# FOLLOW-UP ACTION PLAN OF THE EVALUATION OF THE TAIEX INSTRUMENT IN THE PERIOD 2015-2020

The TAIEX instrument was subject to an evaluation, which took place in 2021-2022. The evaluation was comprehensive, focusing on all strands of TAIEX, namely those serving NEAR regions as well as those for the benefit of partners and policies covered by the six service-level agreements (SLAs).

The evaluation focused on changes brought about by the repositioning of TAIEX towards more strategic events as well as the changes due to COVID. Although COVID impacted only 6 month of the period of the evaluation, its impact on the recommendations is significant as it re-orients the instruments towards a new hybrid delivery mode.

The evaluators delivers nine recommendations listed below. The unit was consulted on the recommendations and has agreed to them in principle.

As a follow up, the unit has prepared its response with a concrete list of activities to be put in place following the evaluation.

| RECOMMENDATIONS, FINAL REPORT | RESPONSES EU SERVICES: (I) ACCEPTED OR NOT, II) ACTIONS TO BE UNDERTAKEN | FOLLOW UP (by who ; by when) |
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| **CLUSTER 1: OVERALL STRATEGY OF TAIEX** | | |
| **RECOMMENDATION 1 : Frame TAIEX's strategy in a written, actualized document**<br><br>*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. In addition, the document could also guide a potential further expansion of TAIEX (e.g. through new SLAs).*<br><br>*This recommendation is linked to: Conclusions 1, 2 and 9*<br><br>*Priority * : 4*<br>*Importance*: 4*<br><br>*Main implementation responsibility: TAIEX team (DG NEAR C3)*<br>*Main associated actors: contact points within Commission services which have active SLAs with TAIEX.*<br><br>*Implementation timeframe:*<br>*- Elaboration of a new strategic document: short/ medium term* | **i) Partially accepted:**<br><br>As a demand-driven tool, TAIEX supports the strategic goals of the European Commission services.<br><br>The TAIEX instrument set-up is based on several legally-binding Commission Decisions and an overall logframe matrix. The creation of a broad guiding strategy could in principle be elaborated, but such document would have no legal validity.<br><br>In the framework of Opsys – the European Commission's Operational information System used for External Actions – a broad strategic framework is currently underway. | NEAR C3 management; finance team.<br><br>By 2023 |

*\* 1 = low, 4 = high*

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| - *Referencing in SLAs, strategy for further expansion of TAIEX, use as part of communication strategies: medium/ long term* <br><br> **Lessons learnt / What works and should continue, be expanded or replicated** <br><br> TAIEX is well appreciated, particularly as it has addressed an existing need for swift, flexible and short-term knowledge development support, and has proven to deliver results. Thanks to its flexibility, it has added value in different contexts and both at operational and strategic level, moving beyond its initial focus on the transposition of the acquis in candidate countries for EU accession. <br><br> **What should be improved? How should this be done?** <br><br> While TAIEX's scope has changed significantly since its inception, the document that frames its purpose(s), characteristics and how the two are aligned has never been updated. As a result, *there is no strategic document* on which to ground the evolution of the design and use of the instrument for purposes other than the acquis. <u>Elaborating a new white paper or strategic document</u> would allow to clarify which objectives are being pursued through TAIEX in different regions (and through different SLAs). It would also better tailor the instrument to the key objectives. Also, it could serve as a basis to explore and frame potential new SLAs. <br><br> Finally, the document could be used to better explain to potential applicants (i.e. beneficiaries and EU officers) how they can use TAIEX, resulting in a higher quantity and quality of demand. | In addition to that, under the MFF 2021-2027, the unit further developed on the TAIEX action document and thus adapted all NEAR financing decisions to the new environment C(2021) 9716, C(2021) 9719, C(2022) 2107. The main elements of these adaptations have been taken up into the new generation of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) that DG NEAR has in place with 5 partner DGs. <br><br> All SLAs have their own communication strategies, as well as visibility and promotion agendas, which are used to further expand the use of TAIEX. <br><br> <u>ii) Actions to be undertaken:</u> <br><br> - Finalisation of Opsys log-frame by 2023 <br><br> - Continuing strengthening TAIEX with changes to its financing decisions and ensuring that all SLAs are aligned. | |
| **RECOMMENDATION 2: Develop a clear approach with respect to TAIEX Strategic** <br><br> *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 capacity in terms of number of events that can be organized in a given timeframe is limited.* <br><br> *Note: this recommendation mainly concerns NEAR strands; albeit it may also serve as a basis, in the future, to support the definition of the strategy for the use of TAIEX in Partner Countries outside the NEAR region.* <br><br> *This recommendation is linked to: Conclusions 3 and 4; Lessons 2 and 4* <br><br> *Priority: 3* <br> *Importance: 3* <br><br> *Main implementation responsibility: TAIEX team (DG NEAR C3)* <br> *Main associated actors: Other DG NEAR thematic and geographic services (NEAR.A, NEAR.B, NEAR.C) should collaborate in defining the strategy and validate it)* | **i) Partially accepted:** <br><br> - Proportion between strategic and classic TAIEX activities responds to the political context as well as the technical situation in a given country and, for these reasons, is in constant dynamism. <br><br> - Criteria for assignment and prioritisation of actions can thus only be implemented on a dynamic and flexible manner according to political needs and specific developments. <br><br> - The TAIEX Management System (TMS) allows full insight into monitoring of operations. The | NEAR C3 management; TAIEX country coordinators; Part of the programming and outreach exercise in spring 2023. In close coordination with concerned directorates of DG NEAR and partner DGs. |

