

ESPON 2030 Programmes

Monitoring Committee meetings

7 March 2024, 09h30-17h00

8 March 2024, 09h30 -13h00

Online (Luxembourgish time)

1. Agreement on the Agenda

The MA confirmed the quorum, the Agenda was approved by the MC.

2. General Management Provisions for the ESPON 2030 Programme

2.1. ESPON MA Info note on management (document, questions and answers)

The MA reminded CY, PT, NO, CH, BG and LI about the signature of the agreement.

2.2. Update on the programme communication activities (information)

The MA presented an update on the programme communication activities conducted by the MA in 2023 and foreseen for 2024 (see related PPT presentation).

2.3. Progress on the implementation of the Evaluation of the ESPON 2030 Programme (presentation by the external evaluators, information and discussion together with the external evaluators and the members of the Evaluation Steering Group)

The MA briefly introduced the agenda point and invited MC members to fill in the questionnaire that was prepared by the evaluators.

The Evaluation Steering Committee informed having had a good discussion about the evaluation report and that the questions raised were seriously taken on board by the evaluators and underline again the importance of having MC inputs (via the survey).

The inception report was presented and discussed.

2.4. State on setting up the audit work (information)

The MA informed that the public procurement for the selection of the external auditor to support the Audit Authority was launched and that the contracting should take place before the summer and the implementation of the system audit before the end of 2024. The MA also informed that audit of operation will only start in 2025 as there will be no expenditure declared for the accounting year ending on 30 June 2024.

2.5. Change of rules for travel reimbursement (document and decision)

The MA presented the modifications in the travel reimbursement rules.

The MC agreed on the modification of the Travel Reimbursement Rules introduced by the MA. **The updated version with the recommendation of CH will be uploaded together with the Minutes.**

2.6. Assessment of Progress Report 5 of the Single Operation (document and decision)

The MA shortly introduced the agenda item.

Based on the clarifications and the assessment report of the MA, the MC approved Progress Report 5 of the Single Operation submitted on 10 November 2023, with a total eligible expenditure of € 34.980,94.

The MC asked the MA to process the payment of € 34.980,94 to the Single Beneficiary.

Sessions with the ESPON EGTC

2.7. Stakeholder consultation for the new programming period post 2027 (information and discussion)

The MA reported back from the Interreg Knowledge Fair and presented to the MC the information gathered during the event.

3. Participation of third countries with the ESPON 2030 Programme (information)

In the beginning of the meeting the representatives of the third countries of Ukraine, Serbia, Moldova and Bosnia & Herzegovina were already welcomed and now they were invited to introduced themselves and their expectation in relation to the participation to the ESPON Programme.

Furthermore, the MA gave a short summary on the status of the nomination of the third countries:

- Albania has not replied the invitation and the MA will contact them again;
- Bosnia & Herzegovina has provided the official nomination;
- Republic of Moldova has provided the official nomination;
- Montenegro has provided the official nomination;
- Republic of North Macedonia has not replied the invitation and the MA will contact them again;
- Serbia has provided the official nomination;
- Ukraine has provided the official nomination.

The EGTC provided some information on how the new observer countries can participate and benefit from the programme, however it was agreed that it might be useful to organise a separate meeting to discuss more in depth about the different possibilities.

The MA also informed the MCs that Kosovo has sent a letter expressing their interest in joining the ESPON Programme.

The MA will prepare a background document on Kosovo four weeks before the June MC meeting for further discussion with the MCs.

4. Developments in Territorial Cohesion, Urban Policy and Cohesion policy including Presidency programmes relevant for the ESPON 2030 Programme presentation by BE, HU, PL Presidencies and inputs from EC (Q&A)

The MA introduced the session mentioning the work of the high-level group on the future of Cohesion Policy and the coming 9th Cohesion report.

BE recalled that the priorities of the Belgian presidency of the Council of the EU on territorial cohesion will focus on no net land take, no urban sprawl and soil sealing.

HU indicated that the ESPON week will take place from 4-8 November 2024 in Budapest and that the work of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU on territorial matters will focus on innovative ways to provide public services in lagging regions.

PL announced that the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU has started to work with the ESPON EGTC on the topic of resilience of eastern borders of the EU.

EC informed the MC that the final report of the Group of high-level specialists on the future of Cohesion Policy was published on 20 February 2024. This is an independent report that entails a strong place-based approach: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/how/future-cohesion-policy_en

The 9th Cohesion report will be published before the 9th Cohesion Forum which will take place on 11-12 April 2024 to debate on the post-2027 Cohesion Policy (participation upon invitation): https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/whats-new/conferences/9th-cohesion-forum_en
The future Cohesion Policy will be also much discussed during the future MFF.

