



Objectives and scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation was commissioned by the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) – Coordination of financing instruments – performance, results, and evaluation unit.

The general objective of this evaluation is “to provide an overall independent assessment on the contribution of the TAIEX instrument in the period 2015–2020 to reform processes in partner countries and EU Member States”. The evaluation has a stock-tacking, lesson-learning and forward-looking dimension.

The evaluation’s scope covers all support provided under TAIEX during the period 2015 to 2020 in all thematic areas and in all countries.

Background

TAIEX is a capacity-building instrument aimed at supporting public administrations in improving approximation, implementation, and the enforcement of the European Union (EU) acquis and sharing of good practices.

TAIEX was set up in 1996 for a two-year period, to support countries that were candidates for EU Accession (CCs) in transposing and implementing EU legislation (acquis) specifically related to the internal single market.

Between 2014 and 2020, the geographic scope of TAIEX was progressively extended to EU MS (through Service Level Agreements with DG ENV, DG REGIO, DG REFORM), as well as to countries covered by the EU development policies (DG INTPA) and by the Partnership Instrument (through the FPI). Its implementation structure is in DG NEAR.

This extension was accompanied by a broadening of the thematic coverage. TAIEX activities are now organized along 9 strands, each with a different thematic and/or geographical focus and with a separate budget:

- ➔ Three strands for the enlargement and neighbourhood regions: TAIEX IPA, TAIEX ENI South and TAIEX ENI East.

- ➔ One strand focusing on the Turkish Cypriot community: TAIEX TCc.
- ➔ Three strands for EU Member States: TAIEX-REGIO Peer 2 Peer (P2P), TAIEX SRSP P2P, TAIEX EIR P2P.
- ➔ Two strands for countries outside the EU, enlargement, and neighbourhood regions: TAIEX PI and TAIEX INTPA.

TAIEX mobilizes the expertise and technical know-how within EU MSs to boost capacity development within beneficiary countries, within the framework of existing EU internal, foreign, and multilateral political commitments.

TAIEX services were initially demand-based, in the sense that all requests were to be initiated by the potential beneficiaries. However, in 2016, TAIEX also added the possibility for Commission services to initiate TAIEX support to allow for a stronger focus on EU priorities.

TAIEX is based on peer-to-peer exchanges and takes the form of short-term projects. It supports five types of events: workshops for beneficiary countries, studies for EU Members States, expert missions to beneficiary countries, peer-review assessments, and work from home.



Methodological approach

This theory-based evaluation was conducted in three phases:

- ➔ The structuring phase served to define the approach for the entire evaluation. This consisted among other things in mapping the TAIEX support provided, reconstructing the TAIEX intervention logic showing the expected pathway to move from support to expected results and impacts, and refining the evaluation questions proposed in the TOR and identifying the judgment criteria and sources to be used to address them.
- ➔ Data collection consisted of the analysis of available documents; of the mapping of the funding; of interviews with stakeholders at strategic and event level; of seven case studies; and of two rounds of surveys, one targeting experts and participants to TAIEX events and one targeting a broad range of stakeholders. The case studies jointly analysed a selection of 105 events. They involved four online focus group discussions.
- ➔ The synthesis phase was dedicated to triangulating the information that was collected through all the different means and from the different sources. Based on that triangulation, the team answered the evaluation questions and formulated conclusions and recommendations.

An Interservice Steering Group (ISG) composed of members from different Commission services ensured the management and steering of the evaluation. Intermediary deliverables were provided at key stages of the evaluation process (inception, interim and draft final report) and discussed with the ISG.

Findings and conclusions

On TAIEX's strategy to address beneficiaries' capacity development needs

TAIEX has fulfilled its role by intervening as a gap-filling instrument for capacity development, both in the enlargement context in which it was created and in the other countries and regions to which its support was later broadened. TAIEX support was generally a part of overarching strategies in pre-accession countries and TCc, but less in other strands, where support was more punctuated. It was intended to be one of many tools/instruments in the broader architecture of aid. This was reflected by the financial weight of TAIEX, which represented a marginal percentage of the overall support that was provided. Overall, TAIEX represented € 65M over the period 2015–2020, i.e., about €10M/year.