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| *Implementation timeframe:*<br>- *Implementation of a system to monitor the use of TAIEX team resources by each event: short term*<br>- *Definition and implementation of an approach with regards to TAIEX Strategic: short-medium term (plus subsequent adjustments and revisions)* | management unit controls delivery in monthly meetings based around TMS statistics.<br><br>**ii) Actions to be undertaken:** | |
| **Lessons learnt / What works and should continue, be expanded or replicated** | - Continue evaluating emerging needs in cooperation with partner countries and Commission services. | |
| The possibility for EU officers to request TAIEX events enabled the use of TAIEX towards EU-driven policy needs. Programmatic/ planning features allowed to provide support in a way that was more extended in time, when relevant.<br>The definition of priority areas of support allowed a more strategic use of the limited capacity available and represented a clear criterion to assign priority to events when not all of them could be organized. | - Monitoring proportion of types of TAIEX actions, ensuring that emerging priorities and needs are supported on yearly basis via TMS and Planning meetings. | |
| **What should be improved? How should this be done?** | | |
| Different TAIEX events compete for limited organizational capacity. It would thus be important to understand how much of TAIEX's organization capacity is absorbed by each type of event, and bearing this in mind, to define a strategy to ensure that the use of different features is optimally balanced.<br>A first sub-recommendation concerns monitoring <u>the level of use of TAIEX's human resources (case handlers) in the organization of individual events.</u> This issue could be addressed by adding a time-use-monitoring feature to TMS and/or other TAIEX internal systems.<br>Secondly, if resource constraints remain in place, the Commission could consider defining <u>indicative quotas (in terms of number of events) that should be organized according to each modality.</u> These quotas could remain flexible, but it should be ensured that a sizeable capacity is left available to address emerging, non-programmed needs – according to the original philosophy of TAIEX.<br>Similarly, while the definition of priority areas of support also makes sense in a scenario of limited capacity, the Commission could also <u>consider explicitly reserving some capacity for events</u> that, albeit they do not fall in these categories, are deemed particularly valuable (e.g. have the strong support of EU Delegations). | | |
| **RECOMMENDATION 3: Adjust the application process**<br><br>*The Commission should 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.*<br><br>*This recommendation is linked to: Conclusions 3 and 4*<br>*Priority: 2*<br>*Importance: 4*<br>*Main implementation responsibility: TAIEX team (DG NEAR C3)*<br>*Main associated actors: contact points within Commission services which have active SLAs with TAIEX.*<br>*Implementation timeframe:* | **i) Accepted**<br><br>The simple and fast application has been recognised as a key strength of TAIEX, also by this evaluation. Fine-tuning the application form can help identifying the most mature applications. Therefore, the unit plans limited but regular changes to the application process, depending on request from NCPs, partner DGs applicants, and case handlers.<br><br>**ii) Actions to be undertaken** | TAIEX team leaders; by end of 2022 |