EC gave information about the Harnessing Talent Platform, a new knowledge-building and experience-exchange platform, which seeks to support regions in addressing the consequences of the demographic change and in mitigating the challenges associated with the decline of tertiary educated populations across the EU. EC identified regions in talent development traps.

5. Single Operation: implementation status (MC Info Note and discussion):

5.1. General overview of the implementation process (key developments)

5.2. Progress in implementing evidence production (European research projects, targeted analyses and other formats of on-demand services) and knowledge development activities under the eight ongoing TAPs

5.3. Overview of horizontal measures

5.4. Budget and output performance to date

5.5. Upcoming events (arranged by ESPON EGTC and ECPs)

5.6. Draft Seminar programme Mons

In a comprehensive presentation covering the scope of the MC Info Note, ESPON EGTC gave a general overview of the implementation process, with key developments since the last MC meeting (in November 2023), the progress in implementing evidence production and knowledge development activities under the four ongoing TAPs, the overview of horizontal measures, the budget and output performance to date, and the calendar of upcoming events.

6. Quality check follow-up measures (document, discussion)

6.1. Strategy to prevent delays in the implementation of the Single Operation, incl. information about the needs management, and to achieve the targets of the Single Operation

6.2. Measures put in place to follow up on the other aspects conclusions and recommendations of the 1st quality check

6.3. Presentation of the indicative time-plan to implement the services upon request (including the procurement procedures)

After having provided a detailed written response to the first quality check and as a follow-up to the latest MC meeting, ESPON EGTC presented an overall strategy to achieve the targets of the Single Operation.

The presentation outlined the state of play with evidence and knowledge activities, the implementation plan to reach the targets approved by the Monitoring Committee, and the three directions of the strategy proposed by the EGTC in the Single Operation:

1. Ensure that the number of activities follows the plan.
2. Constantly broaden up the target group of stakeholders and researchers.
3. Speed up delivery mechanisms.

ESPON EGTC emphasised that by the proposed implementation plan, each year some 15-20 new evidence production activities need to be initiated, including European research projects, targeted analyses, on-demand territorial studies and data acquisition/updates.

7. New activities under TAPs and Horizontal measure

7.1. Major activities (documents and decision), to be confirmed

None

7.2. Other activities (ppt and information)

The MA introduced a structure under this agenda point to distinguish major and minor evidence production activities. The former are processed via scoping notes for MC decision, while in the latter case, the MA and/or the MC are assigned to validate that they fit into the programme framework and that they are under the right category.

With no major activities submitted for MC decision this time, ESPON EGTC presented 10 minor evidence production activities, the need for which was identified in late 2023 through

stakeholder mapping and discussions on synergies and complementarities with peer providers of territorial evidence, and which are now in scoping.

8. TAPs: a revised proposal on how to discuss each TAP in depth at the MC meeting in the future (document and discussion)

Following outcomes of the discussion on this point at the MC meeting in November 2023, ESPON EGTC presented a revised proposal.

The MA emphasised that the strategic discussion on the TAPs should help understand how the various projects respond to the policy questions at the core of the TAP, and where to place new activities in this context.

9. Further implementation steps (information, ppt and discussion)

9.1. Engaging with stakeholders and researchers

9.2. Timetable on interaction with the MC

9.3. Involvement of MC members and ECPs in ESPON activities

On all this points the ESPON EGTC shared information on the further steps in implementing the Single Operation.

10. Update on ESPON Contact Points (information, ppt and discussion)

10.1. Nomination and contracting

10.2. Status of ECP work plans

10.3. Role of ESPON Contact Points

Regarding the three points the ESPON EGTC presented updated information on this point, stating that 28 out of 31 ESPON countries made ECP nominations, 21 Partnership Agreement have been signed to date, and 14 workplans for 2024 have already been submitted.

11. Timetable MC/MA and EGTC (two documents: one by the MA on 2030 (decision) and one by the EGTC on the Single Operation (see point 9, second bullet) (information)

No comments were made on the Timetable which was approved by the MC. The MA will provide the new version with the date of the defined meeting organised by the Presidencies.

12. AOB

Under AOB, EGTC asked MC members for feedback concerning the housing compendium being developed in the ERP House4All, with a particular emphasis on "country fiches" (cf. the annexed internal note). In addition, the EGTC would appreciate if MC members could facilitate contacts within the relevant housing ministries for the service provider's consortium to engage with.