**Council of the
European Union**

**Brussels, 22 November 2022
(OR. en)**

**15105/22
ADD 1**

**UD 262
ENFOCUSTOM 167
MI 857
COMER 143
TRANS 732
ECOFIN 1194**

COVER NOTE

From:	Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director
date of receipt:	18 November 2022
To:	Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union
No. Cion doc.:	SWD(2022) 363 final
Subject:	COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Final Evaluation of Regulation (EU) No 1294/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing an action programme for customs in the European Union for the period 2014-2020 (Customs 2020) and repealing Decision No 624/2007/EC Accompanying the document Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the final evaluation of the Customs 2020 Programme

Delegations will find attached document SWD(2022) 363 final.

_____

Encl.: SWD(2022) 363 final

EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Brussels, 18.11.2022
SWD(2022) 363 final

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Final Evaluation of Regulation (EU) No 1294/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing an action programme for customs in the European Union for the period 2014-2020 (Customs 2020) and repealing Decision No 624/2007/EC

Accompanying the document

Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council

on the final evaluation of the Customs 2020 Programme

{COM(2022) 635 final}

EN

EN

Table of contents

1

1. INTRODUCTION

The Customs Union is a foundation of the EU and an essential element in the functioning of the single market. The EU Customs Union territory is governed by common rules and procedures laid down in the Union Customs Code (UCC)[1]. They require proper and uniform interpretation, implementation and application across the Member States. Moreover, customs policy and the customs administrations constantly need to adapt to modern trade realities, increasing responsibilities and modern communication tools. The UCC is a milestone in modernising EU customs, aiming to reach a paperless and fully automated Customs Union. The EU's Customs 2020 programme is indispensable in supporting its implementation, allocating the necessary resources for the adaptation and functioning of existing European Information Systems (EIS) for customs and for the development of required new ones.

The Customs 2020 programme was set up by Regulation (EU) No 1294/2013 of 11 December 2013[2] as a multiannual action programme for customs in the EU, to facilitate and enhance cooperation between national customs administrations, providing them with the possibility to exchange information, data and expertise. The programme is a key EU tool, striving towards a Customs Union functioning seamlessly as one, instead of a patchwork of 27 separate administrations. It allows for the joint development and operation of major trans-European IT systems, and for the establishment of networks that bring together national officials from across Europe. In accordance with Article 18(1) and (3) of the Regulation, the Commission carried out a final evaluation of the programme.

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

The purpose of the final evaluation is to assess the programme since its start on 1 January 2014 up to its end on 31 December 2020, or where necessary until 2021[3]. The geographical scope includes all participating countries in the programme, comprising the EU Member States[4], as well as candidate countries (Albania, North Macedonia,

---

[1]   Regulation (EU) No 952/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 October 2013 laying down the Union Customs Code (OJ L 269, 10.10.2013, p. 1).

[2]   Regulation (EU) No 1294/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing an action programme for customs in the European Union for the period 2014-2020 (Customs 2020) and repealing Decision No 624/2007/EC (OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 209).

[3]   Certain activities funded in the programming period 2014-2020 continued or even started in 2021. This was due to the delay in adopting the new programme and releasing the budget from the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027. Moreover, there are some activities of the programme that run with no interruption between each programming period.

[4]   The United Kingdom withdrew from the EU and is a third country as of 1 February 2020. It was therefore considered a participating country for most of the programme duration.

*   This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey) and potential candidates (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*).

The final evaluation builds on the results of the mid-term evaluation performed in 2018 and seeks to shed light on the: (1) achievement of the general and specific objectives and programme's performance; (2) cost-effectiveness of the different activities funded, with special focus on the European information systems (EIS) for customs; (3) continued relevance of the programme for the Customs Union and customs administrations; (4) coherence and synergies with other EU policies and priorities; and (5) value added of acting at EU level. Moreover, the evaluation examined (6) the implementation and follow-up of recommendations made in the mid-term evaluation. For accountability and learning purposes, the evaluation also identified areas for improvement for the future. These complement the recommendations from the mid-term evaluation and, in some cases, build on measures that are currently ongoing.

The evaluation took into account the programme's full range of funded and management activities, stakeholders and participating countries.

