. The MA is responsible for any maintenance and development costs as well as translation costs (information is provided in Finnish, Swedish and English) and provides communication tools and templates (for forms, posters, business cards etc.) as well as guidance to the beneficiaries. The IBs in turn are responsible for advising the beneficiaries in terms of publicity and communication. With respect to social media (Facebook in particular), the information and communication officer at the MA has the overall responsibility (although the regions have administrative rights to provide content).

Communication activities are planned and implemented in line with the partnership principle involving economic and social partners, the representation of the European Commission in Finland, Europe Direct-information points, the communication office of the Parliament and Europe Information. Work in partnership will increase the preparedness of many smaller organisation and associations to take part in project activities.

Source: IQ-Net research.

3.4.3 Networks

Additional communication responsibilities may arise from activities associated with the participation in domestic or external communication networks. Where a national network of Fund communicators exists, the information and communication officer is responsible for its coordination (CPR, Art. 117). The following examples illustrate the different networks that are used.

- Portugal: the national information and communication officer is also a coordinator of the Portugal 2020 Communication Network.
- Spain: there is a national communication network that meets periodically to organise seminars, exchange of experience activities etc. Within the País Vasco, there is a local communication network with nine members representing key OP thematic objectives.
- Greece: the Communication Unit of the NCA is the coordinator of the ESIF communication network, which exists since the 2000-06 period.
- Croatia: each IB has nominated at least one person for information and communication and all of them constitute OPCC network of information and communication officers.
- Finland: the MA appoints the information and communication officer, who is the chairperson of the national ESIF communication network. The communication network was launched at the start of the programme period and its membership mirrors the monitoring committee.
- Slovenia: the MA has recently established an informal cohesion network of persons responsible for information and communication (see Box 3).

The information and communication officer also normally represents the country/region in the **EU-wide networks of communication**, such as INIO (Informal Network of European Social Fund Information Officers) and INFORM (Communication officers responsible for communicating European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund investments).

Box 3: Informal cohesion network for information and communication, Slovenia

The main task of the network, established by the MA, is to provide target groups with all relevant information regarding calls for proposals and how to apply, the responsibilities of EU funds recipients, results and outputs of 2014-20 Cohesion policy, and participation in various joint promotion activities of individual programmes and projects as well as providing the MA with feedback.

The network includes participants from intermediate bodies, regional development agencies, Europe direct points and other institutions dealing with Cohesion policy. The network meets 2-3 times a year, and the participation is voluntary.

Planned activities of the informal cohesion network, which engage various partners, include:

- participating in information and communication activities – promotion in terms of transmission of information for beneficiaries and/or end users by using own communication channels and available tools;
- submitting information and materials to be published on the website <http://www.eu-skladi.si/> and in the e-bulletin ('Kohezijski e-kotiček');
- motivating beneficiaries/end users to actively participate and give proposals regarding communication activities, examples of good projects;
- informing the MA about the communication activities in the framework of individual projects or programmes (e.g. opening ceremony for individual infrastructural projects, workshops pertaining to the implementation of programmes/projects, etc.);
- organising meetings for network members with the aim of identifying potential new partners; and
- promoting cooperation and networking among various partners.

Source: IQ-Net research.

3.4.4 Training and capacity-building

Training and capacity-building activities for professionals involved in ESIF communication is important for ensuring the quality, consistency and effectiveness of Cohesion policy communication, and can be funded through technical assistance and ESIF support for institutional strengthening and administrative capacity-building for the effective management of the Structural Funds, or with other support measures and initiatives.

The value of training on communication is recognised in a number of evaluations of previous communication efforts. For instance, an evaluation of the 2007-13 Pomorskie OP recommended creating a specialised newsletter and organisation dedicated to training on communication, while the need for training is implicit in many other evaluations carried out in partner regions or countries that have found a lack of understanding among Cohesion policy staff about communication obligations.

Periodic training is often provided through networks of information and communication officers (France, Croatia, Portugal, País Vasco). For instance, in France communication training with networks is part of an action for coordination of the network of regional communication officers under the national communication strategy. In Spain, training events and seminars have been organised

through the national communication network, mainly to develop understanding of regulatory requirements. A 2014 evaluation report of the 2007-13 communication strategy found that the knowledge of information and communication requirements is high among programme managers and a survey showed that 77.8 percent of respondents considered training seminars/events to have met their expectations. In Portugal, various training events on communication have been organised (Box 4).

Box 4: Most recent training events on communication in Portugal

2016 – New ways to communicate institutional information (Second meeting dedicated to public relations and communication of the entities of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 30 September);

2016 – Seminar ‘Communicate efficiently EU Cohesion policy in Portugal – Seminar for the national officers responsible for ESIF communication and for Information centres Europe Direct, COM representation in Portugal, 27 June;

2016 – Making the most out of Facebook, INFORM INIO meeting, Portorož, Slovenia, 30 May (*EU-level event*);

2016 – Evaluating communication activities, INFORM INIO meeting, Portorož, Slovenia, 30 May (*EU-level event*);

2016 – ‘Quem tem vídeos, tem tudo’ (‘Who has videos, has everything’) ADC, 31 March;

2015 – Evaluation of European Commission Communication. ADC, Lisbon, 20 November;

2015 – First meeting dedicated to public relations and communication of the entities of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. PMC, Lisbon, 30 September;

2015 – Communication Strategy of the Association of Portuguese Manufacturers of Footwear. OP Norte 2020, Porto, 3 July;

2014 – Public Affairs & Lobby. European Association of Communication Directors, Lisbon, 11 November;

2014 – ‘Does public administration know how to communicate?’ Internal and external communication strategies. INA, Lisbon, 3 April;

2014 – Communication for people with special needs. ADC, Lisbon, 27 March;

2013 – E-Marketing. INESTING, MSSS, Lisbon, 30 and 31 May.

Source: IQ-Net research.

Training has been provided in relation to specific communication tasks (Austria, Denmark, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Slovakia, Flanders). For instance, staff have attended courses and special training on new media techniques and public relations (Flanders, Czech Republic), graphic software training and copywriting (Czech Republic). In Austria, the Communication Officer is a communication expert, but has received SF-specific training by participating at an ECTP (European Training Centre in Paris) course on Cohesion policy communication. In Denmark, workshops have been held with the communication staff of the RGF about methods to use. In Slovakia, training is organised for both the

team of Department of Information and Publicity and administration capacities of the Central Coordination Authority.

Box 5: Targeted communication training in Slovakia

In Slovakia, since 2009, the training courses have been directly linked to the system of financial management of the Funds in the 2007-13 programming period, followed in subsequent years by courses on technical subjects such as communication skills, monitoring, evaluation.

The Department of Information and Publicity was able to offer training sessions in relevant communication topics on professional and technical aspects through its own administrative and technical capacity.

Source: IQ-Net research.

Training can also be organised by the MA for IBs. In Finland, the MA has organised training for the IBs, which also organise their own training. In Pomorskie, the MA's preparation of a Communication Strategy included a dedicated workshop organised in the MA for MA staff and consultations with IB staff. The drafts of the document were also presented and discussed in a Communications Working Group.

In other cases, no specific training has been provided beyond guidance (Czech Republic - ROP, Sweden). In Sweden, training was carried out to the heads of Tillväxtverket's regional programme offices at the end of the previous programme period. Since then new training has not been done, the focus to date being on the provision of guidance to projects.

EU training/events. Finally, MA staff attend events, courses and workshops that have been organised by the Commission. The meetings of the INFORM and INIO network coordinated by the DG REGIO and DG EMPL are considered to be a valuable source of information (especially in terms of interpretation of communication legislation), inspiration and knowledge exchange (Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Portugal, Slovenia, United Kingdom). The Going Local seminar of the European Commission in Greece was considered successful as it brought together the communications officers of DG REGIO with all the communication officers of the Greek OPs, Europe Direct staff and other European networks' desk officers in an interactive way.

4. IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

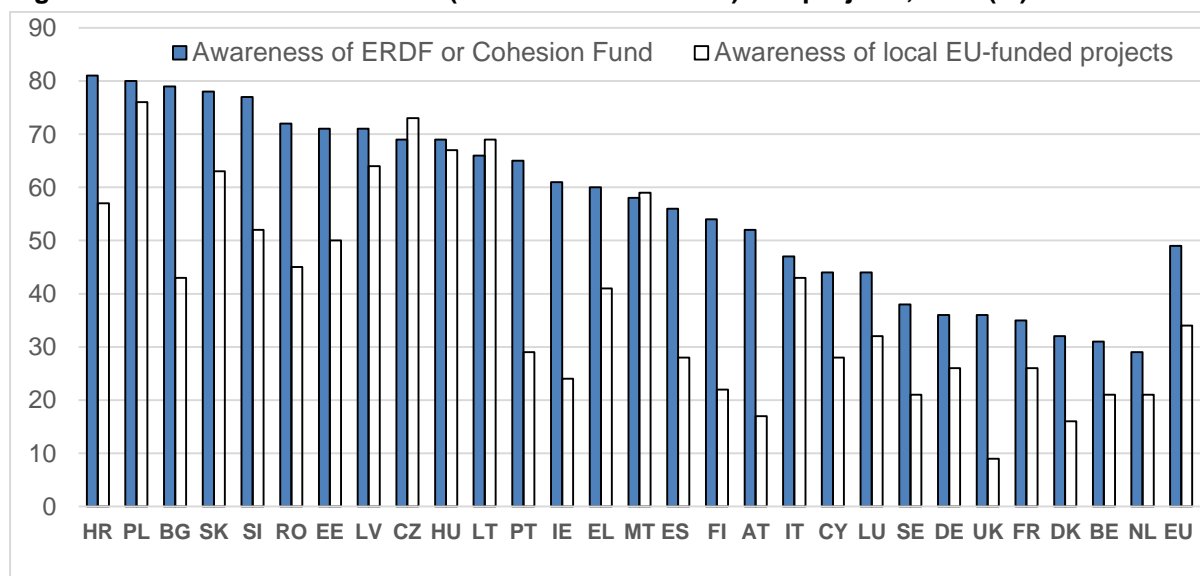
Having reviewed the general approaches in the new communication strategies for 2014-20, this section turns to the early implementation experiences. It begins with a review of the profile of Cohesion policy programmes in terms of awareness and visibility, before turning to the key strategic and operational developments and an assessment of the use and effectiveness of different tools.

4.1 Awareness and visibility of Cohesion policy

A key priority for the EU is to publicise the role and achievements of the ESI Funds through information and communication about the results and impact of Partnership Agreements, operational programmes and projects (Article 115, CPR).