TAIEX support was successfully expanded to regions and contexts beyond the enlargement region. This was done in a pragmatic and ad hoc manner that worked well, although there was no clear approach towards retrofitting and the overall objectives remained broad.

Stakeholders have generally appreciated TAIEX, but the demand for TAIEX support has decreased over the years and budgets have been underspent. This was linked to the lack of knowledge of the instrument, a lesser implication in the accession context, the strategic choice of recalibration, and, in a different way, the COVID-19 pandemic. The share of budget spent ranged for instance from 17% in TAIEX INTPA to 54% in TAIEX IPA and to 85% in TAIEX ENI EAST.

The TAIEX Recalibration has only partly succeeded in better inscribing TAIEX IPA–ENI support in broader policy frameworks. TAIEX Strategic enabled Commission Services/ EEAS to request events for the pursuit of key EU priorities that would not have been undertaken by the national authorities, and to use TAIEX in support of other EU instruments and programs (e.g., Twinning). However, in a context of scarce resources and prioritisation of TAIEX Strategic over the demand-driven approach, TAIEX Strategic constrained the capacity to serve countries' specific needs and reform objectives.



On the results achieved and their sustainability

TAIEX has proven to be an effective tool for achieving its key objectives of exchanging best practices and short-term individual and institutional capacity building. There were also examples of TAIEX playing a key role in bringing about structural reforms or paving the way for political change. These occurred when TAIEX support was clearly inscribed in a broader support strategy. Significant variation was observed across strands, and TAIEX was most constrained by its short-term and ad-hoc nature and its limited critical mass. In most strands, TAIEX accounted for less than 1% of the budget beneficiaries received for reforms with only TCc and SRSP accounting for 4.2 and 1.3% respectively.

TAIEX has succeeded in reaching its goal of being an instrument easy to call upon and addressing demands swiftly. However, there was a slowing down of the speed of delivery in recent years. This was due to several factors

such as the lack of available expertise that increased the response and implementation times, and an overload of the TAIEX team.

The achievement of results was conditioned by several recurrent factors, most importantly the presence of high-quality experts, the use of TAIEX as part of a more long-term strategy, and the synergistic use of TAIEX with other instruments. Conversely, adverse political contexts and political instability, and occasional implementation issues hampered results. In some contexts, the sustainability of results remained a challenge, notably for reasons of lack of follow-up and frequent staff turnover in beneficiary administrations.

The TAIEX monitoring and evaluation system was well-organised and consisted of several instruments. However, it faced several challenges in its implementation and there was also no clear strategy for learning lessons.

On the TAIEX implementation modalities (including during COVID-19)

TAIEX events were mostly organised with a low administrative burden for the beneficiaries but they required a considerable effort from EU stakeholders. In some cases, the administrative burden has increased in recent years, but it has remained low compared to other instruments. Direct financial costs of TAIEX events showed large variations across type of events and strands and increased over time. Online events were not always less costly than in-person events.

In the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, TAIEX rapidly shifted to organising online events, with both a positive and a negative impact on the capacity of events to deliver results. As of April 2020, TAIEX launched online events. Not only did this ensure the continuation of services and the use of the instrument to

address key pandemic needs, but the online work also brought environmental benefits and increased the speed and flexibility of the involvement of experts and participants. It showed, however, also limitations in terms of reaching results due to, for instance, the loss of informal interactions and technical difficulties with translation.

The location of the TAIEX management in DG NEAR offered clear advantages and was regarded as appropriate by most stakeholders. Indeed, this allowed, for instance, old and new strands to capitalize on the accumulated expertise and know-how, and on the centralised database of experts. The evaluation did not identify specific drawbacks to this centralisation of the TAIEX management.