In line with Article 18(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1294/2013, which mandates an independent final evaluation of the programme, Directorate General for Taxation and Customs Union (DG TAXUD) commissioned an external contractor to perform a study in support of the Commission evaluation (hereinafter referred to as 'the external study'). The external study was carried out between November 2020 and December 2021 and is a key contribution to this staff working document (SWD).

The evaluation followed a two-pronged approach with an **overall programme assessment**, including a desk review of programme documents, in-depth interviews with a number of key stakeholders and a benchmarking exercise, and a **contribution analysis** through five thematic case studies[5]. The benchmarking exercise aimed to provide suggestions and guidelines for the management of the EIS for customs by comparison with similar IT systems[6] that are comparable in scale and complexity. The **five case studies** focused on a set of themes[7], which were primarily based on the IT capacity building activities to allow for insightful analysis of the EIS for customs in conjunction with other Customs 2020 activities. The selected EIS for customs were those particularly relevant in terms of resource allocation[8].

---

[5] These add to the seven case studies of Annual Work Programme projects, that were carried under the mid-term evaluation and which provided in-depth qualitative research to support the evaluation.

[6] Schengen Information System - SIS (DG HOME), European Exchange of Criminal Records System - ECRIS (DG JUST) and Trade Control and Expert System - TRACES (DG SANTE).

[7] Risk management, classification of goods, customs decision, economic operator management and the EU Customs Trader Portal and the EU Single Window environment for customs

[8] ICS2, SURV3, EBTI3, CDS, EU CSW-CERTEX, AEO upgrade.

4

Annex II. Methodology and Analytical models used presents the analytical diagram for the two-pillar approach and details behind the data collection tools and techniques for each pillar. An overview of the benchmarking exercise and the rationale for selecting the thematic case studies is also covered in that annex.

The main challenges identified during the evaluation and the measures taken to counterbalance them are summarised below:

- *Nature and complexity of the programme* – the programme supports a broad range of policy, legislative, operational and IT processes and systems through diverse activities and actions. These in turn contribute to objectives at various levels, but often in indirect ways, alongside other factors such as national administrations' administrative capacity and priorities, prevailing economic and trading conditions, and potential unexpected factors such as the COVID-19 outbreak. Due to this complex environment, it was difficult at outcome level and close to impossible at impact level to attribute changes in outcome to the functioning of the programme in a precise quantifiable way and to differentiate the programme and its outcomes and impacts from that of the policies it supports. Nevertheless, an in-depth qualitative research was conducted to identify the likely contribution of the programme activities across a wide range of areas.

- *Stakeholder bias* – an important part of the stakeholders consulted were national customs officials from the participating countries, who are direct beneficiaries of the programme and thus potentially more inclined to positive judgement. To mitigate this risk, their views were triangulated with those of DG TAXUD and other Directorate-Generals (DGs), EU level stakeholders, and economic operators, where possible.

- *Timing* – this evaluation covers the programming period 2014-2020. However, a significant number of Customs 2020 activities were still ongoing at the end of 2021, and for many recently implemented activities, including notably some EIS, the impacts will not have been realised yet.

- *Data limitations* - Limited quantitative data on costs and benefits of the EIS for customs, did not allow to carry out a cost-effectiveness assessment of the systems as originally envisaged. As an alternative, a quantitative cost assessment was conducted, contextualised and exemplified by non-quantifiable benefits achieved thanks to the IT systems funded by the programme. In addition, the limitations of the information provided by the Performance Measurement Framework (PMF) of the Customs programme[9] affected the ability to assess the programme's performance at outcome and impact level. This evaluation could therefore only use a few indicators from the PMF to assess the programme's performance.

---

[9] These limitations were raised in an external Study on the Performance Measurement Framework of DG TAXUD's Programmes, November 2020.

2. WHAT WAS THE EXPECTED OUTCOME OF THE INTERVENTION?

2.1 Description of the intervention and its objectives

Figure 1 presents the main features of the Customs 2020 programme in terms of its objectives, supported activities, beneficiaries and overall financial envelope. The intervention logic underpinning the evaluation is presented in **Figure 2**.