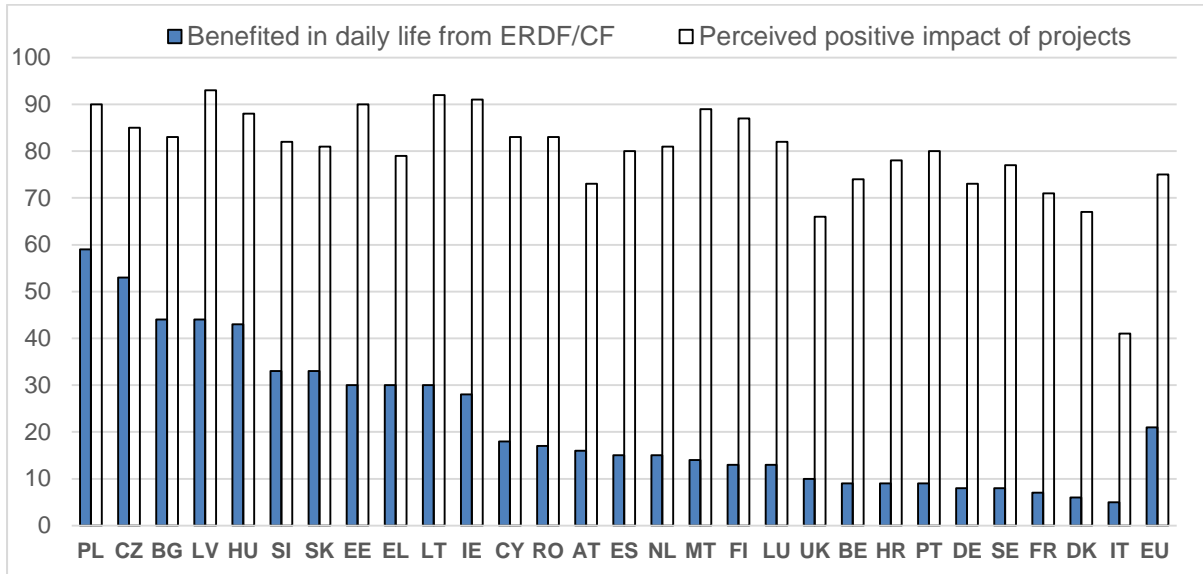
A recent EU survey of citizens in 2015 shows that around half of EU citizens have heard of the ERDF or Cohesion Fund across the EU, but only a third of citizens were aware of local EU-funded projects in their region or city (Figure 1). Awareness of local EU-funded projects is as high as 70+ percent in Poland, the Czech Republic and Lithuania but falls to under 10 percent in the United Kingdom.

Figure 1: Awareness of ESI Funds (ERDF/Cohesion Fund) and projects, 2015 (%)



Source: Eurobarometer.

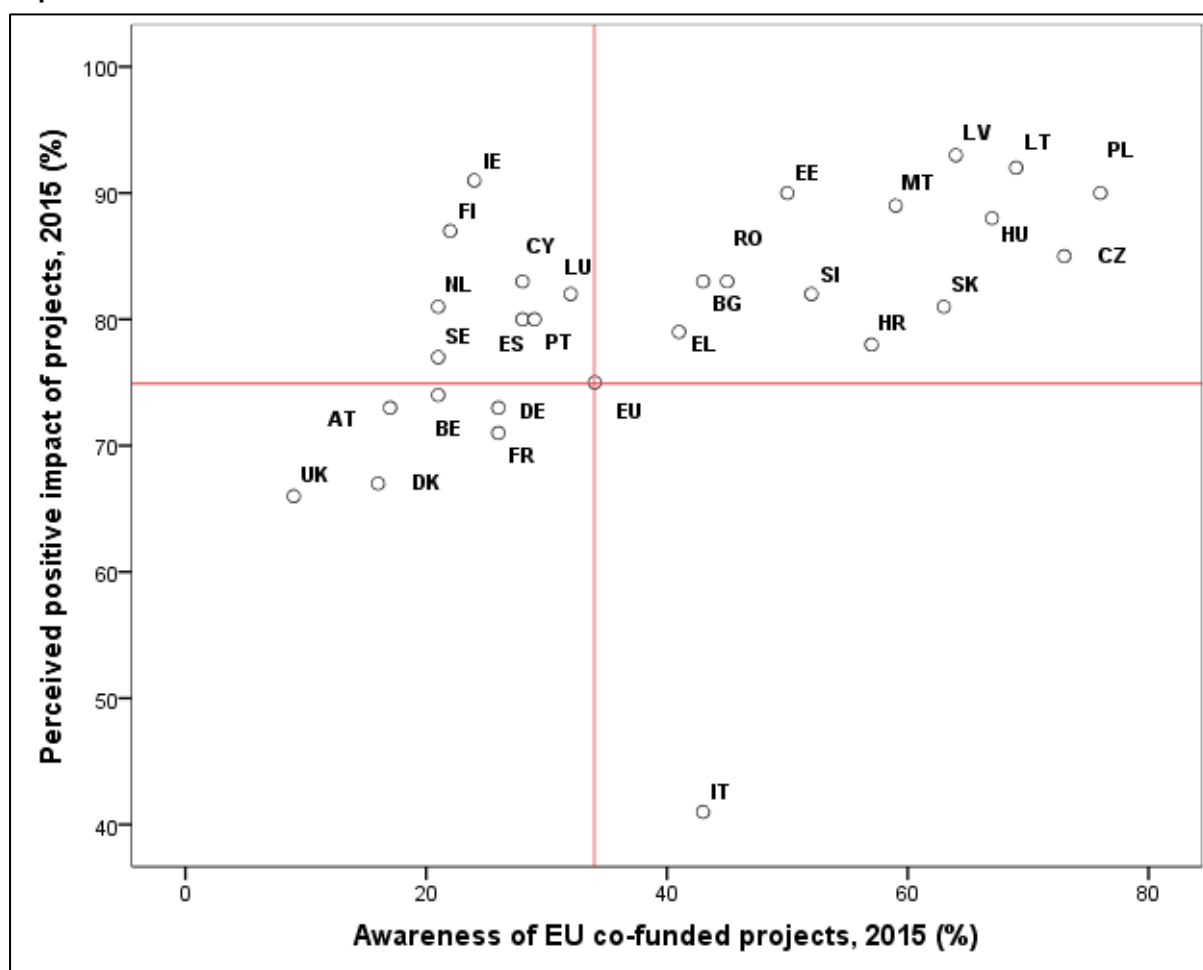
Overall, three quarters of citizens that have heard of EU-funded projects believe that the impact has been positive, but only around a fifth of citizens that have heard of the ERDF or Cohesion Fund feel that they have personally benefitted in their daily life from an EU-funded project (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Perceived impact of ESIF Funds (ERDF/CF) and projects, 2015 (%)

Source: Eurobarometer.

There is a strong link between awareness and the relative scale of financial allocations, and positive perceptions of impact are strongly linked to awareness of projects and personally benefiting from the funds (Figure 3). The surveys show that the main communication sources driving awareness about EU co-funded projects are television and newspapers.

Figure 3: Relationship between awareness of EU funded projects and positive perceptions of impact



Source: Eurobarometer.

National surveys undertaken in IQ-Net countries and the views of programme authorities confirm some of the Eurobarometer survey conclusions, particularly the relationship between public awareness and funding intensity. **In EU12 Member States receiving relatively large allocations, the public profile and visibility of Cohesion policy is generally high** (e.g. Croatia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia).

- **Slovenia.** According to the last annual survey in Slovenia (November 2015), 84 percent of the population know that Slovenia receives EU funding and 72 percent can name at least one EU-funded project. However, a far lower share of the population (45 percent) consider that EU funding has had a positive effect on Slovenia's development.
- **Slovakia.** A survey in Slovakia in the 2007-13 period, 74 percent of the respondents were aware of the Structural Funds and 64 percent were aware of the brand and importance of the Structural Funds. A significantly lower share of the population (10 percent) had knowledge about particular programmes (e.g. the name or general objectives).
- **Poland-Pomorskie.** A Poland-wide survey found a systematic increase in the proportion of people who knew and understood the term "European Funds" in the 2007-13 period.

Specifically, 89 percent of Poles knew of these concepts, and 56 percent understood them. Moreover, the research revealed an appetite for more information among citizens – more than half of the inhabitants of the Pomorskie region (54 percent) declared that they would be interested in having access to information about the implementation of EU-funded projects. The conclusion was that communication activities should continue to support public awareness, to enrich knowledge of the funds and the impact on citizens' daily lives.

- **Croatian** citizens have shown a very high degree of awareness of the existence of the EU funds, notably the ERDF and Cohesion Fund. This has been driven by the increasing interest of the public and the media immediately after the completion of the process of Croatian accession to the European Union. It also suggests the distinct possibility of a further increase in awareness in the future following the increase in allocations and implementation of EU projects.

By contrast, **the Structural Funds have a relatively low public profile in more-developed countries and regions, albeit with regional variations.** Many programme authorities recognise that the profile of Cohesion policy is lower than they would like (England, Finland, País Vasco). While the public may be aware of projects, they are not normally aware that they have been co-funded by the ESIF (Finland, País Vasco, Sweden). There is a low-level of awareness in Austria overall, but it is much higher in the Burgenland – a former Objective 1 region (2000-06) and then Phasing Out region (2007-13) – given the greater intensity of funding received compared to other Austrian regions. In Scotland, the public profile of the Structural Funds is higher in areas where the projects involve well-known physical assets, although the profile is low across the region overall. In Denmark, the public profile is limited and given the limited resources available they cannot be the main targets; the main priority is to help raise awareness of the opportunities among applicants.

The shift in emphasis in many programmes away from infrastructure in 2014-20 can make public awareness increasingly difficult to maintain as co-funded projects become less visible. To address this challenge, increasing use is being made of project case studies and the MA's website to communicate on programme activities (Austria, Scotland, País Vasco) and of messages such as 'how ESI Funds help SMEs grow' (Scotland).

There are significant variations in awareness of different ESI Funds, again reflecting differences in funding scale and the visibility of interventions. In more developed countries, the ESF accounts for a much higher share of funding. In France, both the ESF and EAFRD are more well-known than the ERDF. A national survey undertaken in 2013 showed that the level of public awareness of the ESF was around a third of the population (32 percent), followed by the EAFRD (25 percent), ERDF (24 percent) and EMFF (13 percent). By contrast, the ERDF has a higher public profile than the ESF in less-developed countries. For instance, a survey in Slovenia in November 2015 showed that 93 percent of respondents had heard of the ERDF, compared with 75 percent for the Cohesion Fund and 60 percent for the ESF.

For many programme authorities as well as DG REGIO, it is **the visibility of the Structural Funds overall and their contribution to economic development that matters most for communication goals** rather than the visibility of individual programmes or Funds (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Flanders, Portugal, Pomorskie).

That said, the branding of programmes and **NSRFs/PAs can play an important role in raising visibility and awareness among target groups**. In Greece and Portugal, there is good recognition of their PA brands – ‘ESPA’ and ‘Portugal 2020’ respectively. In Greece and Slovenia, the PA brand is more identifiable than individual Funds. The ADC in Portugal considers that there is also strong recognition of the programmes as a result of the strong presence of the brand in a wide range of communication materials.

A single visual identity can reinforce visibility. This has been a key objective in the Czech Republic and Greece for 2014-20, contrasting with individual logos for different programmes in the previous period. In Croatia, following the adoption of the OPCC Communication Strategy and the OPCC Communication plan, two documents have been prepared for the purpose of visibility and uniformity of OPCC visual identity. In the first document, "Guidelines on the application of OPCC graphic standards" graphics solutions for the entire OPCC visual identity were developed. The guidelines are a practical tool for the design and development of promotional materials for OP visibility, while another document "Guidelines on the use of language and terminology" contains practical recommendations and linguistic rules for improved writing and communicating messages. At EU level, the European Commission has itself pursued a more uniform visual identity through a reduced number of logos. For instance, the Horizon 2020 programme for research and innovation – unlike the previous Framework Programme – is being promoted as a verbal brand with no "visual mark" or logotype beyond the EU emblem/flag.

Brand continuity is important for visibility, which can be challenging to maintain in new programme periods when there are shifts in the programme architecture, priorities and associated messages. In Greece, the PA brand was established in 2007-13 under the NSRF and it was decided to retain it for 2014-20 to ensure continuity in the profile and visibility of Cohesion policy and co-funded interventions, while also avoiding the loss of sunk costs in a context of fiscal restraint. Similarly, in Austria the 2000-06 Objective 1 brand was retained in the Burgenland OP for 2007-13 even though it was technically a phasing out (convergence objective) region. In this context and more widely, a challenge for 2014-20 in Austria is the change from a Land-level OP to a national-level ERDF OP as the existing profile has been lost to extent and has to be built up again for the new programme, which involves new terms, acronyms etc.

