



Evaluation of the Twinning instrument in the period 2010-2017

Final report
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
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Evaluation carried out on behalf of the European Commission



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The opinions expressed in this document represent the authors' points of view
which are not necessarily shared by the European Commission
or by the authorities of the countries involved.

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Objective and scope of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide an overall independent assessment of Twinning in the period 2010-2017. The findings, conclusions and recommendations of the report are intended to inform the debate on the future of Twinning as a delivery mechanism to support enlargement and neighbourhood countries in meeting their respective commitments in the framework of their relationships with the European Union (EU).

In accordance with the ToRs, the evaluation covered the period 2010-2017, and all EU Member States (MSs) and the 20 partner countries (PCs) that have benefited from at least one Twinning project over the period.

Carried out from February 2018 to February 2019, the evaluation was organised around five evaluation questions (EQs), namely two transversal questions reviewing the conditions for Twinning implementation over time and the relevance of Twinning as a mechanism to EU assistance (1. Regulatory framework and institutional set-up and 2. Added-value, complementarity and coherence) and three sectoral questions assessing the contribution of Twinning in building capacities for reforms in three priority sectors identified in the ToRs (3. Public finance management (PFM), 4. Rule of law and 5. Economic governance and competitiveness¹).

1.2 Introduction

Twinning was initiated by the European Commission in 1998 in an enlargement context, to help candidate countries to prepare for EU membership by strengthening their administrative and judicial capacity to transpose, implement and enforce the EU *acquis*. At the end of 2003, Twinning was extended to neighbourhood countries in the South that had signed Association Agreements with the EU, and in 2004 to the East, for countries that had concluded Partnership and Cooperation Agreements. In this context, Twinning aimed to upgrade the capacities of the partner country's public administration through staff training, support to reorganising structures, and assistance with approximating national laws, regulations and quality standards to those of EU MS.

1.3 Twinning projects in the years 2010-2017

639 Twinning project fiches were circulated over the period 2010-2017, which resulted in 527 projects implemented across 20 partner countries for a total contracted amount of €556.1m. There were 272 projects in enlargement countries (total contracted amount: €252.5m) and 255 projects in the neighbourhood region (total contracted amount: €303.6m), of which 129 in the South and 126 in the East.

The highest number of projects was recorded in Croatia (69), followed by Serbia (46), North Macedonia (42) and Turkey (37). The largest uptake of Twinning in ENI South was recorded in Tunisia (34 projects) and Algeria (28 projects). In the East, Ukraine and Azerbaijan came first and second with 34 projects and 33 projects respectively.

In total, the administrations of 24 EU MSs were involved in Twinning projects over the period, either as lead or junior partner. France implemented the highest number of projects as lead partner (101), of which 69 projects were in ENI South, representing more than half of all projects implemented in that region. Germany came second with 69 projects, of which 36 in IPA and 33 in ENI countries. Austria implemented the highest number of projects in the Western Balkans (43).

In total, 94 Twinning light projects (18% of the total number of projects) were implemented for €21m representing 4% of the total funding. The majority of them (84%) were implemented in the Western Balkans (including Croatia, which benefited from 42 Twinning light projects over the period).

Projects in the field of economic competitiveness and governance represented 46% of the total funding spent over the period followed by rule of law projects (24%) and public finance management projects (15%). Hence, the sectors that are the subject of their own EQs constitute 85% of all Twinning expenditure.

1.4 Main findings

- The FR and the guidance provided by the TM constitute a robust framework, which enabled the implementation of 527 Twinning projects across 20 partner countries. The TM was subject to a rigorous

¹ The focus of sectoral questions were narrowed down to tax and external audit (PFM), democratic institutions and fight against corruption (rule of law) and agriculture & fisheries and energy (economic governance & competitiveness)

review starting in 2014 and involving widespread and intensive consultation with EU MSs, EUDs and various Commission Services, as well as studies and analyses performed by DG NEAR, culminating in a new version that was published in 2017 and updated in November 2018. As well as simplifying procedures, increasing flexibility and harmonising rules and processes across IPA and ENI regions, TM 2017 puts more emphasis on results, and embeds the concept of mainstreaming public administration reform in the Twinning mechanism.