Figure 1. Key features of the Customs 2020 programme
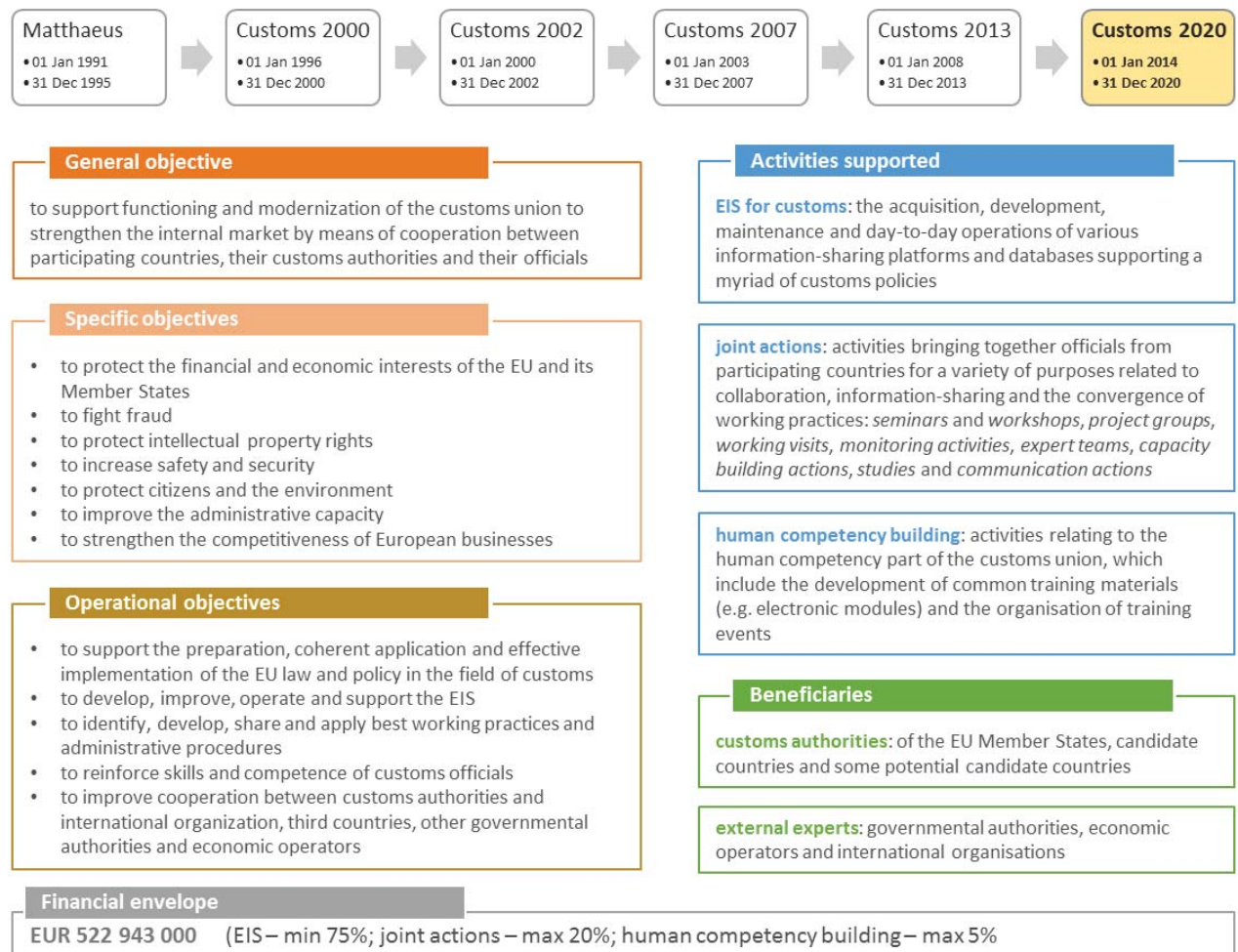
Source: DG TAXUD