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| - *Small adjustments to application forms: short term*<br>- *Wider adjustments to processes: medium term (particularly upon negotiation/ renegotiation of SLAs* | - Continuous improvements of TAIEX application forms and consultation process, as per demand from stakeholders | |
| **Lessons learnt / What works and should continue, be expanded or replicated** | - Continuing using outreach missions to promote smart applications, including embedding TAIEX in wider reform processes and linking it to EU priorities and other EU instruments. | |
| The TAIEX application process is perceived to work well and to be conducive to the organization of well-conceived and beneficiary-owned events.<br>Application formats and review/consultation processes have been somewhat tailored to the different strands, although they mostly remain standardized. Application formats are relatively simple and easy to fill in, making TAIEX accessible. | | |
| **What should be improved? How should this be done?** | - Regarding the SLAs, the workflow of the application process is annexed to every SLA, which is renegotiated on average every second year. Modifications to the workflow will continue being suggested. | |
| TAIEX is not conceived as a standalone instrument; rather, it is meant to contribute to the achievement of broader purposes acting in combination with other interventions.<br>These elements are not, however, clearly reflected in application formats. While formats typically include an "objective" field, it is unclear whether this refers to the specific event or to the broader objective, and it is used inconsistently. Also, while formats require listing other actions which pursue the same goal, they do not require information on all the necessary conditions (beyond capacity development supported by TAIEX) which are required for the broader objective to be reached, and whether those are or can be reasonably expected to be in place.<br>These issues could be addressed by adding specific questions to the application format, such as "What broader objective is the event meant to contribute to?" and "List what other conditions need to be fulfilled or measures taken to ensure the broader objective can be reached. Please specify how conditions will be ensured and/or measures taken." This should be accompanied by guidance on what these conditions typically are, including political momentum, resources and capacity issues. The application review sheet should also include a checklist in this sense, such as: "Are other conditions to the achievement of the broader objective in place, or can they be reasonably expected to be put in place?" A lack of satisfactory provisions should constitute a reason for rejection.<br>In addition, the application review process should be adapted through the addition of one or a few questions, so that it promotes reflection on how to best leverage synergies with other available EU instruments, whether their use is already being considered or not.<br>A further item in the application could ask how dissemination and application of acquired knowledge will be ensured, with the purpose of stimulating reflection on this item from the very beginning.<br>Also, on a strand-by-strand basis, it should be examined whether it is worth maintaining all steps of the application process as they are, or if some elements should be given emphasis to increase efficiency. In particular in strands where TAIEX events are well inserted in broader programs (notably TAIEX TCc and TAIEX SRSP), the consultation process could be shortened or waived (as in fact it is the case for TAIEX TCc). Application fields should also be periodically reviewed to ensure relevance. Such aspects should be defined upon negotiation (and re-negotiation) of SLAs.<br>Concerning study visits, it is suggested that the profile of each person meant to participate be briefly described | - The application form for study visits will not include directly the profile of participants. However, the issue of the profile of participants will remain of high importance in the implementation phase. The Study Visit modality is increasing popular and there is pressure to increase the number of participants, therefore a thorough screening of proposals is needed. | |

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| and justified, and that the discussion on the selection of participants be part of the application review process. | | |
| **RECOMMENDATION 4 : Strengthen communication to promote the use of TAIEX**<br><br>*The Commission should be more strategic and thorough in its communication efforts to promote the use of TAIEX.*<br><br>*This recommendation is linked to: Conclusions 3 and 5; Lessons 2, 4, 5 and 6*<br>*Priority: 1*<br>*Importance: 3*<br>*Main implementation responsibility: TAIEX team (DG NEAR C3), contact points within Commission services which have active SLAs with TAIEX.*<br>*Main associated actors: NCPs, EU Delegations Contact Points.*<br>*Implementation timeframe: medium term*<br><br>**Lessons learnt / What works and should continue, be expanded or replicated**<br><br>TAIEX was overall well appreciated and deemed useful by its users. Several institutions are frequent users.<br>The NCP network appears to play an important role in supporting the demand for TAIEX in NEAR countries.<br>Communication and awareness-raising strategies are to some extent diversified among strands and implemented in collaboration with DGs responsible for each SLA. This allows to consider the specificities of each strand as well as the magnitude of its scope.<br><br>**What should be improved? How should this be done?**<br><br>Over the period studied, TAIEX has been introduced in new regions, but with an uptake that often remained limited and that was below the ambitions (e.g. TAIEX INTPA, TAIEX REGIO, TAIEX EIR). Several stakeholders linked this issue to low awareness of the instrument.<br><br>The uptake of TAIEX Strategic has also been relatively low, particularly within EU Delegations in the NEAR regions, whose representatives (particularly: in the South Neighbourhood and the region of Western Balkans and Turkey) demonstrated limited or no awareness of the option of directly asking for events.<br><br>There are also indications that awareness of TAIEX and the opportunities it offers are low in countries beyond the NEAR region. In addition, there appears to be a significant degree of confusion and misunderstanding around planning efforts promoted by the TAIEX team in the NEAR region, as well as the use of training maps and workshops.<br><br>Furthermore, the assignment and distribution of responsibilities in creating awareness of TAIEX at the local level is not fully clear. In particular, within NEAR countries it is unclear how these are split between NCPs and EU Delegation contact points (and to which extent these are to be supported from the TAIEX team). TAIEX EIR and | **i)Accepted**:<br><br>Strengthening communication is key to promote TAIEX. Communication and outreach efforts are part of the Unit's ongoing work to strengthen the uptake of all TAIEX strands including TAIEX strategic, and increase the instrument's awareness in partner administrations including at local level.<br><br>**ii) Actions to be undertaken:**<br><br>- Continue providing guidance on communication, to everyone involved in preparation and implementation of TAIEX.<br><br>- Continuing raising awareness on the TAIEX instruments, both in NEAR regions and non-NEAR partners worldwide, through dedicated information sessions and targeted outreach missions in cooperation with EU Delegations.<br><br>- Rolling out the newly created TAIEX digital identity on the website and in all other communication material.<br><br>- Organising periodic meetings with the NCP network, including with newly nominated NCPs for INTPA countries.<br><br>- Continue building up the NCP network for INTPA countries, in view of the ambition of TAIEX INTPA and its financial contribution.<br><br>- Planning to make our Annual Activity Report available via dynamic website, which will guide visitors to all best practice records.<br><br>- Communication challenges to become a | TAIEX communication staff; TAIEX country coordinators; TAIEX management; ongoing work |