- Overall, stakeholders in both EU member states (MS) and partner countries (PC) are generally satisfied with the mechanism and appreciate the positive contributions it can make to reform processes as a capacity-building tool based on the exchange of public sector expertise. PCs recognise the added value of Twinning over other instruments, when the expertise required was only available in the public sector and/or the peer-to-peer cooperation was more suited than TA to transfer know-how and gain access to the knowledge and experience of an entire institution, as well as foster partnerships between EU and PC public administrations.
- In recent years, statistics reveal a relative decline in the uptake of Twinning, with fewer TPFs being circulated and fewer EU MS submitting proposals. The factors underlying this trend include: the impact of budgetary constraints on staffing levels in public administrations, reducing EU MSs' ability and willingness to 'lose' key staff members for several years; shortcomings in Twinning-related legal and regulatory frameworks in some MS; geo-political developments resulting in weaker political commitments to reforms and/or less secure environments in some PCs; and the possibility for MS public administrations to be involved in other forms of peer-to-peer cooperation, avoiding the perceived complexity and restrictions of Twinning arrangements by means of action grants or delegation agreements.
- While most projects reviewed by this evaluation appear to have reached their mandatory results, strengthening the capacities of beneficiary institutions in their specific fields, evidence of long-term impact was more elusive, especially when projects tackled more complex sectors with a wide range of contributory factors outside their scope of intervention. This does not mean that projects have not had any impact.
- The evaluation identified a number of shortcomings in the Twinning project cycle, which affected the potential of the mechanism to deliver changes and partly explain the decline observed in the mechanism take-up, including: sub-optimal consultations in PC and at times inoperative communication channels in MS at design stage; weak intervention logics and performance frameworks; a lower interest of MS administrations narrowing the choice of partner countries; over-ambitious work plans (in pre TM 2017 period); and a lack of synergies with other initiatives.
- Given that TM 2017 was only recently introduced, the evaluation could not assess its impact on the performance of Twinning projects. While most stakeholders welcomed the new manual, there were also concerns about some of its innovations and a universal demand for more training and clarifications, including how to apply the principles of public administration about which there is limited knowledge among Twinning stakeholders.

1.5 Conclusions

The report drew the following 12 conclusions, which have been organised around four clusters.

Cluster 1: Overall performance, impact and results.

Conclusion 1: Twinning has made a positive contribution to achieving the EU's objectives through effective exchange of public sector expertise: By harnessing expertise from the public administration of 24 EU Member States through 527 Twinning projects implemented across 20 partner countries in 2010-2017, Twinning has been largely successful in helping to take forward the EU's enlargement and neighbourhood policies through institution-building.

Conclusion 2: Twinning is adaptable to contrasting policy contexts: Twinning has proven to be an adaptable delivery modality, applicable in different sectors as shown by the examples of PFM, RoL and ECG, although with varying degrees of impact.

Conclusion 3: Diminishing take-up of Twinning raises question about its future relevance, in the context of alternative modalities for peer-to-peer cooperation: Despite widespread satisfaction with Twinning, a

decline in the mechanism take-up, particularly in ‘old’ EU Member States, could present an ‘existential threat’ to Twinning in the face of alternative modalities.

Conclusion 4: *Twining is more appropriate when it responds to well-identified operational needs of the host administration in the context of advanced and comprehensive reform processes* : Twinning has proven its worth in helping PCs to put in place operational solutions to specific problems as well as stimulating a dialogue about policy options, in particular when the project is able to build on already existing capacities/frameworks in the context of a wider programme to support reforms in the sector through peer-to-peer partnerships.

Cluster 2: Regulatory framework and institutional set-up

Conclusion 5: *The Twining framework in the evaluation period was robust, but often considered too rigid by stakeholders, who generally welcomed the simplification and harmonisation introduced in TM 2017*: Twinning benefited from a robust Twinning regulatory framework, but the rigidity of some of the rules, and more critically, the overly strict and excessive interpretation of them has often affected project performance and may partly explain the declining Twinning take-up among EU and PC administrations although they are many other contributory factors.

Conclusion 6: *The 2017 Twining Manual is a step in the right direction, but it is too soon to evaluate its effects*: TM 2017 has already sought to address many of the concerns and constraints identified by the European Commission, MS’ and PCs in the evaluation period, by placing the emphasis on results and simplifying and harmonising project management. It is too early to say whether the improvements in the TM since 2017 will arrest the decline in take-up. However, it is clear that stakeholders are insufficiently acquainted with the changes introduced by the new TM.

Cluster 3: Added-value, complementarity and coherence

Conclusion 7: *Twining fills a niche in the range of EU instruments, which contributes to its added value. However, most partner countries and EU Delegations do not have a system in place to compare the advantages and disadvantages of Twining with other implementation modalities*: Twinning adds a valuable modality to the EU’s range of instruments for conducting enlargement and neighbourhood policies, allowing close cooperation between peers in public administration and facilitating the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* and EU norms and standards. However, a systematic framework is currently lacking to select Twinning among the other implementation modalities.