Figure 2. Intervention logic for Customs 2020 programme
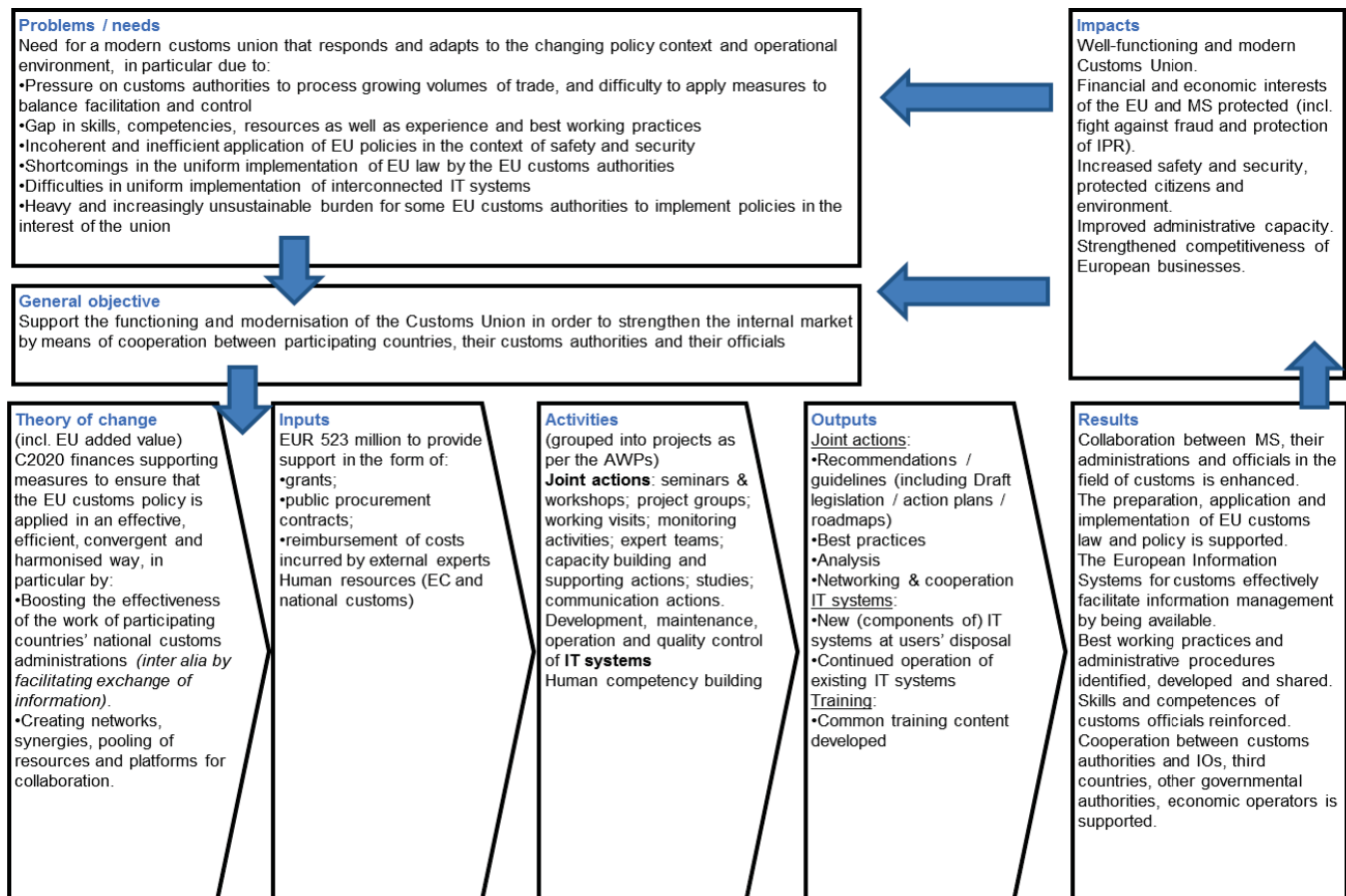
Source: 'Customs 2020 Programme Progress Report 2020'

The programme's multiannual budget envelope is implemented through annual work programmes (AWP) providing annual allocations for budget disbursement across the three types of supported activities (IT capacity building, joint actions and human competency building). The Commission directly manages the Customs 2020 programme with assistance of the Customs 2020 Committee[10].