4.2 Strategic and operational implementation trends

In reviewing the communication strategies for 2014-20 and the views of programme authorities, it is evident that there is **continuity in the overall approaches to communication** in terms of objectives, measure and target groups in most cases, notwithstanding modifications of different degrees of importance, which often build on previous experiences and address new EU goals requirements. Among the most significant changes are a more strategic approach to communication, including stronger integration of communication as a core component of planning and implementation, more coordination across Funds and activities, centralisation of governance in some cases, a wider scope of activities and target groups and a stronger focus on communicating results.

4.2.1 Strategic Governance

Greater strategic coordination of communication across ESIF and measures is a key trend witnessed in a number of countries and regions. Greater coordination of communication across Funds

is often a response to multi-fund programming (e.g. Greece, Portugal, Czech Republic, Slovenia, France, Poland) as well as efficiency and effectiveness considerations stemming from evaluation recommendations, experiences and/or reduced TA budgets (Czech Republic, Finland, England, Scotland, Wales). The scope of shifts ranges from more limited integration of communication efforts associated mostly with an increased cooperation between ERDF the ESF, to more extensive coordination and pursuit of synergies across all Funds.

- **Coordination across all ESI Funds.** In Portugal, greater alignment between all communication channels and products across ESIF is being pursued in 2014-20 (Box 6).

Box 6: Coordinated communication of ESIF in Portugal

In Portugal, an overall greater alignment between all communication channels and products has been achieved in the current period. A greater 'joint' effort is being pursued, among other things through the coordinated communication of all the five funds. The current alignment of the key messages is something that did not exist in the previous period.

The main differences in the approach to communication are associated with the focus on the new strategic priorities of Portugal 2020 and new governance model with regards to the ESIF. Communication has become multi-fund and centred on a single portal, Portugal 2020, which integrates Balcão 2020 for the submission of ESIF project applications and their follow-up.

The Communication Network (Rede de Comunicação Portugal 2020), now having a legal basis, integrates all the funds and programmes of Portugal 2020, ensuring better shared knowledge and better cooperation.

Information and Communication Guide for beneficiaries has been one of the important products of the Communication Network, among other things, containing a summary of communication rules and templates for all communication materials. A common layout for posters/billboards has been elaborated, with a greater emphasis put on the EU flag as compared to specific OP logos.

Source: IQ-Net research.

- **Coordination of national and regional communication strategies** (France – Picardie, Czech Republic). The Picardie 2014-20 Communication strategy seeks more efficient communication activities *inter alia* through increased coordination with the CGET national communication strategy. Similarly, efficiency considerations (related to a lower communication budget) have driven improvements in coordinating communication activities between the National Coordination Authority and MAs in the Czech Republic.
- **Maximising the use of thematic and/or dedicated communication networks** (France, Greece, Portugal, UK-England). In England, there is a communications network within the MA, and best practice is shared across the country, which helped develop the planning for 2014-20, and the ERDF MA works closely with the MA for the England ESF OP (DWP, the Department for Work and Pensions).
- **Joint events.** For the first time in Greece, many communication activities are undertaken in partnership in Greece as a whole, such as 'Europe in my region', partly due to the increased inter-fund coordination.

- **Websites.** Greater consolidation of Cohesion policy-relevant information through a dedicated single website or portal integrating information on all OPs is a new obligatory requirement for 2014-20, but in some cases the websites go beyond requirements by providing a platform for communication with potential beneficiaries through the publication of calls and/or integrating one-stop shop portals for submitting funding applications for all programmes (Greece, Portugal, Slovenia). At the same time, some MAs were doing this already in earlier programming periods (Wales).
- **Unified visual identities, logos and messages across ESIF.** Increased cooperation between the Funds is also reflected in the formulation of logos and/or messages that highlight the joint contribution of Europe as a whole rather than individual funds and streamlined approaches
 - In **Portugal**, a common layout for posters/billboards has been elaborated, with a greater emphasis put on the EU flag as compared to specific OP logos. Key messages (titles of news items, main headings/slogans etc.) will also focus on communicating 'the Funds of the EU' rather than individual ESI Funds (with the information on specific funds presented in the detailed description of the relevant support measures).
 - **Flanders** has pursued a similar approach, having chosen to formulate a message that highlights the contribution of Europe as a whole rather than a single fund.
 - In **Greece**, the strategic goal of homogeneity is being pursued through consolidated logos in 2014-20 with only one in use while the EU flag is displayed both on its own and as a part of the PA logo.
 - The **Czech Republic** is placing an emphasis on a more efficient visual style through a substantial decrease in the overall number of logos (individual OP logos have been abolished).
 - Similarly, in **Wales**, the improvements made in communications activity for 2014-20 included streamlined approach to branding across the ESIF.
 - The new logo for the **Nordrhein-Westfalen** ERDF OP has formed part of the corporate design strategy, to be consistently used for branding. The corporate design strategy aims at a consistent and positive image; in particular, the 2007-13 handbook on corporate design and procedures for the implementation and communication of all competitive calls and project calls has been further developed and will continue to be used in 2014-20.
 - In **France**, a YouTube channel with 186 videos, covering ERDF, ESF, EAFRD and YEI, contains 90-sec videos presenting co-funded projects and featuring the contribution of the EU as a whole (being named 'L'Europe d'à côté' – 'Europe next door'), which are more standardised in 2014-20.

- In **Slovenia**, a peculiar visual identity framework has been elaborated covering the thematic areas supported by the ESIF and depicting them in a coherent and engaging way (See Box 7 and Figure 4).

Box 7: ESIF-related visual identity 2014-20 in Slovenia

No	Area (Thematic Objective / Priority Axis)	Animal	Lead Fund
1	Strengthening research, technological development and innovation	CHAMELEON is known for quickly changing its colour which helps the chameleon regulate its body temperature or signalling other chameleons. The chameleon thus symbolises a “high-tech animal”.	ERDF: colour blue
2	Enhancing access to, and use and quality of, ICT	SPIDER is a symbol of infinity and targeted concentration which helps the spider stay focused. The spiders forms webs and is thus often used as a symbol for information and communication technologies.	
3	Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises	HORSE has significantly contributed to reducing the distance between people and thus to enhancing society’s development. The horse enhances distribution of energy, exploring new opportunities and discovering freedom outside the established frameworks. The horse symbolises top-performing companies and other role models.	
4	Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors	POLAR BEAR has become a symbol of those animal species which face loss of natural habitat due to global warming and other climate changes.	CF: colour green
5	Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management	TURTLE is a symbol of longevity. The turtle symbolises eternal stability and resilience. The turtle’s shell protects it from unfavourable environmental and/or external impacts.	
6	Protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency	PROTEUS is a symbol of Slovenia’s natural heritage and is a protected species. Increased pollution of its habitat may prove fatal for the proteus.	
7	Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures	CHEETAH is a big and slim cat whose physical form resembles that of a greyhound than its feline relatives. Cheetah is the fastest land animal often used as a symbol in the field of transport due to its features and elegant movement.	
8	Promoting employment and supporting labour mobility	BEE is one of the most hard-working animals playing a very important and complex role in nature. The bee’s hard-working and active nature has a very important impact on food production as well as on human health and other life-relevant factors.	ESF: colour yellow
9	Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty	KANGAROO is a great jumper and a very caring animal. The female bears the cub in the sack for several months and nourishes and protects it.	
10	Investing in skills, education and lifelong learning	OWL is a universal symbol of wisdom – learning and knowledge.	
11	Enhancing institutional capacity and efficiency and efficient public administration	ANT is one of the most hard-working animals. Anthills are organised in a very efficient and hierarchical manner.	

Source: Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, see also <https://prezi.com/886lnql8mhss/visual-identity-in-slovenia/>

Figure 4: ESIF visual identity elements, Slovenia



Source: <https://prezi.com/886lnql8mhss/visual-identity-in-slovenia/>

Another trend in the governance of communication is **increased centralisation of communication activities in Managing Authorities or central coordination authorities at regional or central level** (Austria, Czech Republic, Flanders, England). For instance, in Flanders, a more centralised approach to communication is seen in the efforts to address the challenge of excessive 'diversity' in terms of communication efforts, sometimes 'out of sync with the programme timeline'. Whereas in the previous period contacts points in the provinces and cities worked relatively autonomously on communication, in the current period the MA has taken a more direct approach and manages an annual communication plan which informs the contact points on what to work on. Similarly, in the Czech Republic, the Common Communication Strategy recommends 'central coordination of communication activities and preventing duplication of information'.

Efforts to centralise communication activities can be linked to changes in the programme architecture such as changes in the number and scope of national and regional OPs (Austria, England, Scotland). For instance, in Austria, the approach to communication changed because of the rationalisation of the management of the ERDF in Austria, i.e. from nine MAs to one (ÖROK Secretariat) at national level, with increased management responsibilities. In England, the change in approach is also related to the changed programme structure, namely centralisation of the ERDF MA function (from nine MAs to one) part-way through the previous programme period, followed by reduction in number of ERDF OPs from ten to one national ERDF OP in 2014-20.

Irrespective of changes to the programme architecture and greater centralisation of communication activities, **decentralised implementation arrangements can require a strong communication role for lower governance levels and implementation actors.**

- **Regional governments.** While the MA responsibilities have been centralised in Austria in 2014-20, the MA (ÖROK Secretariat) perceives its communication role as acting as a common 'roof' for the activities in the *Länder*. ÖROK Secretariat's communication officer sees its task mainly in combining the existing inputs and know-how in the *Länder* with the MA's role as acting as a service centre for these.
- **Local partnerships.** In England, there are 39 local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) responsible for local growth which means that while responsibility was centralised within one MA for ERDF and one for ESF, some communications responsibility had to be decentralised to local level. As a result, the MAs take a national approach promoting at programme level while supporting LEPs and local partners delivering more local communications to the appropriate audiences. The MAs lead on a coordinated approach e.g. to social media, to ensure consistent messaging.
- **Lead partners.** In Scotland, the emphasis on communications has also changed to reflect the new programme structure in 2014-20, including the reduction of the number of OPs. 'Lead Partners' now take a major role in programme implementation. Large-scale funding allocations (minimum of €15 million) known as Strategic Interventions are administered by Lead Partners who are responsible for distributing smaller-scale amounts of money to eligible projects and must work in partnership with the MA to maximise media coverage about the awarding of funding for individual projects. Among other things, the Communications Strategy aims to ensure that Lead Partners fully comply with the communications obligations and work

with the MA to maximise ERDF and ESF publicity, and that effective supportive measures are in place to maintain the communications partnership between the MA and lead partners.

- **Projects.** A different kind of change, but also to some extent in the direction of an increased centralisation, has taken place in Wales, where programme delivery changed radically in 2007-13 – from supporting c. 3,000 projects in 2000-06 to supporting c. 300 (larger, more strategic) projects in 2007-13. The major change in approach took place in the last period, and was further built on in 2014-20. The smaller number of projects means that the communications team can establish a more personal relationship with the projects funded and there is more capacity to support projects to maximise their communication on the benefits of EU funds.

4.2.2 Communicating results

An increased focus on communicating results was reported by a number of programme authorities (Czech Republic, País Vasco, Pomorskie, Portugal, Scotland, Wales), in line with the increased result orientation and the EU emphasis on communicating the positive benefits of Cohesion policy.