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| TAIEX REGIO do not count with clearly identified contact points at the local level. In the case of TAIEX PI, no systematic awareness efforts were identified beyond those targeted specifically at PI staff.<br><br>There is hence a clear case for devising communication plans to make TAIEX and the possibilities it offers better known among potential users, both beneficiaries and EU Commission.<br><br>Such communication plan should include the following components:<br><br>- Communication materials and training. These should be strengthened, among others by including more in-detail explanations of how TAIEX can be used (also in line with what was expressed in Recommendation 1), highlighting examples as relevant. Also, restrictions and priority criteria (see also Recommendation 2) should be clearly explained to the extent relevant.<br><br>- Website(s). These should be revised to ensure that relevant information is available and easy to find. It is advisable that this also includes easy-to-access information on instruments that can be used as complement or alternative to TAIEX.<br><br>- Roles and responsibilities in raising awareness for each strand, including at the local level and within the EU Commission. In particular, there should be clearer guidance and expectations in terms of the responsibilities of, respectively, NCPs and EU Delegation contact points (within NEAR countries) and EU Delegation contact points (within non-NEAR partner countries). This should be formalized in guidance manuals specific for each SLA (or geographic region, if more relevant). It is recommended that LCPs also be identified to support the use of TAIEX EIR and TAIEX REGIO within EU MS (note: a possibility in this sense would be to leverage on existing NCPs).*<br><br>Local visits by the TAIEX team were also considered an effective practice in raising awareness and stimulating demand. Therefore that would be worth considering extending, weighed against the time and resource considerations.<br><br>*Considering the current limited budget and ambition in terms of number of events of TAIEX INTPA and TAIEX PI (compared to the vastness of the target geographic region) and the still early phase in the implementation of TAIEX INTPA, the evaluation team does not currently recommend the establishment of an NCP network in partner countries outside the NEAR region. Rather, it considers continuing the approach of leveraging a network of contact points within EU Delegations would be more efficient. This recommendation could change, however, should the use of TAIEX be significantly expanded in those regions. Should that be the case, a gradual build-up of an NCP network starting with countries where TAIEX is more established could be considered.* | regular feature of the agenda of the institution building days, with all stakeholders. | |