2.2 Point(s) of comparison

It is very difficult to establish points of comparison because the Customs 2020 programme builds upon previous iterations of the programme (see Figure 1) and the Customs programme as such has been in place already for 30 years. The IT systems, constituting approximately 87% of the programme's expenditure, have long become an integral part of the national and EU customs landscapes. In fact, the programme (and its iterations) has been around too long for most stakeholders to meaningfully consider the

---

[10]   The Customs 2020 Committee is a comitology committee based on Regulation (EU) No 182/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 laying down the rules and general principles concerning mechanisms for control by Member States of the Commission's exercise of implementing powers (OJ L 55, 28.2.2011, p. 13)

7

situation before it started. The programme has evolved along with changes in the customs landscape including the opportunities for increasing digitalisation and automation.

Compared to the previous programme, **the Customs 2020 Programme represented a considerable financial increase (61.5%) and was instrumental to implement the new customs' legislative framework** (UCC) that started to apply in May 2016. The need to deliver the new UCC rules and particularly to adapt existing IT systems and develop new ones to achieve a fully electronic customs environment, lays at the core of the current programme. Moreover, the programme introduced a **new type of joint action, the expert teams**, whose results are specifically referenced where appropriate.

In line with the Commission's commitment to monitor the EU budget[11] and ensure the accountability for value for money, DG TAXUD developed a framework for monitoring the outputs and results of the programme – the **Performance Monitoring Framework (PMF)**. The PMF was put in place for the current iteration of the Customs programme and its outcome has been taken into account to the extent possible in this evaluation[12]. It includes, for most of the indicators, the corresponding baselines and targets presented in specific references in this report. However, the information provided is limited, in terms of indicators at outcome and impact level. For this reason, and based on one of the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation, DG TAXUD commissioned an external study to reassess the current set of indicators and better align the monitoring results with decision-making needs. The study was finalised in December 2020 and forms the basis for the programme monitoring and evaluation framework (MEF) for the next funding period, which is currently under preparation.

3. HOW HAS THE SITUATION EVOLVED OVER THE EVALUATION PERIOD?

Current state of play

The Commission reports on the implementation and performance of the programme annually, through the Annual Progress Reports[13]. The overview of the programme's implementation presented here is based mostly on the 2020 Annual Progress report, which provides its latest state.

The Customs 2020 programme had a committed budget of **EUR 531.7 million** for the **period 2014-2020**. This budget is significantly higher than the 272 million committed for the previous programming period (2007-2013). This is mainly due to the increased focus on the development of the EIS for customs in the context of implementation the new

---

[11] As set out in Article 17 of the Customs 2020 Regulation, the Commission is required to monitor the implementation of the programme and its actions.

[12] Based on Article 17(3) of the Customs 2020 Regulation.

[13] Customs: Reference documents (europa.eu)

legislative framework set by UCC. **Table 1** presents the committed expenses per year and by main categories of activities.

Table 1. Committed expenses per year and by main action categories of activities

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
EIS for customs	57.232.015	61.196.379	59.897.436	82.067.173	71.396.600	67.822.380	64.857.451
Joint actions[14]	6.323.000	5.500.000	5.400.000	5.815.000	5.450.000	6.264.000	5.639.100
Joint Actions - expert teams	-	-	1.767.365	-	1.726.971	1.450.667	2.100.000
Human competency buiding	1.350.000	995.000	2.646.000	-	1.800.000	1.836.000	1.814.000
Studies and communication	1.184.798	817.233	1.782.025	1.087.965	1.694.366	812.953	720.239
External experts	200.000	200.000	240.000	230.000	255.618	100.000	33.210
TOTAL	**66.289.813**	**68.708.612**	**71.732.826**	**89.200.138**	**82.323.555**	**78.286.000**	**75.164.000**

Source: data extracted from ABAC

As shown in **Figure 3** below most of the budget was spent on the **development and operation of the EIS for customs (EUR 464.5 million or 87%)**, followed by the **joint actions (EUR 56.8 million or 11%**, including expert teams, as well as studies, communication actions and external experts[15]) and **human competency building (EUR 10.4 million or 2%)**. This is in line with Annex III of the Customs 2020 Regulation, which states a minimum indicative allocation of funds of at least 75% to IT capacity building, a maximum of 20% for joint actions, and a maximum of 5% to human competency building.