In some cases, a **communication results orientation can be seen at the project level:**

- **Delivering project messages.** In Wales, the approach to communications activity in 2014-20 is characterised by a stronger focus on communicating project milestones and achievements, facilitated by changes in programme delivery arrangements. As the MA already knows which organisations are going to apply for funding, and these applicants are already very familiar with the processes in place, communication can move on to delivering messages about achievements and impact.
- **Project maps and databases.** In Nordrhein-Westfalen, OP website in 2007-13 and the new web page in 2014-20 has a project browser, in the form of a map of the Land, with click-able access to projects that is updated regularly. Nordrhein-Westfalen was one of the first regions to present a new project each month, and to provide up-to-date information on all funded projects, searchable via a map or list. In Greece, project maps are available online since the 2007-13 period through a dedicated website (www.anaptyxi.gov.gr). A similar approach can be seen at EU level through an “EU budget for results” app featuring concrete projects and their results via a map or list. In Spain, Slovenia and Western Finland, databases are being developed to obtain, describe and disseminate information regarding good projects and best practices (see Box 8).

Box 8: Project score card (Hanketuloskortti) in Western Finland

The project score card (*hanketuloskortti*) in Western Finland is a tool that was developed for the project managers and IBs in Western Finland for the 2014-20 programme period.

The project score card website (www.hanketuloskortti.fi) aims to describe and disseminate results, solutions, learning and good practices of projects. The website allows projects to be searched by key words, and the search can be narrowed down by region, specific objectives, the state of the project, and the budget.

- **Basic information:** The project score card can provide a quick overview of what type of Structural Funds projects are funded in Western Finland.
- **Results:** The project score card can also give an overview of the key results of the project (What changed? How much did it change? In what way did it change?).
- **Solutions:** This section provides information on the way that the project has been implemented (In which way did the project achieve the results? What is exceptional or new in the solution?)
- **Good practices:** This section describes the good practice(s) that have resulted from the project (if these have emerged). This is always backed up by some evidence. There is also information on how such good practice(s) can be transferred.
- **Development needs:** This section monitors the learning of the project and is updated in the course of the implementation of the project:
 - *Before the project:* What went well? What went badly? What have we learned? What have we implemented?
 - *During the project:* What went well? What went badly? What have we learned? What have we implemented?
 - *After the project:* What went well? What went badly? What have we learned? What have we implemented?
- **Activities:** This section provides a brief description of the best working practices. These can include advice that applies to any project (What worked in practice very well during the implementation of the project?).
- **The importance of different actors:** What was the role of different actors in the implementation of the project?

Source: IQ-Net research.

- **Project communication plans at application stage.** In Flanders, in 2007-13 communication activities were already included as part of project applications but they were not very structured. Beneficiaries often carried out communication activities without adhering to the requirements and therefore these activities could not be counted as part of the programme's communication plan. In 2014-20 project applications have to include a separate work package for communication. As the communication activities are now part of the project activities, the costs can be covered by the grant and the activities can be counted towards the Programme's overall communication plan. Beneficiaries are expected to undertake a certain minimum amount of communication activities (e.g. press releases, showing European flag on signs etc.) but they can do more and these additional activities can be covered by the project. They have to report on this and include the logo etc. This means that some of the larger projects have a significant communication budget.

4.2.3 *Recalibrating target groups and goals*

A stronger focus on communicating with the public can be seen in a number of cases through a range of channels.

- **Discovering new communication channels through annual events.** In Nordrhein-Westfalen, the MA feels that they need a more proactive approach to engaging citizens. Although the Nordrhein-Westfalen ERDF OP MA has a long experience of undertaking communication and information work, it is not always easy to find the kind of specific and concrete information that citizens would find interesting. The aim in 2014-20 is to develop new channels for engaging citizens, and to use the annual information events to try out different ways of doing this. A large annual information event is planned as well as an information bus that will travel around Nordrhein-Westfalen with information about the OP, aimed at raising awareness and acceptance of Cohesion policy and the EU among citizens.
- **Improving public perceptions.** In the Czech Republic, the 2007-13 objectives of communication targeting the public mainly aimed to increase awareness about Cohesion policy, while the key aim for 2014-20 is to change the negative perception of European funds in the public opinion through
 - usage of ambassadors and opinion leaders in communication;
 - demonstrating concrete benefits for society;
 - usage of personal stories and emotional tone; and
 - an emphasis on the positive role of actors that bring changes
- **Reprioritisation of target groups and responsibilities.** In Scotland, the emphasis for the MA is now on communicating with the wider public on what the Funds are achieving, rather than on communicating with potential applicants on how to access the Funds, as in 2007-13. The task of communicating with potential applicants is taken on by Lead Partners – a change due to the new programme structure in 2014-20. In the Czech Republic, there is now a clearer specification of responsibilities and competencies with national communication targeted predominantly at general public (e.g. through large communication campaigns, multi-thematic campaigns) and the communication and publicity of managing authorities and intermediate bodies aiming at (potential) project applicants and beneficiaries.
- **User-friendly materials, stories and case studies.** In France (Picardie) an area in 2007-13 where room for improvement was identified is developing more accessible and recreational communication material, more oriented towards the general public. In Wales, improvements to communications activity for 2014-20 include a greater focus on human interest case studies. As noted, usage of personal stories is recommended in the Czech communication strategy. The lack of a human element in the discourse about European funds is noted in the Pomorskie ROP Communication strategy 2014-20, which cites critical evaluation evidence about the presentation of statistics, priorities and effects that are often detached from people's everyday lives. The new strategy for 2014-20 stresses the personal perspective of the recipient as an important element of the system of attitudes and beliefs and the important role

of the European Funds which should be strengthened in the activities of information and publicity.

- **Using beneficiaries to inform the public.** In Pomorskie, the ROP Communication strategy emphasises the role of beneficiaries in communication and publicity efforts. Despite the commitment of the beneficiaries to inform the public about the assistance obtained from the Funds, this potential was not fully exploited in 2007-13. Thanks to the scale and importance of the funding in Poland and in Pomorskie, the input of beneficiaries in emphasising impact would be significant, especially in terms of impact on the immediate environment and on everyday lives. This objective requires the systemic support of beneficiaries rather than ad hoc or 'one-off measures'. In Portugal, direct contacts with beneficiaries are planned through seminars held in different area of the country on 'How to communicate projects supported by EU Funds'. The seminars focus on two main aspects – communication rules, as well as tips on how to successfully communicate projects and promote their image in a way attracting people's attention and interest.

An extended scope of communication target groups to a wider range of socio-economic stakeholders and multipliers is foreseen in several countries and regions.

- In **Pomorskie**, the ROP communication strategy notes the need to extend information and promotion activities beyond beneficiaries to a broader group of socio-economic stakeholders and media partners as these play an important role in informing and educating the public or selected groups about European Funds. This is in line with the results of an evaluation of information and promotion tools in 2007-13, which concluded that in defining target groups, the Communications Plan omitted an important category of stakeholders, namely the social and economic partners (governmental, business and environment organisations and institutions, etc.).
- The **Slovenian** communication strategy for 2014-20 recommends focusing more on establishing stronger cooperation with opinion leaders, multipliers (institutions having an integrating role) and other partners in the future.
- In **Wales**, the improvements made in communications activity for 2014-20 include engaging new audiences (e.g. schools and young people) to increase awareness and understanding of the benefits of EU funds (e.g. photo or artwork competitions showcasing local EU projects).
- The **Greek** communication strategy extended the coverage to include research and education institutions, the Europe Direct information centres and, European Commission and European Parliament representation offices, as specified in the CPR (Greece).

A greater emphasis on beneficiaries is apparent in other cases, although addressing the public and beneficiaries are not necessarily mutually exclusive goals. Informing potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities is a crucial part of programme management and viewed as the first priority for communication among some programme authorities. In order to ensure that cohesion policy invests in the most relevant and innovative projects, the widest possible audience of potential beneficiaries needs to be informed. This happens not only by highlighting the investment opportunities, but also by showcasing the results achieved. In Poland, there is a general perception that not all potential

beneficiaries are eligible to apply for EU funding and that the chances of receiving a grant are not equally distributed. In France, a survey found that the share of beneficiaries that consider themselves to be “well-informed” about the ESI Funds is relatively low and there are significant variations across Funds: ERDF (35 percent), EAFRD (26 percent), ESF (23 percent), EMFF (10 percent). The French PA states that communication in 2007-13 was too much directed towards the general public, instead of focusing on project generation. In Greece, attention to queries from the public and potential beneficiaries is reflected in the improvement of service quality and staffing levels of the existing help desks: the national PA/ESPA help desk and two sectoral OPs help desks. In Slovenia, a challenge for 2014-20, according to the MA, is to address the information needs and responsibilities of beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries. Specific initiatives have been launched to address this, including a dedicated help desk providing information on EU funding opportunities (see Box 9).

Box 9: Contact point FINA EU točka, Slovenia

Fina EU točka is about helping potential applicants and project promoters to find their way to relevant information on funding opportunities available either through EU funding sources or international financial mechanisms (Norway and EEA Grants, Swiss Contribution). It also seeks to provide information on the system and rules on spending EU funds.



Fina EU točka was launched in September 2016. It consists of two full-time staff members not only replying to questions, but also summarising public calls and targeting these to the right audiences. The contact point's goals are to:

- be a user-friendly information service on Cohesion policy and international financial mechanisms (Norway and EEA Grants, Swiss Contribution);
- provide quick, correct and understandable information on funding opportunities for individual target groups;
- spread the word about success stories and the results and impacts of Cohesion policy and international financial mechanisms;
- raise awareness about the importance of EU funding for Slovenia's development and enhance visibility of Cohesion policy and international financial mechanisms in Slovenia;
- increase awareness of potential applicants about the rules and how important it is to respect them, and deliver clearly articulated interpretations;
- act as a link bringing together the institutions involved in the implementation of Cohesion policy and of international financial mechanisms; and
- enhance credibility of individual measures/goals/reforms and build public trust in them.

Fina EU točka can be contacted in different ways:

- as part of a dedicated website available at: www.eu-skladi.si
- via email: eutocka.svrk@gov.si
- via a toll free helpline number (080 20 23). The helpline operates from Monday to Friday between 9.00 and 12.00. Helpline calls will be answered by a staff member of the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy.

Source: Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy.

Finally, **integration of non-discrimination is foreseen in several communication strategies**, in line with EU requirements to describe materials available in formats accessible for people with disabilities under several measures,

- **Events:** with the availability of signing translation (Slovenia, Nordrhein-Westfalen); accessibility for people with disabilities (Nordrhein-Westfalen, Slovenia); with invitations to events including questions on accessibility, so that individual solutions can be found (Nordrhein-Westfalen).
- **TV advertisements:** with signing translation (Portugal).
- **Websites:** ensuring that appropriate image and sound material is available on the programme and its results (Finland, Nordrhein-Westfalen).
- **Brochures:** on OPs and funding opportunities in Braille and easy to read format (Slovenia, Croatia – see Box 10).

Box 10: ESIF-related brochures for people with disabilities, Croatia

In Croatia, several brochures accessible to people with disabilities have been prepared, including:

1. The OPCC brochure in Braille's – 180 copies of the brochure "OPCC Funding opportunities" was prepared and published in Braille. Throughout 33 regional associations of the blind situated in towns all over Croatia, the National University Library and 17 city libraries with department or services for the blind and visually impaired, the brochure is available to blind and visually impaired people.
2. The OPCC brochure in easy to read format – With the help of Association for Self-Advocacy the MA has issued a brochure in easy to read electronic format on its web page. The brochure with its adjusted content is prepared for people with dyslexia.

With this brochure the MA began to release tailored made materials for different target groups to ensure that all communication activities, measures and tools are adjusted to people with disabilities as well as people who have a disorder that causes difficulties in reading, writing and understanding, as defined in the OPCC Communication Strategy.

Source: IQ-Net research.