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| **CLUSTER 2: IMPLEMENTATION AND THE CAPACITY TO GENERATE RESULTS** | | |
| **RECOMMENDATION 5 : Focus on maintaining the swiftness aspect of TAIEX**<br><br>*The Commission should make sure that TAIEX maintains its capability to be mobilized swiftly.*<br><br>*This recommendation is linked to: Conclusion 6*<br><br>*Priority: 3*<br>*Importance: 3*<br><br>*Main implementation responsibility: TAIEX team (DG NEAR C3)*<br>*Main associated actors: NCPs in EU MS, TAIEX experts (registered in EDBE).*<br><br>*Implementation timeframe:*<br>- *Interventions on EDBE and other efforts to improve the identification of experts: short-medium term*<br>- *Diagnostics of event organization capacity and issues beyond high rotation of the TAIEX team: short term (subsequent remedial/ optimization interventions: variable timing depending on their nature)*<br>- *Introduction of practice of provision of estimate for the organization of each event upon event approval: short term*<br>- *Introduction of practice to suggest online options when speed is particularly critical (and other characteristics make it viable): short term* | **i) Accepted:**<br><br>The speed of TAIEX is one of its main strengths. It should be maintained and increased whenever possible.<br><br>In our opinion, increased average times in the implementation of TAIEX rather depend on the time needed for beneficiaries to engage with the Commission after the application submission and in the time needed to find experts in our TAIEX expert database, which in some policy areas and specific fields should be strengthened with new expert profiles.<br><br>TMS allows to measure time spent in the organisation of a given event. Events that become dormant due to unresponsiveness of the applicant are regularly closed in order to gain admin capacity. Special statistics on this topic are collected and published internally every month.<br><br>The existing profiles in our database received an e-mail to update their list of competencies. Moreover, the data privacy rule was changed to allow for a longer profile "life span" – the current setting is 5 years as compared to the previous 2 years only.<br><br>Challenges related to our internal resources (project officers) are known - see recommendation 9 for our response.<br><br>**ii) Actions to be undertaken:**<br><br>- Working on a database update/campaign to recruit more EU Member State experts in those | NEAR communication staff; by mid-2023<br><br>Effectiveness of the TAIEX database extension to be regularly monitored by TMS statistics and by a dedicated project officer.<br><br>- |
| **Lessons learnt / What works and should continue, be expanded or replicated** | | |
| TAIEX's capacity to be mobilised rapidly was highly appreciated by all stakeholders. It is considered one of its key assets and a differentiator versus other EU instruments. Given TAIEX's catalytic function (i.e. as an enabler of broader actions), speed has often proved essential to ensure that events could respond to needs and deliver results (e.g. by allowing to leverage on an existing political momentum).<br><br>Well-established administrative and logistics processes have enhanced TAIEX's speed. These include pre-approved event budgeting mechanisms, an established and well-working logistics apparatus, existing arrangements for the short-term involvement of MS experts, elements facilitating swift identification and recruiting of experts (the EDBE and the network of NCPs based in EU MS), and the specific experience and specialization of the TAIEX team. | | |
| **What should be improved? How should this be done?** | | |
| Throughout the 2015-2020 period, average times required for the organization of events have increased. This has been a source of dissatisfaction among stakeholders. It is recommended that the Commission acts on strengthening the above-mentioned elements, considered critical to achieving swiftness.<br><br>Concerning administrative and logistics processes, no particular issues have been identified. These should be | | |

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| maintained as they are. However, concerning the identification and recruiting of experts: <br><br> (1) The evaluation found that there were some issues with the maintenance of the EDBE, and notably that expert profiles had become obsolete and at times no-longer accessible. Hence, <u>it is recommended that the EDBE design and updating process be reviewed</u> to make sure experts' profiles are kept up to date. This could be done by providing clear and user-friendly. MS NCPs could also support in diffusing guidelines and in periodically reminding national experts to update their profiles. <br><br> (2) <u>Areas in which the EDBE is limited (e.g. innovative topics) should be identified, and strategies should be implemented to address them</u>. Examples are: coordination efforts with NCPs in EU MS to identify experts, or leveraging on existing experts to identify colleagues. <br><br> Concerning the TAIEX team, two issues were identified: <br><br> (3) Constraints in the capacity in terms of number of events that can be organized in a set timeframe, linked to the number of case handlers available. This should be better understood, with a view to developing a realistic estimate of capacity. In this sense, <u>monitoring the time spent on the organization of individual events is once again recommended</u> (See also Recommendation 2). <u>Also identifying areas for efficiency optimization is key.</u> Building up queues of events should be strictly avoided. If the capacity is not sufficient and it is not possible to increase it (i.e. by increasing the number of personnel or through efficiencies), it is preferable to develop and communicate priorities as a way to reject excess eligible events. This is, however, not desirable as it would leave eligible needs unattended, as well as affect demand. <br><br> (4) Frequent rotations in the TAIEX team, which led to prolonged vacant positions and sub-optimally frequent induction periods, in which case handlers had to build up experience. <u>It is suggested that rotations be further investigated to understand the root causes and see whether it would be possible to mitigate the issue.</u> <br><br> In the spirit of minimizing and managing queues and waiting times, <u>it is suggested that upon the approval of each event the beneficiary/ applicant be given an estimate of the timeframe in which the event is expected to be organized.</u> This would allow the withdrawal of applications in case the timeline is not compatible with the needs. <br><br> Last, it is suggested that (in line with Recommendation 6, below) <u>the use of online events be considered/ suggested to applicants in cases in which speed is particularly critical,</u> as those events' characteristics make them comparatively swifter to organize. | policy areas where the current expert database is lacking. The campaign will address the NCPs, but will also aim to approach directly institutions in MS for which there should be more presence in the database (e.g. local expertise, financial issues, natural disasters, etc.) <br><br> - Reinforcing the sense of community amongst the TAIEX experts, for example through tailored communication products or networking & capacity-building events. <br><br> - The issue of limited resources is beyond the Unit's control. Nonetheless, reinforcement of human resources available to the unit is being requested by the unit's management (please see point 9). | |
| **RECOMMENDATION 6: Integrate online options in the TAIEX approach** <br><br> *The TAIEX team should integrate online events/ features within their menu of options, codifying and providing specific guidance on their advantages/ disadvantages and suitability to different needs and circumstances, and* | **i) <u>Accepted</u>** <br><br> Virtual TAIEX is already well established and an important part of the TAIEX offer. Further | TAIEX communication staff; TAIEX project officers; |