---

[14]   Other than expert teams and studies.

[15]   Overall, 0.2% of the budget was spent on "External experts", i.e., the reimbursement of costs incurred by external experts (representatives of other governmental authorities, economic operators' organisations, or international organisations) who are invited to contribute to selected activities organised under the programme. External experts are mostly involved in joint actions, and therefore this budget line has been included under Joint actions here.

9

Figure 3: Programme expenditure by type of activity (2014-2020)
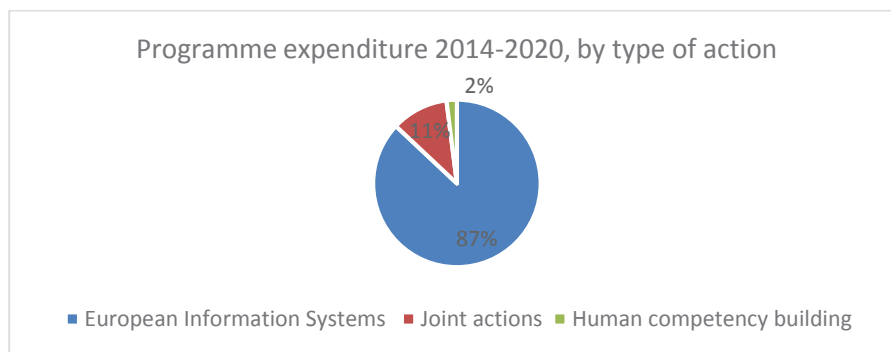
Source: data extracted from ABAC

IT capacity building activities

The Customs 2020 programme contributed to financing the development of EIS for customs. In particular, it financed the Union components[16] of new EIS for customs or the upgrades to the existing ones. A brief description of the customs EIS which are referenced in this SWD is provided in Annex VII. Under Customs 2020, the development of most EIS was linked to the implementation of the UCC, as defined in the UCC Work Programme[17]. This was in addition to the development, maintenance, and operation of other systems not governed by the UCC, such as the EU Customs Single Window Certificates Exchange project (EU CSW-CERTEX), COPIS system for anti-Counterfeit and anti-Piracy Information or the VAT e-Commerce.

In particular, the UCC Work Programme, defined 17 IT projects for electronic systems aimed at the harmonised exchange of information for customs procedures and authorisations. The IT capacity building activities under the Customs 2020 programme led to the release of nine of these projects[18]. The others are either national systems or their release will happen during the next iteration of the Customs programme.

---

[16] The EIS for customs include Union and national components. The Union components are the IT assets and services that the Commission owns. They are developed by DG TAXUD and funded by the programme. In turn, Member States develop, maintain and operate national components with national funding. Nonetheless, these need to comply with common specifications to ensure interoperability, which are also supported by the programme.

[17] Initially established in April 2014 by Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2014/255. It was subject to a first revision replacing it by Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2016/578 of 11 April 2016. It has recently been replaced by Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2019/2151 of 13 December 2019 establishing the work programme relating to the development and deployment of the electronic systems provided for in the Union Customs Code.

[18] Registered Exporters IT system (REX), the UCC Customs Decisions system (CDS), the Uniform User Management & Digital Signature (UUM&DS), European Binding Tariff Information-3 system (EBTI-3), UCC Surveillance 3 (SURV3), the upgrade of the Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) and Economic Operator Registration and Identification (EORI) systems, the UCC Information Sheets for Special Procedures (INF SP) and the upgrade of the Import Control System (ICS2) release 1 in 2021.

The Customs 2020 programme also financed the operation of the common IT infrastructure on which all the EIS for customs operate – the Common Communication Network/Common Systems Interface (CCN/CSI) and Single Portal for Entry or Exit of Data (SPEED), including their respective evolutions (CCN2 and SPEED2)

In addition, the programme financed implied major updates in the field of IT after the United Kingdom's (UK) Withdrawal Agreement and Northern Ireland Protocol.

Joint actions

The joint actions bring together officials from participating countries. They include seminars and workshops, project groups, working visits, joint monitoring activities, expert teams, capacity building and supporting actions, studies and joint communication actions. A detailed description of the key features of joint actions is provided in Annex VII.