Conclusion 8: *Twining complements other modalities and vice versa, but explicit coordination is less common*: While Twinning has its own distinct specificities, and hence there seems to be no overlap in the parameters of Twinning with other EU delivery mechanisms (TAIEX, SIGMA, delegation agreements under indirect management, action grants, budget support and technical assistance), there is complementarity, but less often overt coordination, i.e. a combined / sequenced deployment of assistance to achieve common specific objectives.

Conclusion 9: *There is limited awareness of public administration principles and a demand for more guidance on how to apply them in the context of Twining*: While Twinning contributed in some cases to more accountable and efficient public administration (e.g. by improving governance and services to citizens), the application of the principles of public administration was weak, which sometimes undermined the impact and sustainability of TP results. This should change as the effects of the new TM are felt, but stakeholders appear in need of guidance how to put the principles into practice.

Cluster 4: Project design, selection and implementation

Conclusion 10: *The quality of Twining project design is affected by insufficient assessment, consultation and dialogue, and weak intervention logic*: The design of TPs was undermined by insufficient inputs from external expertise and stakeholders, not always taking full account of absorption capacity in the PC, and flawed intervention logic. The TM 2017 emphasis on results rather than activities, and the clarification that ‘mandatory results’ means concrete operational results, which should be expressed in measurable terms, are both helpful and appropriate.

Conclusion 11: *Lower interest from MS administrations and a lack of information about MSs systems undermined the process of matching PC needs with MS expertise*: Statistics are showing increasingly diminishing response from MS administrations, with a growth of solo or zero bids and a strong presence of a

limited number of MSs in some countries and sectors. PCs often lack reference points (MS performance in these policy areas) to make an informed judgement on MS applications.

Conclusion 12: Opportunities are not being maximised to extract full value from Twinning's achievements, during and after project implementation: Twinning achievements are not sufficiently capitalised, publicised and disseminated. This starts with inadequate monitoring of ongoing TP performance, and lack of follow-up of completed projects to assess the achievement of mandatory results and other effects. It also reflects low-key promotion and low visibility of Twinning, and the lack of effective exchange tools to highlight inspiring practices and results.

1.6 Recommendations

The report made the following twelve recommendations organised in three clusters:

Cluster 1: Regulatory framework and institutional set-up

Recommendation 1: Increase awareness and understanding of the provisions of TM 2017 by guiding, training and supporting both PC and MS administrations, and address the divergent understanding of how to interpret TM provisions, making the most of the network of NCPs.

Recommendation 2: Address Member State barriers to officials' involvement in Twinning by improving MS legal and institutional environment for Twinning.

Recommendation 3: Reinforce European Commission's capacities at headquarters and in delegations to manage Twinning and implement recommendations contained in this report.

Cluster 2 Added-value, complementarity and coherence

Recommendation 4: Optimise Twinning's synergies with other modalities to strengthen its contribution to realising reform goals by ensuring that Twinning is embedded in more extensive and long-term sector programmes.

Recommendation 5: Provide support to PCs in applying the principles of public administration in TPs, particularly in the programming of Twinning and preparation of TPFs and ensure their application during implementation.

Cluster 3 Project design, selection and implementation

Recommendation 6: Help PCs improve the quality of Twinning project design, to increase the relevance and focus of Twinning projects and improve the likelihood of impact and sustainability.

Recommendation 7: Promote EU benchmarking tools to PC administrations to guide PC administrations in their choice of MS partners.

Recommendation 8: Encourage consortiums and exchange of expertise across TPs to broaden the perspectives of PC administrations, including by enabling projects to transfer experience from one PC to another.

Recommendation 9: Build a comprehensive management information system (MIS) for the benefit of the entire Twinning community and promote monitoring and evaluation practices, including (but not only) by means of TRMs.

Recommendation 10: Capitalise the results of Twinning and promote exchange of inspiring practices to make more effective use of lessons learned from recent and ongoing Twinning projects and generate interest in designing new TPs to replicate or follow-up their successes.

Recommendation 11: Improve visibility of Twinning and the EU's role to raise the profile of Twinning among EU MS, PCs and stakeholders and elicit greater interest and recognition.

Recommendation 12: Review Twinning's state of play in 2021 and explore the merits of alternative scenarios which would strengthen the interest of MS administrations and their engagement in Twinning, thereby increasing Twinning relevance and effectiveness in matching PC needs with MS public sector expertise. Such a review is essential to ensure the future of the mechanism, particularly in the context of a possible geographical extension of Twinning beyond the enlargement and neighbourhood regions.