4.2.4 Simplification

A range of communication measures are being promoted to simplify communication activities

- **Simple and clear messages and understandable language in communication materials.**
In Pomorskie evaluation studies have emphasised the need to communicate a clear and universally understandable language. This is particularly true of documents aimed at potential beneficiaries, as well as materials intended for communications media (including in order to address the common misconceptions regarding European Funds and opportunities in terms of accessing them). In the Czech Republic, the communication strategy recommends an overall simplification of communication, substantial reduction of logos and "euro-jargon". In Wales, improvements to communications activity for 2014-20 include simplifying the message. This is in line with the results of the evaluation of communication strategy for 2007-13, pointing to the challenge of communicating complex Structural Funds terminology. A communication survey of project contacts and intermediate bodies in the Western Finland in August 2016 found that respondents required clear and understandable communication.

- **Simplified, systematic and timely guidance.** In Portugal, guidance containing a summary of communication requirements and common templates for all communication materials was prepared to support coherence of communication efforts. In the Czech Republic, simplified methodological guidelines for publicity and communication were introduced, partly to facilitate compliance and avoid sanction. Publicity has been too often (and pointlessly) a matter of project irregularities/sanctions (e.g. black-and-white copy of a logo instead of a coloured logo could be sanctioned). Timely guidance is also important, especially for new projects.
- **Guidance for simplified messages.** In Greece, the NCA has provided guidance to simplify message (e.g. with regards to the texts of billboards, plaques and posters). This emanates from the overly technical jargon used in the regulations and the complexity of syntax. For instance the stipulation that the main objective is stated for each project does not result in a very friendly communication message on the billboards, plaques and posters. Objectives tend to be long and overly technical while attempts at simplifying them are often resisted. For instance, adherence to the letter of the rules resulted in billboards that contained complex phrases such as the following: “adaptation of businesses and their employees to the new development needs especially those businesses and employees that have the required characteristics of the new development model of the country”. The NCA provided guidance to simplify the message.
- **User-oriented factsheets** provide a useful tool for simplifying programme information and calls. The Nordrhein-Westfalen ERDF OP has prepared a one-page factsheet on the OP to be distributed at information events (and via the website); a factsheet on each planned competitive call and project call will be prepared; and roll-ups with a summary of the NRW ERDF OP can be borrowed by other organisations.
- **Tools to simplify beneficiaries’ compliance with communication rules.** For instance, in the Czech Republic, an online tool aims to simplify the preparation of compulsory publicity items for ESIF beneficiaries (see Box 11).

Box 11: Generator for tools of compulsory publicity, Czech Republic

The division of EU publicity at Ministry for Regional Development, inspired by Hungarian colleagues, has developed an online generator for tools of compulsory publicity (available here <https://publicita.dotaceeu.cz/gen/krok1>). The tool is aimed for beneficiaries to simplify a preparation of items of compulsory publicity (i.e. permanent plaque, temporary billboard and poster A3).

Users simply select an item they need to prepare, then choose entries from pre-defined offer (e.g. name of programme and fund, name of MA) and insert information about project name and its objectives. Next, the tool generates automatically a file with the selected item prepared for printing, including compulsory elements of publicity in proper layout and size.

The development of the tool was rather cheap, and it is considered to be very helpful from the point of view of beneficiaries.

Source: IQ-Net research.

4.3 Usage and effectiveness of communication tools

Turning more specifically to communication activities in 2014-20, this section examines IQ-Net partners' views on the most prominent and widely used communication tool and their effectiveness in addressing communication goals, distinguishing electronic tools, notably websites and social media; traditional printed material; events, information meetings, seminars and workshops; publicity campaigns; and media relations and press releases. Table 4 identifies the different communication activities under these headings that are most commonly used, where there is interest in increased usage or scope for improvement, and the activities that are least used across IQ-Net partner programmes.

Table 4: IQ-Net partners' assessment of most prominent tools

	Website(s)	Social media				Electronic newsletters	Newsletters, brochures, leaflets, other publications	Events, meetings, conferences/seminars/	Media / advertising campaigns	Advertising space in press	Film clips / video presentations	Press releases	Direct contacts with media	Radio	TV	Project trips
		Facebook	Twitter	LinkedIn	You Tube											
AT																
CZ																
DE																
DK																
FI																
FR																
GR																
HR																
PT																
Pom																
PV																
SF																
SI																
SK																
Vla																
Eng																
Sco																
Wal																

Source: IQ-Net research.

Used most		Would like to use more / scope for improvement		Used least / not currently used	
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4.3.1 *Electronic tools (websites and social media)*

Electronic tools, particularly websites and to an extent social media, are reported to be the most widely used communication tools across partner member states and regions. The main benefits highlighted by programme authorities are effectiveness, particularly wide outreach (France, Portugal, Sweden, Finland); and efficiency and ease of use (Sweden), especially in a restrictive budgetary context with technical assistance reductions (Finland). Electronic tools have also been characterised as being better placed for ensuring 'loyalty' among target groups (Portugal) and addressing the 'needs of modern society' (Finland).

Websites are considered to be the most important communication tool serving all the target groups, according to most IQ-Net authorities. Recent website upgrades have been reported in several cases with a view to providing a 'more modern look' (Greece, Nordrhein-Westfalen), easier and more user friendly navigation and access to key information (Denmark, Greece, Sweden, País Vasco). The effectiveness of web-based tools has been emphasised by a number of partners in terms of increasing traffic to the website (Denmark) and valued online support for beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries (Pomorskie).

Box 12: NRW ERDF OP web page

The NRW MA sees the ERDF OP web page in 2007-13 and/or (the new web page in) 2014-20 as best practice both in terms of structure and in terms of up-to-date elements.

The 2007-13 NRW ERDF OP website was an important source of information for interested users and provided information and services to specific target groups. The website was continually updated in order to ensure that the most up to date information was available, both on the 2007-13 ERDF OP and on the 2000-06 ERDF OP.

In addition to OP texts and regulatory/legal documents, the NRW ERDF OP website provided information on the launch and implementation of the competitive calls, enabling stakeholders/brokers, potential applicants and the general public to gather information about the OPs.

The ERDF OP web page in 2007-13 included a project browser, in the form of a map of the Land, with click-able access to projects. This map (and associated list of projects) was updated very regularly (more often than required under EU rules).

A new website has been launched with a more modern look but based on the 2007-13 OP website, which was seen as very good practice. As in 2007-13, the new website will e.g. provide information on all approved projects via a project browser.

Source: IQ-Net research.

Social media have been highlighted as one of the most popular communication tools (e.g. Finland, France, Croatia, Portugal, Slovenia, England, Wales). Specific platforms highlighted include:

- Facebook (e.g. Finland) and Facebook-based campaigns and initiatives, for instance Facebook photo competitions (e.g. País Vasco – see Box 13) or Facebook campaigns (e.g. Portugal – see Box 14).

Box 13: Facebook photo competition in País Vasco

The País Vasco Facebook Photo Competition ‘Where you see Europe in the Basque Country?’ is considered a very effective communication tool. This annual photography competition targets youngsters (within the 14-25 years of age demographic) in the region and aims to raise awareness of ERDF projects, ‘to bring Europe to the Basque youth’ and collect their views on Europe’s contribution to development in the region.

Organised by the Basque Regional Government, the competition requires the participants to submit a limited number of photos of EU-funded projects and to explain their significance through a dedicated Facebook page.

The initiative is considered innovative and pioneering in its use of social media technology to communicate EU values to youngsters and to raise interest in EU projects. It is reported to be the first ERDF photo competition on Facebook in Europe, which has subsequently been replicated in other EU regions and by the Commission itself. The last competition in 2016 was popular with around 8,000 participants.

Source: IQ-Net research.

Box 14: 2016 Facebook campaign in Portugal

On the occasion of the COM-launched campaign ‘Europe in my region 2016’, taking place during May 2016, in the framework of the Europe Day 2016 celebration, the ADC launched a campaign on its Facebook page, under the slogan ‘Do you know that Europe is in your region?’.

The campaign, which ran from 5 to 22 May 2016, targeted the Portuguese population aged 15/+65 years and featured the transmission of the film Portugal 2020 depicting a selection of flagship projects in the four strategic areas of Portugal 2020 (Competitiveness and Internationalisation, Human Capital, Social Inclusion and Employment, and Sustainability and Efficient Use of Resources).

The campaign reached about 600,000 people, having been displayed in the news feed 1.3 million times in the mainland Portugal as well as the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira.

The key objective was to promote the projects supported by EU funds, in order to mobilise organisations and citizens to submit their applications under Portugal 2020.

Source: IQ-Net research.

- Twitter and YouTube, which is increasingly being used in England and Wales. In Wales, for example, the MA has run a dedicated publicity award, seeking to highlight best practices among project sponsors in communicating EU funding, including through social media, or run Twitter campaigns through its bilingual Twitter channel aiming to increase awareness among the public of the impact of ESIF in Wales (see Box 15).
- LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook are also used in Greece for the dissemination of calls, such as those under the OP “Entrepreneurship, Competitiveness, Innovation” (see Box 16) and the OP [Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning](#).

Box 15: The MA Twitter channel and Twitter campaigns in Wales**WEFO's Twitter channel**

In Wales, social media is seen as an important and growing publicity tool that can reach wide target audiences.

WEFO's bilingual Twitter channel (@wefowales and @wefocyrmu) promotes news stories, announcements, case studies, website updates (including progress information, guidance, and PMC papers), and events. It already has over 2,100 followers⁹ ranging from key stakeholders, policy makers, potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries, professionals across the UK, PMC members, and the European Commission, with Tweets reaching, on average, an audience of up to 100,000¹⁰.

According to Wales' Communications Plan, WEFO is to ensure a regular flow of tweets written in an informal or 'human' voice, use visual prompts (photos, digital clips etc.), and link with similar / topical Twitter accounts (e.g. @EU_Regional) to maintain interest among followers and increase coverage. Stakeholders are also to be invited to participate in live Q&A sessions, coinciding with events using unique hashtags so that comments and feedback can be effectively monitored.

WEFO's Twitter Campaign for Europe Day 2015

The communications team ran a very successful Twitter campaign around Europe Day: WEFO's Twitter Campaign for Europe Day 2015 (#EwropDay2015) to increase awareness among the general public of the impact of EU funds in Wales. It involved a series of infographics containing both national and local authority breakdowns. EU beneficiaries were encouraged to support the campaign and tweet about the impact of their EU projects highlighting 'before and after' photos, landmarks, quotes, statistics, case studies, economic and social benefits etc. Tweets reached nearly half a million people/organisations, were viewed on over one million occasions, and the hashtag was in the top trending Welsh Language hashtags on Twitter on Europe Day.

Source: IQ-Net research and Wales' Communications Plan.

Box 16: Information and communication activities related to the project calls of the EPANEK OP, Greece

Information and communication activities related to the project calls of Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship and Innovation (EPANEK) actions carried out during 2015-16 are considered good practice. The calls have focussed on four actions: a) Fostering self-employment among tertiary education graduates, b) Start-up entrepreneurship, c) Upgrading of micro and small enterprises by developing their skills in new markets, and d) Aid to tourism SMEs for their modernisation and upgrading the quality of services provided. Overall, this was an integrated and well-designed process which spanned across three stages.

First, the practice of using pre-issues of four EPANEK flagship calls met good practice criteria:

- Novelty: as it had not been widely used in the past;
- Outreach: generated very large media interest and resonated well with multipliers, potential beneficiaries, and the general public;
- Content: provided simple and clear verbal content which explained the objectives of the call, eligibility and expenditure selection criteria; and
- Language: care was taken to provide plain language wording in the main text while some of

⁹ On 14 November 2016.