Overall, the number of actions, events and participants remained at a constant high level until 2019, as demonstrated in **Figure 4**. However, in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictive measures had a strong impact on the number of joint actions organised and the number of participants.

It is also worth underlining that the lower number in 2014 is due to the transition period between Customs 2013 and Customs 2020 programmes. This transition included one month of complete inactivity followed by a slow start for the new joint actions under Customs 2020 in May 2014, which led to fewer activities being organised.

Figure 4. Evolution of the number of operational Joint Actions[19]and participants

Evolution of the number of participants

2014: 4,704
2015: 5,608
2016: 5,669
2017: 5,236
2018: 5,311
2019: 6,511
2020: 4,875

---
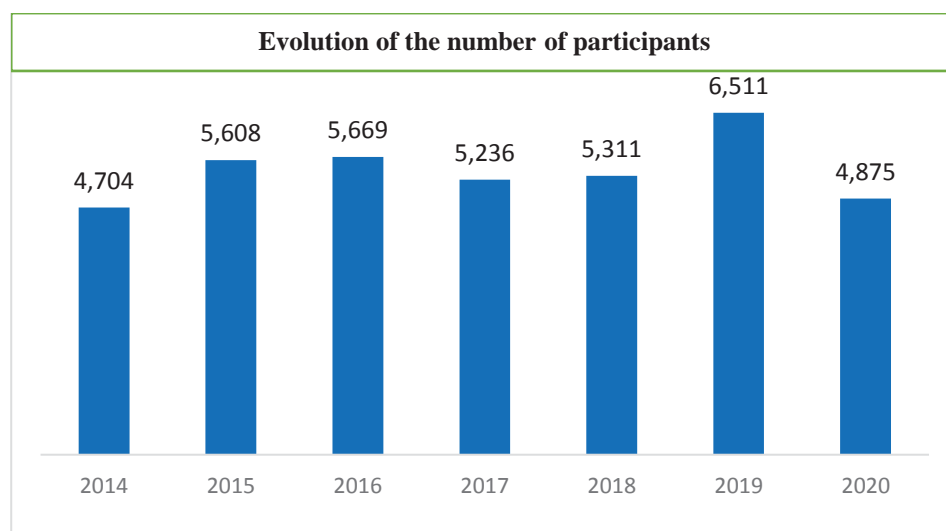
[19]   Operational Joint Actions include the ones that were launched in previous years and continued their activities in the year mentioned, together with the newly launched actions.

Number of operational joint actions per year
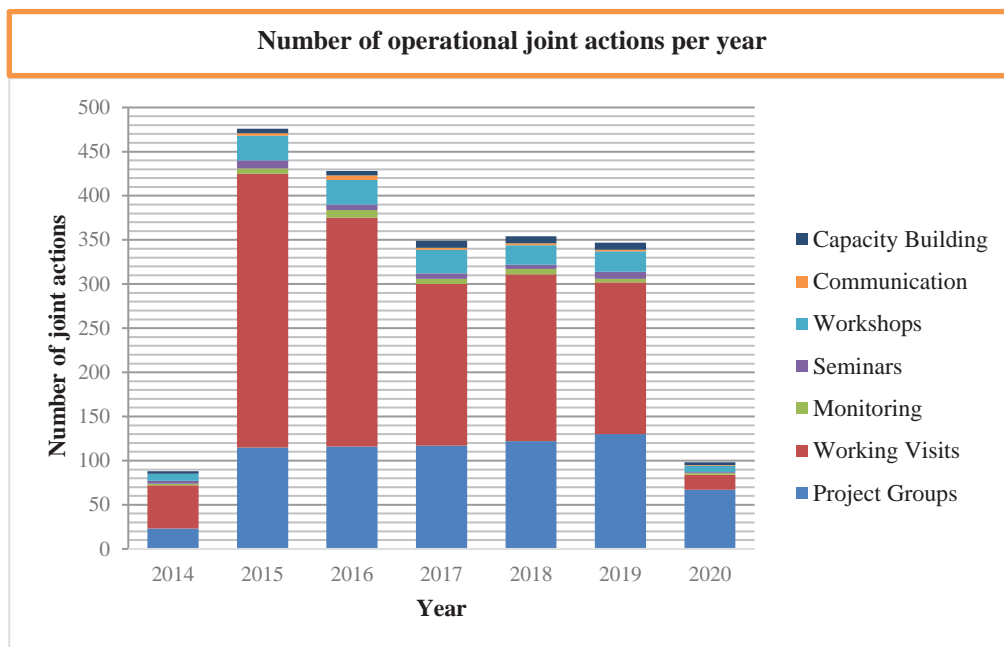
Source: Customs 2020 Programme Progress Reports for 2014-2020