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| *notably introducing their use outside of crisis situations.* | explicit guidance on its usage, advantages and disadvantages will help make it even more attractive. | TAIEX team leaders; Q1/2023 |
| *This recommendation is linked to: Conclusion 9; Lesson 1* | | In cooperation with the contractor |
| *Priority: 1* | The recommendation has been already fully put in place during the evaluation period. The manual of procedures has been significantly updated to cater for hybrid events. Further updates to the manual of procedure may be foreseen, as needed on a regular basis. | |
| *Importance: 3* | | |
| *Main implementation responsibility: TAIEX team (DG NEAR C3)* | | |
| *Implementation timeframe: short term* | | |
| **Lessons learnt / What works and should continue, be expanded or replicated** | | |
| Online events were originally launched to continue activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, in light of the travel restrictions that were imposed. Besides enabling the timely coverage of topics that were critical at that time (not the least, pandemic-management issues), they proved to have advantages that are also relevant in normal circumstances. In particular, they lowered barriers to participation of both beneficiaries and experts, by eliminating the need to travel and allowing for more flexibility in time commitments required to participate. They were also more flexible in terms of the timing of the sessions. Last, they are more ecologically friendly. | **ii) Actions to be undertaken:** | |
| **What should be improved? How should this be done?** | - Develop targeted information material about the potential and advantages of virtual TAIEX | |
| (1) It is recommended that online/ hybrid features be permanently integrated in the TAIEX menu of event options, providing explicit guidance on their usage, based on their advantages and disadvantages. | - Collect examples of creative and well executed virtual TAIEX events to be shared through different means and modalities such as Annual Activity Report and Institution Building Days. | |
| *The drawbacks of online events have to do with a lower possibility to entertain informal conversations and establish personal relationships, as well as to directly observe the context in which either beneficiaries or experts operate.* | - Continue guiding the TAIEX beneficiaries in their choice of the appropriate TAIEX modality | |
| *It is recommended that online events be considered in cases in which:* | | |
| - *Experts and beneficiaries have already established a relationship and the objective of the event is clear and specific and does not require in-person interaction.* | | |
| - *The participation of critical beneficiaries and experts would be otherwise impossible. Hybrid events may also be considered in those cases, allowing for the online participation of these people only.* | | |
| - *There are important barriers to the organization of offline events.* | | |
| *Cultural/context factors also affected the perception of the advantageousness of online and hybrid events. In particular, it was noted that online events tended to force punctuality, thus optimizing the use of time. Hybrid options were appreciated in contexts in which internet was not easily available (as all participants could convene in a single well-connected location).* | | |
| (2) The TAIEX team should review the process of organization of online events in detail, as well as see to the | | |

