

Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the European Refugee Fund (ERF) and European Integration Fund (EIF)

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Summary of Final Report

This document contains recommendations of the consultants regarding the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the ERF and EIF Programmes.

1. CONTEXT AND APPROACH TAKEN

1.1 Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for this assignment were as follows:

The aim of the assignment is to devise a monitoring and evaluation framework for the ERF and EIF in Ireland in collaboration with POBAL. More specifically, the objectives of the assignment are to:

- Consult with a small range of stakeholders (e.g. POBAL, OMI, sample of funded groups) in relation to the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the ERF and EIF.
- Identify appropriate performance indicators at a programme level for the ERF and EIF
- Devise a framework that enables effective monitoring and evaluation to take place on a programme wide basis, in line with European Commission requirements.
- Ensure the framework enables effective monitoring and evaluation to take place at individual project level;
- Identify the resource implications associated with implementing the monitoring and evaluation framework both locally and nationally
- Identify the key steps required to implement such a framework.”

The Framework does not include project-level financial monitoring. Nor does it encompass the evaluation of Programme management by OMI and POBAL.

1.2 Research undertaken

The consultants undertook the following set of activities since signing the contract on 16th November 2010:

- a) A lengthy ‘kick-off meeting was held with POBAL and the OMI, followed by several further meetings.
- b) A very significant volume of documentation was identified and gathered relating to both ERF and EIF Programmes, including documentation concerning European and national level

Directives and programmes, the evaluation methodologies and consultant's reports and presentations, and Project plans. This was all examined for context and relevance

- c) A total of nine projects were interviewed in depth concerning their activities, their plans for evaluation, and their understanding of what might be involved in monitoring and evaluation. These were selected by POBAL and covered a cross section of projects that were at that stage fully approved for funding.
- d) A detailed Progress Report was delivered on December 15th.
- e) A detailed Workshop Report was prepared in advance of a Project Workshop, outlining a first draft Framework.
- f) The Consultants planned and implemented the Workshop on January 13th 2011 to which all projects were invited. A total of 29 people from 22 different projects attended. A number of options were presented there, in broad brush terms, and discussion was lively.
- g) A follow up questionnaire was issued to project, to gain feedback. Nineteen projects responded.
- h) Based on all the above, and on a further detailed discussion with POBAL and OMI, the first draft Framework was produced.

1.3 Approach to the Framework

The approach adopted is intended to:

- Minimise additional work for projects, especially duplication or near-duplication of efforts;
- Integrate project level and programme level evaluation within the framework;
- Minimise staff time required in POBAL to administer and process the work;
- Ensure coherence between project goals, national Programme goals and EU level goals;
- Facilitate OMI reporting to the European Commission;
- Ensure a focus on actual Outcomes at project and programme level, and on linking these to the concrete Actions and Outputs undertaken by project;
- Take into consideration the limited budget available for the work, and the fact that the projects are already well underway.

Many of these act as constraints on what is possible, so that this may be seen as a compromise on what would be an ideal Framework for these programmes. Nevertheless we are confident that what is proposed is realistic and will achieve the core objectives.

Bearing in mind the above the approach taken has the following characteristics:

1. The existing Project Plans, including the Objectives¹, Actions and other categories will be maintained now and into the future. There will be no need for projects to reformulate these.
2. Monitoring the progress of Activities will be direct and discursive, based on issues and problems arising as reported by project. It will also be largely divorced from the evaluation, including the monitoring of evaluation Indicators.
3. The overall Framework is based loosely on the Theory of Change² or a Logic Model, which broadly speaking traces the linkages between actions, outputs, outcomes and impacts. It is also deployed as a means to link project and programme level activities, from the level of project Objectives through to EU reporting requirements.

1 Key terms here are capitalised to indicate that they are used in a specific sense as defined in this document. These include Actions, Objectives Outputs, Outcomes, Indicators and Programme. Evaluators often use these terms in different ways, and sometimes substitute other ones, but they are used consistently here to reduce the potential for confusion.