¹⁰ Based on Wales' Communications Plan.

the more technical but essential information such as the definition of SMEs and state aid regimes was explained in footnotes, for instance in the pre-issue regarding the tourist SMEs).

Second, the MA organised presentations in major cities in Greece. In terms of design, the presentations were characterised by attention to detail from the welcome desk to the main auditorium. The language used in the presentations was simple and clear with the aid of a visual format including PowerPoint slides and video messages. The content was highly relevant and provided real time interaction with the audience that engaged with the presenters in an exhaustive Q&A session using several well-designed channels: a print form for queries, online forms, email. The outreach was also significant; the events themselves attracted large audiences including potential beneficiaries and multipliers, and had a very strong impact on media interest with the effect of exceeding expectations for the given budget. Novelty effects can be associated with the currently more widespread use of the social media, the real time interaction with both the online and physical audience.

Third, the help desk for project applicants has been better staffed and upgraded in comparison to 2007-13, with positive effects on communication with project applicants.

Information Events for the 4 new calls




7 events organized in major cities by the Managing Authority

- 1200 participants
- 2000 questions answered

>10 additional events in collaboration with other bodies

*** No Intermediate Body for the Managing Authority** of EPAnEK so I&C of the MA responsible for dissemination of information to the whole of Greece.

- Capitalise on Experience from Publicity & Communication for "The national SMEs aid scheme" of 2013, budget: 456M €
- Created and coordinated a **country wide information network** :
 - ✓ 72.843 telephone calls
 - ✓ 16.921 visits of prospective investors
 - ✓ 9.432 e-mails answered

Information Desk of EPAnEK

- Increased employees from **3 to 9**
- Extended opening hours: **8:30 to 7pm**
- **Thorough training** of the new staff
- **System of organizing and processing queries**



Source: IQ-Net research and EPANEK Communication Strategy, 2015.

The use and take-up of social media faces a number of challenges including:

- **Limited use by key target groups.** Pomorskie noted that sizeable population groups and key targets for the ROP (e.g. older people or the unemployed) have less capacity to use social media.
- **Management demands and acceptance.** In Austria, the MA has at this stage deliberately decided against Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn due to the management difficulties (they cannot be managed by solely the Communication Officer, but require the whole team to be involved in creating the content). In Nordrhein-Westfalen, it is still to be examined whether and how to use social media, depending on acceptance among key target groups.
- **Resources.** Social media will play an increasingly important role in Cohesion Policy communication in the future but it is sometimes a challenge for the communication officers, who deal also with other communication tasks, to find the time for it. In Finland, at the national Ministry, Facebook 'likes' have reached a level which is manageable for their team, and they are not considering expansion into other types of social media, (Twitter), although a YouTube

account is likely to be set up (with selected videos uploaded). At the regional level in Finland, particularly at the regional council of the Helsinki-Uusimaa region, the future focus is very much on social media (Facebook primarily) and the visualisation of information, looking into ways to make ESIF more interesting. In this process, outsourced expertise (e.g. in terms of visualisation and key messages) can play a key role, although there are often limited resources for these purposes.

- **Overlapping responsibilities.** Social media is not used specifically for ESIF in Denmark, all the content being published through the Danish Business Authority's (the organisation in which the MA is situated) social media platforms.

However, tools are available to programme publications in advance and it is recommendable to use an editorial calendar to strategically plan contents and target groups in advance. Successful posts often use visuals, infographics or videos and the best way to reach out to new target groups is to reserve an advertisement budget, in particular for Facebook.

4.3.2 Events, information meetings, seminars and workshops

The importance of face-to-face contact with the public or beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries through events, information meetings, conferences, seminars and workshops was emphasised by a number of programme authorities. **Events** are seen as important to increase local awareness of ESIF and proximity, particularly EU-wide campaigns **associated with the Europe Day celebrations**, e.g. the "*joli mois de l'Europe*" in France, the Europe in my Region campaign in Greece and Flanders, or the EU-funded 'Open Days' in Pomorskie.

- The "**joli mois de l'Europe**" in France aims to apply the "joli mois de l'Europe" label to events organised directly by EU-funding managers or third-parties, building on Europe Day and offering communication resources across Regions, in order to increase regional and national visibility of EU impact. In 2014, for instance, over 500 events were organised throughout May across 23 regions (the interactive map of the latest event edition is presented in Figure 5). The national strategy involved the development of visual instruments (banners, posters) with regional specificities, promotion objects, digital initiatives (website, google map interactive map, social media), and press relations.

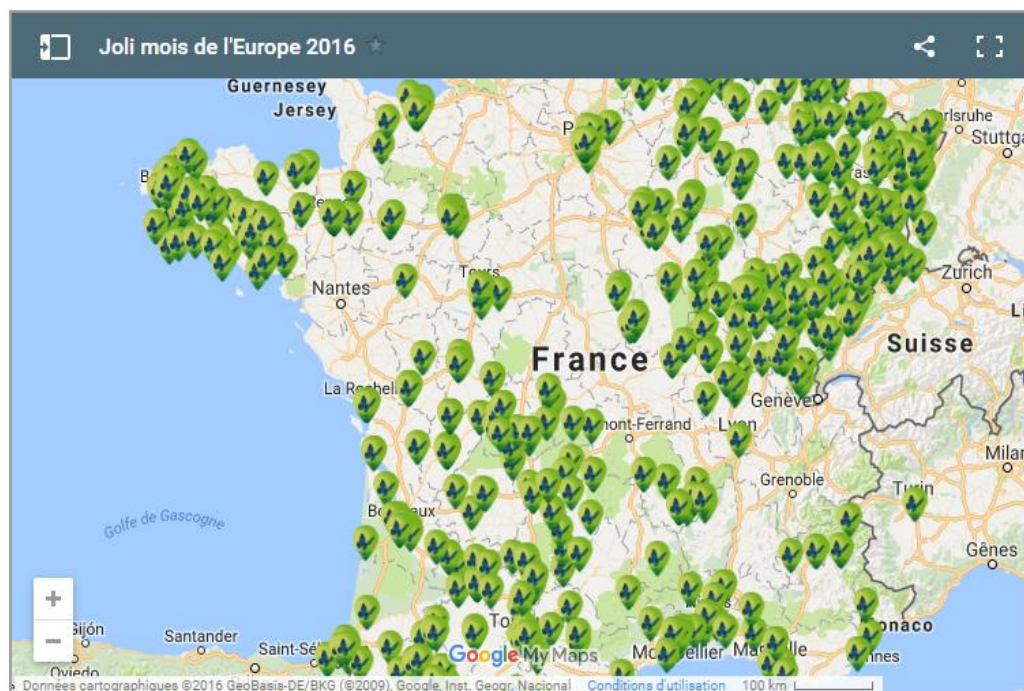
Figure 5: “Le joli mois de l’Europe” 2016 in France: interactive map

Le joli mois de l'Europe



LE JOLI MOIS DE L'EUROPE C'EST LA FÊTE DE L'EUROPE, PENDANT UN MOIS !

Le Joli mois de l'Europe, ce sont des centaines d'événements partout en France pour célébrer l'Europe : visites de projets financés, des expositions, des animations, des balades et découvertes, des débats, etc. pour tous les publics.
Découvrez les événements près de chez vous.



Découvrez l'exposition "L'Europe s'engage pour les citoyens et les entreprises", organisée par le Commissariat général à l'égalité des territoires, le 7 mai 2016, sur le parvis de l'Hôtel de ville de Paris.

- The EU-funded ‘**Open Days**’ in **Poland** are a series of events organised by the MA, during which beneficiaries of EU funds "open their projects" for visitors, who are able to take part in multiple activities organised by project beneficiaries.

Box 17: EU-funded 'Open Days' in Pomorskie

'Open day' events were held in Pomorskie on 12-15 May 2016, involving four OPs: the Regional OP, OP Human Capital, OP Fisheries and the Rural Development Programme. Two members of MA staff were designated coordinators of regional activities and 6 other staff were responsible within individual programs. A total of 95 attractions and events were organised by the beneficiaries, and approximately 5,500 visitors participated.

Promotion of the Open Days initiative involved: 8 newspaper articles during the period; 104 posts on Facebook during the period 2-14 May; 624 radio spots during the period 2-14 May, across 8 regional stations. Promotional costs amounted to €16,200.

During 'Open Days', visitors are able to take part in various activities organised by project beneficiaries, including:

- Access and introduction to places not open to the public on a daily basis (e.g. research laboratories),
- Free workshops (on a variety of topics: from dance, through the exercise of soft skills, to art),
- Free or discounted entry to cultural institutions,
- Attractions for families with children,
- Competitions,
- Sports activities.

Source: IQ-Net research.

- In **Flanders**, the '**Europe in your neighbourhood**' campaign, aiming to demonstrate the contribution of European funding to everyday life of citizens in Flanders, is considered among the most effective communication initiatives. The campaign, having a dedicated website and involving flyers distribution, photo competition and newspapers publications, as part of Europe Day is used as a vehicle to promote European projects.
- In **Slovakia**, there is a strong street presence during the Europe Day through cultural and social events and competitions (such as Young European, Digital European) organised in cooperation with the Representation of the European Commission.
- **Greece** participated actively in the **Europe in my Region campaign** in May 2016, with 26 events countrywide. Events took place in 23 cities, with more than 14,000 participants. At the same time, a promotional campaign was organised in the Athens Metro system; two Metro trains running for a four-week period in May and June had photos and information of PA projects. Moreover, at the Syntagma central Metro Station PA and Europe in my Region events in Greece were promoted through photos and posters. The DG REGIO summer issue of the Panorama magazine referred to the Europe in my region events in Greece (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Europe in my region events in Greece



Source: IQ-Net research.

Roadshows organised by MAs reportedly have different degree of success across partner regions and countries. For instance, in Slovenia, a roadshow organised by the MA and travelling throughout the country since 2014, is considered to have been quite effective. By contrast, in Scotland roadshows are not viewed as being effective as they are no longer as relevant for the MA because of changes to the programme structure.

Various examples of successful **events associated with programme launch** have also been identified. For instance, in England, for the annual event in 2015, a national Government minister participated in the ERDF programme launch with a media call, which received a widespread social media coverage and generated press releases with a content specific of each of the 39 LEP areas in England, highlighting the ESIF contribution (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Programme launch activity – England ERDF, 2014-20

England European Regional Development Fund, 2014-20

Programme Launch Activity – 6 August 2015, Bristol, England



Conducted by Government Minister James Wharton



European Union

European Regional
Development Fund

Also in attendance:

Local Member of Parliament, local Mayor,
European Commission, local and specialist press corps,
local partners and projects

Held across 2 project / development venues in Bristol

39 localised press releases

35 local press and media articles

More than 20 tweets, 60 retweets,
12 favoured messages, 400 followers

Launch of ESIF YouTube pages

Launch promoted on GOV.UK website
through webstory



Source: IQ-Net research.

The importance and value of **conferences, seminars, workshops and information days for beneficiaries** has been highlighted by several programme authorities (Czech Republic, Pomorskie, Croatia, Greece, Denmark). For instance, seminars and workshops are widely used to inform about particular calls for proposals, along with annual programme events and periodic thematic conferences (Czech Republic) and are always fully booked and allow for a beneficial direct flow of information (Czech Republic, Croatia). In Greece, day conferences are organised for beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries. In Denmark, workshops and events are used frequently as a means of bringing together the MA, applicants and the regional authorities. The role of training activities (Pomorskie) and consultations – individual consultations for project applicants and beneficiaries (Czech Republic, Croatia) and broader public consultations (Croatia) – have also been noted.

4.3.3 Traditional printed materials

Whereas a number of countries (e.g. Sweden, Finland, Portugal) noted a prioritisation of web-based instruments over non-electronic tools, others have highlighted the importance of **printed materials such as newsletters, brochures / leaflets, other information materials and publications** (Greece, Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovenia, Flanders).