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| restrictions imposed on their design, to verify whether these are indeed optimized. In particular:<br><br>- The organization of online events implies costs that may in some cases be reduced. In particular, the requirement of a testing day for each event could be re-assessed.<br><br>- Some design restrictions that applied to in-person events may not be relevant or necessary in the case of online events. In particular, it appears less necessary that an event takes place over multiple consecutive days – options for shorter events or events of the same duration but spread through longer periods could also be considered. | | |
| **RECOMMENDATION 7: Maintain the TAIEX management centralised and in DG NEAR**<br><br>*The Commission should maintain the TAIEX management centralised and in DG NEAR, and continue to serve other Commission services through SLAs.*<br><br>*This recommendation is linked to: Conclusions 1 and 10*<br>*Priority: -*<br>*Importance: 4*<br>*Main implementation responsibility: TAIEX team (DG NEAR C3)*<br>*Implementation timeframe: short term*<br><br>**Lessons learnt / What works and should continue, be expanded or replicated**<br><br>The centralisation of TAIEX management under a sole team has worked well for all stakeholders. This enabled, among other things, the exploitation of resources and know-how such as existing administrative and logistical arrangements and the EDBE.<br>The lack of expertise of DG NEAR in non-NEAR geographic regions has been successfully compensated through the designation of specialized case handlers seconded from the relevant Commission services with which SLAs have been signed.<br><br>**What should be improved? How should this be done?**<br><br>In a context whereby the management of all TAIEX strands remains centralised in DG NEAR, the collaboration between DG NEAR C3 and the relevant Commission services implementing the SLAs could be further improved in the following ways:<br><br>- Firstly, as stated in Recommendations 1 and 3, it is suggested that TAIEX's mission and strategy be formally redefined considering the wider range of objectives that it can serve. Each SLA should then reference to this strategy by stating which objectives TAIEX is meant to serve within its scope. Also, it should be accompanied by manuals and guidance notes that define specific adjustments to TAIEX | **i) Accepted**<br><br>This recommendation is about preserving the existing state of affairs.<br><br>In our experience, all services cooperating under the SLA are content with the management of TAIEX by NEAR and plan no re-allocation of public peer learning approach into their own programmes. Partner services are interested in the cross-fertilisation of various strands. This takes place at the case handler level almost daily, while the unit organises once per year the Institution Building Days during which complementarities between the strands are discussed.<br><br>**ii) Actions to be undertaken:**<br><br>- Continue working closely with the other Commission services with Service Level Agreements to ensure optimal delivery of TAIEX<br><br>- Continue providing space for TAIEX project officers from different TAIEX strands to exchange best practice and lessons learnt | No follow up is needed in this area.<br><br>TAIEX management; ongoing |

| RECOMMENDATIONS, FINAL REPORT | RESPONSES EU SERVICES: (I) ACCEPTED OR NOT, II) ACTIONS TO BE UNDERTAKEN | FOLLOW UP (by who ; by when) |
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| processes (most notably, to the application and application review processes). These should also define processes and assign roles and responsibilities for raising awareness of TAIEX and supporting the organization of events in terms of content (e.g. preparation of experts). <br><br> - Secondly, <u>it is suggested that practices within each strand be periodically compared to support cross-fertilization of best practices</u> that may work within different strands. (It is the understanding of the evaluation team that a function has already been created with this purpose.) | | |
| **RECOMMENDATION 8: Improve monitoring and reporting practices** <br><br> *The Commission should further improve TAIEX's monitoring and reporting practices with a view of fostering better transparency and learning.* <br><br> *This recommendation is linked to: Conclusion 8* <br> *Priority: 2* <br> *Importance: 3* <br><br> *Main implementation responsibility: TAIEX team (DG NEAR C3)* <br> *Main associated actors: Contact points within Commission services which have active SLAs with TAIEX, other TAIEX users and potential users of the expert reports (including beneficiaries, EU Delegations, line DGs, and other DG NEAR thematic and geographic services (NEAR.A, NEAR.B, NEAR.C), TAIEX experts.* <br><br> *Implementation timeframe: short/ medium term* <br><br> **Lessons learnt / What works and should continue, be expanded or replicated** <br><br> TAIEX counts on an impressive data collection system (TMS), where a significant amount of qualitative and quantitative information on events is stored in a well-organised way. <br><br> **What should be improved? How should this be done?** <br><br> While TAIEX has a solid system to store data and information, it does not seem to have equally consolidated and well-thought practices to analyse and use it for learning and improvement (both of TAIEX itself, and to support follow up of events). <br><br> A specific area of improvement concerns the follow up on events. More specifically: <br><br> - Expert reports significantly diverge in quality. Also, they do not always seem to be shared or used by stakeholders<u>. The TAIEX team should revise report formats with DGs responsible for each SLA, to ensure the information they include is effectively and that they are sent to the most appropriate stakeholders after each event</u>. Guidance for experts for the completion of reports should also be provided and the quality should be verified, for example, through the post-event survey. | **i) Partially accepted** <br><br> Continue improvements in information and data systems will help further develop the instrument. <br><br> TAIEX is a form of very short-term technical assistance. During the lifetime of a project (a week) it is impossible to detect its impact. Our self-evaluation procedures aim to do this. We accept the evaluation recommendation to continue improving ways to assess impact. However, rather than engaging in systemic evaluation of events 6 months after their implementation, it would be more adequate to have regular evaluations of the instrument, as needed, with the aim to assess its overall impact. <br><br> **ii) Actions to be undertaken:** <br><br> - Explore the possibility of future TAIEX evaluations, as needed and on a regular basis, with the specific aim of assessing its overall impact. <br><br> - Revising the TAIEX event report template; providing TAIEX experts with more information of what is expected in the event reports; Quality control the submitted event reports before approving them. | TAIEX team leaders; TAIEX project officers; Q1/2023 onwards |