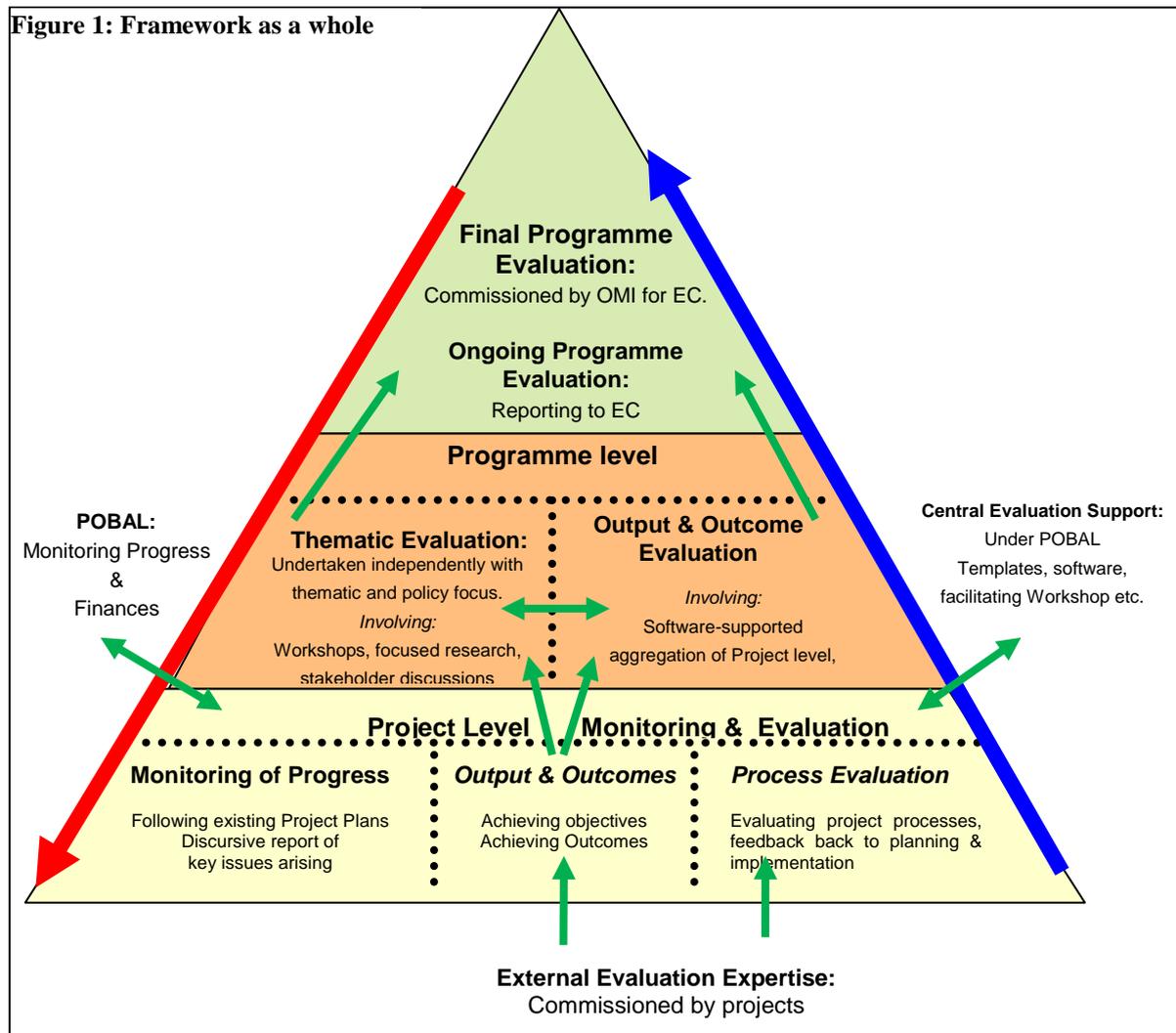
2 See www.theoryofchange.org and <http://www.wkkf.org/knowledge-center/resources/2010/Logic-Model-Development-Guide.aspx> for more on these.

4. All evaluation activities will be gathered together within this framework, enabling a coherent aggregation of different evaluation sources and results.