Newspapers and publications are among the most effective communication channels in País Vasco and the Czech Republic. For instance, in País Vasco, the 'Business Strategy' newspaper/journal is considered a good practice example for publicising programme priorities and implementation progress, albeit to the business community primarily rather than the general public. In terms of publications, project books can be useful outputs for demonstrating achievements:

- Flanders have noted the success of a projects book, developed by the Programme MA at the end of the 2007-13 and start of 2014-20 period. The book, which demonstrates the results achieved in 2007-13 but also communicates what can be done in the future period, was professionally developed by publishers and is aesthetically pleasing; it was used during the launch events in Flemish parliament, and is considered a good practice notwithstanding relatively high development costs.
- Scotland produced a similar publication but an online version (rather than traditional printed material), highlighting the achievements of the 2007-13 programme via a series of case studies from different parts of Scotland. The booklet also introduced the new ERDF and ESF 2014-20 programmes, and the key priorities for Smart Growth, Sustainable Growth and Inclusive Growth. The book was launched at an event at the Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation in March 2015 organised to highlight a £76 million scheme focusing on Scotland's low carbon economy and part-funded with EU funds. The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities attended the event to promote the fund and launch the book, and several media and press representatives attended.

By contrast, among the traditional tools that are considered to be less effective in addressing communication goals are leaflets (Portugal, País Vasco) and/or billboards and posters (Slovakia, País Vasco). A common problem is the lack of a dissemination strategy to maximise the impact of printed materials. Visibility is also an issue - In Slovakia, billboard and poster campaigns are noted to be suffering from so-called 'billboard blindness', with messages on the EU being lost within a huge volume of billboards on motorways or in the city.

4.3.4 Media and advertising campaigns

Media and advertising campaigns are frequently used in some cases to reach the general public. In Pomorskie, the broader population, as the least active category of target audience for communication activities, learns about European funds mostly through projects. The MA uses advertising campaigns in the mass media presenting examples from the perspective of the individual, and subsequently, from the perspective of the community and the prospects for the region as a whole. In Flanders, the general public is reached through media campaigns, which include advertisements in local and regional media, various activities in the context of the Europe Day (handing out flyers at major train stations in Flanders, photo competition), as well as activities organised by contact points to coincide

with local events. Large-scale media campaigns are beyond the scope of communication activities, given the small size of the programme and thus limited funding for communication. Challenges with media /advertising campaigns include high costs (Czech Republic, Croatia, Flanders) and lengthy administrative procedures for contracting media campaign services (Croatia).

Television and radio have been used in a number of countries with varying degrees of success.

- **Slovakia** values the cost-effectiveness of TV and radio campaigns and ability to attract the interest of the general public. More specifically, Slovak officials referred to the “Good News – We grew up thanks to EU funds!” campaign (Figure 8 and Box 18) as a particularly effective example. The campaign, relying on simple and clear messages and a very professional design, was considered as innovative, and, placing real emphasis on the EU contribution, managed to reach a large proportion of the general public with basic facts to raise their awareness.

Figure 8: Media campaign “We grew up thanks to EU funds!”



Source: Government Office of the Slovak Republic (2016).

Box 18: Advertising and media campaign for the OP Technical Assistance 2007-13, Slovakia

In 2015 in the framework of media activities, media support for the Operational Programme Technical Assistance was ensured through the following media tools: television and radio campaign, online campaign through the web, print campaign and campaign through city lights.

For the Department of Information and Publicity at Central Coordinating Body as responsible for communication strategy on ESI funding, the main objectives of advertising and media activities were: (i) to secure the effect on the general public and its opinion on the application of Community instruments, (ii) to stress their positive benefits for all citizens of the country, and (iii) to stimulate the interest of citizens to participate in the process of drawing Structural Funds in Slovakia.

In 2015, media activities were implemented via two projects of the OP Technical Assistance in different types of media, with the total impact of 32,253th (number of visualisations in all media, e.g. including clicks on the website promoting ESI funding).

In the first half of 2015 media activities to promote Europe Day 2015 were implemented, as well as media support for competition "How ESI funds helped my region in 2015", under which a media campaign was divided into two phases – in the first to motivate the public to participate in the competition and in the second to present outputs of the competition.

In the second half of 2015, media campaign was focused on the presentation of the 2007-13 programming period – the outcomes and the added value that Slovakia obtained thanks to ESI Funds during previous years. The central slogan for the media campaign during this final phase of the 2007-13 programming period was: „*We grew up thanks to EU funds!*” within advert called “*Good News*”. This advert was being broadcasted mainly at the turn of the years 2015 and 2016.

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gYXWm_qS0Y (parallel between country being developed by EU funds and person growing up during lifetime – girl version)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_0VWk0No18 (parallel between country being developed by EU funds and person growing up during lifetime – boy version)

The main message of this advert was: „*Slovakia is now full of good news, thanks to EU funds. Did you know that 80 % of public funding is being financed through EU funds? Only by them Slovakia could grow up in 2007-2013. We created eight new industrial parks, more than 130,000 job opportunities and 80 km of motorways.*”

Another version of TV spot says: „*Thanks to EU funds, Slovakia has modernized more than 1,000 schools, 74 km of railways and 641 municipalities and public spaces.*”

Total planned budget of the projects on media support activity was €2,980,000, with paid expenses to the beneficiary at €2,958,863.09.

Slovak officials evaluated the most visible media campaign („Good News – We grew up thanks to EU funds!”) as follows:

- **Design:** The tool looks very professional
- **Language:** Engaging language that ‘speaks to’ the target audience
- **Content:** Focus on simple, clear messages (as opposed to technical details)
- **Outreach:** Reaching a large proportion of the general public with basic facts to raise their awareness
- **Novelty effect:** An innovative concept
- **EU visibility:** A real emphasis on the EU contribution; ensuring the EU logo / slogan etc. stands out visually
- **EU messages:** The key message is: We grew up thanks to EU funds!

The highest level of satisfaction was identified with Part 4 (Campaign Outreach), whereas the reported duration of the media campaign via TV could be longer than two months (at the turn of 2015 and 2016), although campaigning through print and online tools as well as radio started even two months earlier.

Source: IQ-Net research.

- In **Portugal**, a big campaign realised together with the media in 2015, involving announcements on TV channels in prime time, on the radio and in digital sources (press and social networks), also achieved significant results, reaching over 3 million people. In addition, TV advertisements and programmes featuring ESIF support are considered successful (See Box 19)

Box 19: TV advertisements and programmes featuring ESIF support in Portugal

In Portugal, there are five TV advertisements featuring the ESIF support (one focusing on Portugal 2020 in general – <https://www.youtube.com/embed/HHMdMoiK3T8>), and four thematic ones – <https://www.portugal2020.pt/Portal2020/campanha-portugal-2020-anuncios-tematicos>) – covering the four thematic priorities under Portugal 2020, four of them also available in English.

So far, these are the only advertisements that are accompanied by the sign language – showing the adherence to the principle of inclusiveness at the core of the ‘Portugal 2020’ brand.

In addition, TV programmes, focused on the results of ESIF support and incentives to submit project applications presenting value for the country, can be watched on the ADC YouTube channel. They present a series of TV programmes, exhibiting the projects under QREN, aligned with the strategic priorities of Portugal 2020, with the objective to disseminate the results of ESIF-supported projects and incentivise project applications under Portugal 2020.

Source: IQ-Net research.

- In a similar vein, a TV campaign in the **Czech Republic**, held at start of 2014-20 implementation, was deemed a success, and is planned to be held each year (although in more general terms, advertising campaigns are considered too costly and are therefore not widely used in the Czech Republic).
- In **Flanders**, cinemas adverts, with which one of the provinces experimented in 2007-13, was considered a successful and cost effective practice, and for the 2014-20 period the MA is considering rolling this out across Flanders. The effectiveness of this tool is viewed to be due to the small number of cinema operators, which makes it easy to reach agreements, as well as the ability of the adverts to reach a broad audience.
- In **Greece**, radio, TV and newspaper ads are important, with successful campaigns run by regions (Kentriki Makedonia). At the national level, the launching TV campaign for the 2007-13 period was an effective tool, that raised awareness of the PA/ESPA and won the first prize in the Regio Star Awards. In the last few years, however, expenditure on communication is being geared towards lower cost measures.
- In **Denmark**, the use of TV ads was explored in the previous programming period, however they were not deemed to have boosted the number of applicants and their use was not continued.

4.3.5 Press releases and media relations

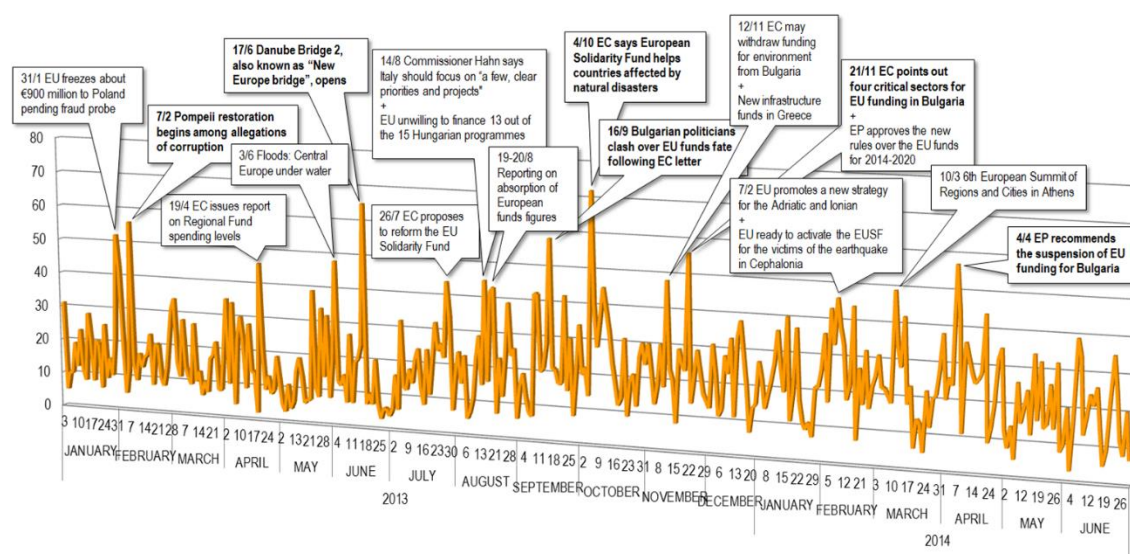
The media can be an important channel for informing the public about EU Cohesion policy. As noted, EU surveys of citizens show that television and newspapers are the main sources of information about EU co-financed projects. However, media interest can vary. In some cases, there is a high level

of ESIF press coverage as in Wales, where political visibility has been high historically and the Structural Funds are 'always on the agenda'.

Limited media interest in Cohesion policy or negative tone in press coverage was reported by many IQ-Net programme authorities (Austria, Czech Republic, Greece, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Portugal, Sweden, Scotland, Slovakia). In Austria and Sweden, there has not been much interest by the media and the focus tends to be on negative news. In Nordrhein-Westfalen, the media tends to see Cohesion policy simply as a funding source, in both positive and negative terms – so that media stories will focus on the amount of resources allocated from the EU budget to Germany/Nordrhein-Westfalen, or on difficulties in absorbing EU funding or on the misuse of funds. In Portugal, the media have mostly focused on negative aspects of implementation, notably on the threat of the ESIF suspensions and changes in programme management. Financial absorption is the main interest in the Czech Republic as well as irregularities or fraud in public tendering, which may explain the rather negative or neutral attitudes of citizens to Cohesion policy. In Scotland, national stories picked up by the press tend to be negative, unless it is a major headline achievement (preferably involving roads, buildings). In Greece, media interest is attracted mainly when specific calls are issued.