# FOLLOW-UP ACTION PLAN OF THE EVALUATION OF THE TAIEX INSTRUMENT IN THE PERIOD 2015-2020

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| - A system could be devised to make expert reports/recommendations more accessible within EU Institutions (e.g. line DGs and EU Delegations, with recommendations searchable by country, sector and/or timeframe). Right now, the reports are not easy to find and access from outside the TAIEX team.<br><br>A second area of improvement concerns more general reporting on TAIEX:<br><br>- The results of immediate and after six-month participant and expert evaluations should be systematically analysed and shared within the TAIEX team and other relevant stakeholders as they can be an important source of lesson learning;<br><br>- KPI and statistics should be developed to assess TAIEX's activity and results (also considering the specific objective of each strand, and in consultation with relevant stakeholders), in detail at the country/sector level, and assessed periodically (e.g. every 3 months). These should be shared (at least) within the TAIEX team and with relevant stakeholders, including NCPs and people responsible for TAIEX within each DG or service with which TAIEX has SLAs. | - We started dialogue with SLA partner DG on how to export evaluation and event results into their systems. For the time being, this is happening though interim reports, however, there are also possibilities to link TMS and their data bases.<br><br>- Our statistical reports are shared with MS twice per year. Once per year we develop a synthetic Annual Activity Report. We receive feedback but only on national or event specific basis. More feedback will be sought and put on the agenda of the Institution Building Days.<br><br>- | |
| **RECOMMENDATION 9: Dimension the human and financial resources within the TAIEX team to the desired levels of activity**<br><br>*The Commission should 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.*<br><br>*This recommendation is linked to: Conclusions 3, 4, 5 and 6; Lessons 2 and 4*<br>*Priority: 4*<br>*Importance: 4*<br>*Main implementation responsibility: TAIEX team, DG NEAR and other DGs which have SLAs with TAIEX, Commission HR functions.*<br>*Implementation timeframe: short/ medium term*<br>**Lessons learnt / What works and should continue, be expanded or replicated**<br>The specialization of members of the TAIEX team according to strands and, within IPA-ENI, by thematic and geographic areas has been perceived as favourable. The accumulated expertise and knowledge of members of the team who have participated for long periods (in terms of knowledge of beneficiaries and their needs, and of available experts) was also a key asset. | **i) Accepted**<br><br>Adequate human resources are a necessary condition for efficient and effective delivery of TAIEX assistance, which is key for the sustained attractiveness of the instrument.<br><br>The drop in the number of events which occurred in the past years has been accompanied by a drop in the number of case handlers in the unit. The drop in events has been now surely reverted, however, it is unclear if the current staffing allows to return to the past levels of events. The growing number of events gives strong arguments to the unit to ask for more staff.<br><br>The staffing issue is not the sole responsibility of the unit. Delivery on this action will require | TAIEX management team;<br><br>NEAR management; Q1/2023-> |

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| **What should be improved? How should this be done?** | understanding of the Directorate as well as the business correspondent team. | |
| 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. The introduction of TAIEX Strategic further complicated the issue, as it was not accompanied by increased staffing. This meant that part of the already tight TAIEX Classic's capacity was used for TAIEX Strategic. (In contrast with this, the budget assigned to TAIEX for the 2016-2020 period remained significantly underused.) It is suggested that <u>efforts be put in place to better understand the level of case handler effort required to organize events</u> (see also Recommendation 2), and that these be dimensioned to the level of activity that is deemed most adequate to sustain the broader objectives that TAIEX is to contribute to. Furthermore, the introduction of new TAIEX strands but also new TAIEX activities (such as TAIEX Strategic) should be <u>accompanied by the specification of the human and financial resources</u> (additional, if necessary) to implement them. No human resources nor financial capacity constraints have been observed for TAIEX strands other than IPA-ENI in the 2015-2020 period (except for TAIEX PI budget constraints at the beginning of the period, which have been addressed through budget increases). However, it is worth noting that TAIEX INTPA has significant growth potential. If that were to be exploited, there would be a need to progressively add additional staffing and budget. | <u>**ii) Actions to be undertaken:**</u><br><br>- Based on factual data, we will continue building the case for more human resources in the unit to respond to the growing TAIEX demand, both in quality and quantity. | |