Although EU Guidelines for Final Programme Evaluations are not yet forthcoming, it is expected that the approach taken here will provide significant raw material, in accessible and usable formats, to such an evaluation. It is also recommended that this evaluation be initiated at the earliest possible stage.

2. THE FRAMEWORK IN SUMMARY

The Framework covers several interlinked components. These are summarised in the diagram below, in terms of the different levels, the activities and who undertakes them, then briefly described.



There are three basic levels to monitoring and evaluation, and some support functions.

The **Final Programme Evaluation** is an EU requirement of the ERF and EIF programmes, and will be contracted by the Office of the Minister of Integration (OMI) to an external independent evaluator.

It is anticipated that it will draw on results and lessons emerging from the other evaluation levels to establish Programme Outcomes and insights into effective intervention strategies. It is likely to incorporate an element of national policy review, possibly the use of statistical indicators at national level, and some selective interviews with projects, beneficiaries and working partners for verification purposes.

There is also a requirement annually on June 30th for the OMI to report to the European Commission, and this will be based on Programme-level work at the intermediary level.

Although included above in the Framework as a whole, the implementation of this level will be a matter for the OMI, in consultation with the European Commission, and is not covered here.

The **Programme Level Monitoring and Evaluation** both aggregates the results from projects and adds value specifically at the programme level.

A **Thematic evaluation**, independently facilitated, will focus on collecting best practice from projects, especially to identify what works well, how and why. Results from project evaluation will be fed in, supplemented by selective consultations with project workers, beneficiaries, working partners and those involved in policy. Focused reports will be produced, beginning in 2012, on relevant policy-oriented themes (both institutional policy and departmental policy), with a future orientation. A key question here is to examine how specific *methods* of programmes delivery can lead to successful Outcomes, and the policy lessons implied. For instance, some methods rely on building an intimate relationship with a community and on empowering that community, whilst others are closer to a service delivery model. The ongoing POBAL Programme Workshops will offer opportunities to select themes, and explore the issues and opportunities.

At the same time, the **Programme-level Outputs and Outcomes Evaluation** will draw together the work at project level, taking advantage of the software and the coordination of activities at that level to aggregate the Outputs and Outcomes. This will be combined with the Thematic work as it comes available, to produce an annual overall picture of the Programme Outcomes and the lessons of national relevance, and provide the basis for OMI report to the European Commission.

At **Project Level Monitoring and Evaluation**, three distinct components can be identified.

Monitoring of progress of each project will be based on a discursive account of the Project Plans, describing progress and issues arising under the various Actions. Projects will report directly to POBAL, on June 30th each year, which will provide feedback and assistance.

At the same time, projects will undertake, to the extent and manner they feel is useful, a **process evaluation** i.e. an assessment of how efficiently and effectively the project is in implementing its activities, internally and in terms of its relationship with partners, and so forth,. The results of this are intended to contribute, especially at mid-term, to revising and refining the way the project operates.

Very important too is the **project-level Output and Outcomes Evaluation**. Depending on the needs and nature of individual projects, each will assess the Outputs and Outcomes of each of its Objectives. Project will then match their achievements against an agreed Programme level set of Outputs and Outcomes. This is critical to developing a coherent link between project-level and Programme-level Objectives, and to that extent may be seen as the central component of this Framework.

Ensuring coherence and enabling the effective implementation of this work will be a set of **support structures and activities**.

Projects will themselves, either individually or, if they choose, collectively, contract **External Evaluation Expertise**, especially in relation to the Process Evaluation and the project-level Outcome and Outputs evaluation. (External evaluators may also have an input into monitoring progress, though this is more likely to be completed by project staff.)

The Terms of Reference for these project external evaluators will in part be drafted by the **Central Evaluation Support** who, working with POBAL, will generate a set of Templates and Guidelines for Projects to facilitate the work and enable Programme-level coordination. The Thematic level of evaluation will also be independently facilitated, possibly by the Central Evaluation Support.

POBAL, as always, is ultimately for managing the Central Evaluation Support, ongoing progress and financial monitoring, reporting to the OMI, and the smooth implementation of both Programmes.