On the specific and EU value added provided by TAIEX

TAIEX has offered specific added value through its capacity to complement other support, by preparing it, by filling gaps or by compensating for the absence of other instruments and by doing this in a swift and service-oriented manner.

The EDBE was a key source of EU added value for TAIEX, allowing for the quick identification and deployment of MS experts with the most relevant expertise. It was, however, also confronted with several implementation challenges.

Recommendations

The evaluation presents a set of nine recommendations based on the conclusions. They are all addressed to the Commission and are grouped in two clusters.

On the overall strategy of TAIEX



R1

Pursue the use of TAIEX with the same features, but frame the TAIEX's strategy in a written, actualized document. The Commission should continue to use TAIEX as a swift, gap-filling capacity development instrument, integrated where possible in more broader frameworks. It should also draft a specific strategy document describing the range of purposes for which TAIEX should be used. Relevant purposes should be clearly referenced in each SLA. Such document could also guide a potential further expansion of TAIEX.



R2

Develop a clear approach with respect to TAIEX Strategic. The Commission should clarify how it intends to combine and balance the use of TAIEX Strategic with TAIEX Classic, particularly in a context in which the capacity in terms of the number of events that can be organized is limited.



R3

Adapt the application process to enhance TAIEX's ability to tailor events to any purpose or broader objective they are meant to contribute to, as well as to favour synergies with other instruments. TAIEX is indeed not conceived as a standalone instrument: it is meant to contribute to the achievement of broader purposes, in combination with other interventions. This could be done by adding specific questions to the application format, aiming at favouring such synergies.



R4

The Commission should be more strategic and thorough in its communication to promote the use of TAIEX. This should aim at increasing the awareness and uptake, which were below ambitions in several regions. It should also help clarifying the distribution of responsibilities in terms of creating awareness of TAIEX at the local level.



On implementation and the capacity to generate results



R5

Make sure TAIEX maintains its capability to be mobilized swiftly. Swiftness is one of the key assets of TAIEX. But over the 2015–2020 period, the time required to organise events has increased. Several elements have played a role in this respect and should be addressed. They relate, for instance, to the maintenance of the expert database, its further development for certain sectors, and constraints of the TAIEX team in terms of number of events it can organise.



R6

Integrate online options in the TAIEX approach. The TAIEX team should integrate online events or features within its menu of options, and notably use them also outside crisis situations. It should also provide guidance on the advantages and disadvantages of online events under different circumstances and examine to what extent the requirements for online events are adequate. Online events could be promoted, for instance, when experts and beneficiaries have already established a relationship, when they allow the participation of key beneficiaries or experts that would otherwise not be available, or for specific follow-up.



R7

Maintain the TAIEX management centralised and in DG NEAR and continue to serve other Commission services through SLAs. Indeed, such centralisation has proven to work well for several reasons, even outside regions covered by DG NEAR. Stakeholders were in favour of maintaining it.



R8

Improve TAIEX's monitoring and reporting practices with a view of fostering better transparency and learning. TAIEX has an impressive data collection system, but no consolidated and well-developed practices to analyse and use it for learning and improvement. The follow up on events could be improved by making sure, for instance, that expert reports are of good quality, that they are sent to the appropriate stakeholders, and that they are made more accessible within EU Institutions. Results of participant and expert evaluations should be systematically analysed and shared within the TAIEX team and with other relevant stakeholders. Key Performance Indicators and statistics should be developed to assess TAIEX's activity and results.



R9

Dimension the TAIEX team adequately in function of the levels of activity (i.e., number of events) that is optimal and that it wishes to achieve for each strand. Several elements indicate that the staffing of the TAIEX team dedicated to the IPA-ENI strands was tight, and that this limited the capacity to address all existing demands. This was compounded by the introduction of TAIEX Strategic, as it was not accompanied by increased staffing. The evaluation hence recommends estimating the case handler effort required to organize events, and to make sure that sufficient resources are available given the objectives pursued. Furthermore, the introduction of new TAIEX strands or activities should come with a specification of the human and financial resources required to implement them.