The generally negative tone of media coverage – often linked to funding interruptions or irregularities and fraud – is confirmed by European Commission analysis of media stories (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Media monitoring of Cohesion policy by the Commission: No news is good news?



Source: Lockett A (2016), *Communicating Cohesion Policy: Challenges and Opportunities*, Presentation at COHESIFY launch event, 17 June 2016, Brussels.

There is typically more interest among local and regional news media rather than the national media. The most widely circulated national newspapers rarely report on Structural Funds or co-funded projects (e.g. Sweden, País Vasco). In Finland, visibility in the press is higher in North and East Finland, particularly in local and regional press, largely due to their higher profile as recipients of ESIF and consequently the availability of more concrete projects to report on. There are success stories available, but these do not often spark media interest, particularly in the south where such stories try to compete with other stories for the attention of large media. In Scotland, local press are more informed and interested than national news sources, although they have been quite critical of the new more strategic approach to the programmes.

A frequently reported problem with media coverage of projects is that the EU contribution is often not acknowledged or emphasised. While the media may report on interesting projects, there is rarely a mention of the co-financing provided by the Structural Funds (Nordrhein-Westfalen, Finland, Sweden). The ERDF OP MA for Nordrhein-Westfalen has tried to get media attention in relation to specific projects – and sometimes this has proved a success in the sense that the media has taken up stories on individual projects – but usually with little recognition of the contribution of EU co-funding to the projects. The focus of media attention is normally on the content of the project (Nordrhein-Westfalen), particularly when they are innovative projects (Finland).

Media interest can be driven by politically salient EU events. In the context of the referendum debates in the UK, there was significant media activity, both negative and positive. There have been lengthy articles, featuring high profile projects. Public awareness grew but it was caught up in the whole message around the referendum and people used this information however they wanted to (to further their own preferred agendas). By contrast, accession to the European Union has been an important driver of media interest in new Member States (e.g. Croatia). In Sweden, there has been a clear shift from the accession period in the mid-1990s when there was somewhat more interest in the EU to the present period when Cohesion policy is very marginal in the news (almost non-existent in the national news).

Television and radio are important drivers of public awareness but there are mixed views on their suitability and efficiency value. In some cases, state-driven campaigns are not used because they can be perceived negatively as political propaganda (e.g. Sweden, the UK). In other countries, such practices are considered to be an effective tool for informing the public and promoting debate (e.g. Czech Republic, Portugal). In Flanders, the 2007-13 programme ran one national media campaign but this was considered expensive and not very cost effective.

Lack of knowledge of Cohesion policy among journalists is another factor inhibiting media coverage. As noted by Portugal, journalists sometimes have insufficient background knowledge of the functioning of Cohesion policy and, as a consequence, do not always formulate the most relevant questions during media events.

In reviewing the experiences of IQ-Net partners, a number of factors for enhancing effective media relations and coverage were highlighted.

- **Cooperative and proactive press relations.** In Poland, the unit responsible for coordinating the informational and promotional activities of the ROP cooperates with the Office of the Press Office of the Marshal of Pomorskie. There are also regular meetings with all departments involved in the implementation of European funds, which aim to coordinate cooperation activities with the media. Portugal is aiming to improve two-way communication with journalists in order to improve their understanding of Cohesion policy. In the Czech Republic, breakfasts with journalists are organized to build long-term relationships with the media and their understanding of European funds. In Wales, the MA is very involved with issuing press notices for projects, with a high level of Ministerial involvement, which contributes to ensuring press coverage. While press relations have been limited in Austria till now, a more proactive approach is envisaged for the future. A 2014 evaluation of the País Vasco communication strategy recommended a more proactive approach to media relations including the formulation of a media communication plan, based on a review of existing media

reporting; the establishment of a communications working group with responsibility for retaining a documentary record of media activities and improving relations with the regional media; and a clear separation of tasks with intermediate bodies and intervention managers being responsible for issuing press releases on projects/actions, and the regional MA focussing on the results of the País Vasco ERDF OP overall.

- **Regular press activities.** In Wales, an average of one press release was issued every week in 2015. This received a lot of good coverage, with a good balance between coverage at a Wales-level and at local level. The team have developed a good working relationship with project sponsors, who approach them with their own draft press releases, and to discuss ideas for communications if a project milestone is approaching. In Greece, an average of two press releases are reproduced by the National Coordination Authority every week and when necessary the service provides material for the press conferences. In Nordrhein-Westfalen, there are regular press releases on the breadth of funding under the OP and local press releases oriented to OP results and projects within the local area. In addition, press conferences are held on the key milestones of the OP as well as organised visits for journalists to innovative projects. Evaluators of the País Vasco communication strategy recommended more frequent press releases to the media with the largest regional circulation (e.g. EITB, El Correo, Diario Vasco, Deia, TVE).
- **Providing journalists with technical support.** In the Czech Republic, the EU publicity division supports journalists' work by preparing simplified graphics, regional data of interest to journalists and positive case studies including ambassadors of successful project stories.
- **Dedicated press officers.** In Sweden, the information and communication officer at the MA writes press releases but media relations are managed by a dedicated press officer. The Slovenian PR officer of the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy (i.e. dealing with a wider portfolio than only Cohesion policy) has a very good relationship with journalists, although there is no specialised press officer in the MA itself.
- **Dedicated events.** In Portugal, a national event was organised together with journalists, with support from the European Commission, the representation of the European Commission in Portugal and the Agency for Development and Cohesion. This event was of great interest for the participating journalists. The ADC considers that this awareness-raising work should be continued to promote the organisation of regular spaces of debate and technical discussions with the media to demonstrate good practices and ESIF achievements.
- **Consistent messages across communication activities.** Poland (and within this Pomorskie) is the largest beneficiary of support from EU funds which inevitably results in media scrutiny and requires a range of communication activities in this field. For the MA, the key is consistency of message, across a range of activities:
 - developing ready-to-use material in accordance with the needs of different media;
 - press conferences;
 - interviews;
 - regular meetings with journalists;

- media visits to the projects;
- newsletters;
- mailing;
- and sponsored publications.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The communication of European Structural and Investment Funds has acquired increased salience in recent years in the context of criticism about the effectiveness of Cohesion policy in debates on the future of the EU budget, and against a backdrop of rising Euroscepticism among citizens in many parts of the EU following the ongoing fallout of multiple economic, migration and political crises.

This paper has examined how publicity and communication of ESIF is being achieved in different contexts across the EU. Drawing on research from IQ-Net countries and regions, it reviewed the key changes in the approaches to communication in 2014-20, identified examples of good and interesting practice, and explored the factors contributing to the effective design and delivery of communication strategies and measures.

The review of 2014-20 communication strategies revealed a degree of continuity in the overall approach in terms of objectives, measures and target groups, with changes of varying degrees of importance that build on previous experiences and address new EU requirements. A key shift in many cases is a more strategic approach to communication with a stronger integration of communication as a core component of programming and greater coordination across Funds and activities. Greater centralisation in the governance of communication is also evident, often related to shifts in the programme architecture, and there has been a recalibration of priorities and target groups with a stronger focus on communicating results, especially at project level.

The new communication strategies and implementation experiences are assessed positively overall by most partners, notwithstanding certain challenges and mixed assessments of specific tools in different countries and regions. A clear increase in the communication effort has been witnessed, driven both by new EU requirements and domestic priorities, with a strong focus on electronic tools including increasing use of social media in some (but not all) cases. While recognising the positive results to date, many programme authorities consider that it is too early to give a comprehensive assessment of achievements as programme implementation is in the early phases. Much of the communication emphasis in the early stages has been on potential beneficiaries to ensure absorption of funding, although other target groups have also been engaged, especially through events (at launch and annually thereafter), and substantial efforts are being made to communicate the results and benefits of completed interventions from 2007-13.

Communicating results and harnessing the potential of new digital and social media

At the heart of the “communication paradox” in Cohesion policy is that there is more evidence than ever before on the achievements and added value of the policy, but few people seem to be listening, either in the Commission or the Member States.¹¹ With the debate on the future of Cohesion policy launched through the MFF review and post-2020 discussions, and the publication of the ex-post evaluation of the 2007-13 funding period, DG REGIO has emphasised the collective responsibility of both the Commission and Member States to communicate on the results of the policy. The reinforced results orientation for 2014-20 – including better articulated intervention logics, the performance framework and reserve and conditionalities, – and the increasing focus on communicating achievements at programme and project level could potentially help to improve the situation. New

¹¹ Bachtler J and Mendez C (2016) *Reforming Cohesion policy: the communication paradox*, Cohesify Blog, www.cohesify.eu/2016/10/07/reforming-cohesion-policy-communication-paradox/

opportunities are also provided by the rapid increase in new technologies and communication for interacting with Cohesion policy stakeholders, beneficiaries and, increasingly, the public through web platforms, social media, visualisation tools and information graphics amongst others.

Yet, there are also necessary preconditions for a genuine performance shift in communication, not least in terms of increasing the performance and communication cultures and mind-sets among managing authorities, implementation bodies and beneficiaries in the face of multiple and often conflicting administrative pressures and priorities (effectiveness, absorption, assurance/regularity). While there is evidence of increasing use and interest in new social media for communicating about Cohesion policy, it also requires administrative and technical capacity, skills and resources and crucially the buy-in and active contribution to content by individuals as well as teams involved in programme management and communication.

Questions: *What are the most effective tools for communicating programme and project results and the benefits for the daily lives of citizens? What are the experiences (positive and negative) of communication through different social media platforms? Is there sufficient capacity and skills to use communicate tools effectively? What support could be provided by the Commission in terms of guidance, training, good practice exchange or direct implementation?*

Visual identity and messages

Cohesion policy is “one of most ambitious, complex and misunderstood areas of EU decision-making”.¹² It is inherently difficult to understand and communicate Cohesion policy, at least to the public, because it has a wide range of objectives and priorities, multiple funds and many instruments managed at different territorial levels underpinned by a dense regulatory framework with technical terms, obscure language and jargon. The policy is also constantly evolving to address new agendas and concepts such as smart specialisation with an increasing focus on “soft” activities that are less visible compared to infrastructure projects.

Questions: *To what extent are programme and project logos, emblems and other visual branding tools useful in establishing a visual identity and increasing the profile of ESIF? How can simple, clear and consistent messages be established and delivered across programmes, projects and ESI Funds?*

Public awareness, understanding and EU support

In communicating the achievements of Cohesion policy programmes and projects, a core EU goal is to increase citizens’ understanding and positive perceptions of both Cohesion policy and the EU more generally. However, Cohesion policy is not well understood by citizens and the profile and visibility of programmes and EU co-funded projects varies across countries and regions, partly depending on the relative scale of funding and types of expenditure supported. Moreover, the national media have a tendency to report negative stories about irregularities and fraud, and local or regional media (and politicians) do not place sufficient attention on the EU dimension of co-funded projects. Nor can the positive achievements and impacts of Cohesion policy on the daily lives of citizens be divorced from wider and more politicised macro debates about EU burden sharing in relation to Eurozone bailouts,

¹² Peterson J and Bomberg E (1999) *Decision-making in the European Union*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

migration quotas and the very future and sustainability of the EU itself in a context of rising Euroscepticism and Brexit and domestic electoral cycles.

Questions: *How can Cohesion policy be communicated in a way that is engaging and appealing for citizens? Can better communication improve citizens' understanding and attitudes to the European Union in a positive way? If the media have tendency to report on negative stories, how can the media be engaged to also report about positive achievements?*