Human competency building activities

Human competency building activities consist of common training actions to support the necessary professional skills and knowledge relating to customs. During the Customs 2020 programme, they included the development of eLearning modules, interactive (face-to-face) training courses intended for different audiences (customs officials or economic operators), as well as the development of the EU Customs Competency Framework and Training Curricula, which aims at harmonising and raising customs performance standards throughout the EU[20].

The peak in training expenditure in 2016 was mainly due to development and deployment of an extensive eLearning programme supporting the implementation of the UCC, which entered into force on 1 May 2016. In 2017, there were no commitments as the contracts signed in previous years were of a multiannual nature and the activities carried out in 2017 were funded out of these contracts. In general, DG TAXUD produced over the life of the programme **30 new eLearning modules in English**, as well as over **327 translations and updates** of existing modules. In 2020 specific training support was provided in the context of the preparation for UK's withdrawal from the EU, and all the eLearning modules offered by DG TAXUD were adapted and updated to consider Brexit preparedness.

Implementation of the recommendations from the mid-term evaluation

The Commission broadly accepted the recommendations of the external mid-term evaluation[21] by adopting in 2019 together with national customs authorities an Action Plan outlining the extent to and ways in which they would be implemented.

---

[20]   CustCompEU - EU Customs Competency Framework (europa.eu)

[21]   Mid-term evaluation of the Customs 2020 programme

The mid-term evaluation made thirteen recommendations that were classified in four categories: "**programming and design**" (five); "**implementation"** (two); "**monitoring and reporting"** (three); and "**communication"** (three). Most of the recommendations have been implemented or are planning to be implemented in the next iteration of the programme. The paragraphs below provide some **examples** of the improvements and actions taken. A detailed assessment of their follow-up is provided in Annex VI.

In terms of **programming and design**, the Commission has developed a more top-down and strategic design for the next programme, where the planning follows a tree structure, with various policy objectives divided into well-defined policy projects, split into programme actions. Also, for the next funding period the Commission will establish multiannual work programmes, which are more strategic and reflect better the nature of the activities. Technological improvements have also been achieved in the area of eLearning where DG TAXUD is piloting an EU-level Learning Management System for supporting the development and delivery of EU eLearning materials. DG TAXUD has also introduced a new 'Customs & Tax EU Learning Portal'[22] to facilitate the access to trainings for customs staff and professionals across the Union.

Regarding **implementation aspects**, the synergies between Customs and Fiscalis programmes are being further exploited and will be extended where possible to the new instrument on customs control equipment[23]. In addition, DG TAXUD has made significant progress in optimising the procedures and resources for the implementation of joint actions, in line with more strategic planning outlined above and simplifying administrative processes and tasks.

On **monitoring and reporting**, the Commission is finalising the new monitoring and evaluation framework for the next funding period on the basis of an external study, as explained in section 2. In terms of **communication,** DG TAXUD has made efforts in raising the awareness of the programme to national coordinators and other officials by sending quarterly newsletters. The implementation of several other recommendations under this category is still work in progress, including reviewing the programme's communication strategy and tools, increasing senior-level buy-in and political will, and reviewing the strategy for dealing with economic operators and citizens.

---

[22] European Union, Customs & Tax EU Learning Portal, available at: https://customs-taxation.learning.europa.eu/

[23] Regulation (EU) 2021/1077 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing, as part of the Integrated Border Management Fund, the instrument for financial support for customs control equipment.

4. EVALUATION FINDINGS (ANALYTICAL PART)

4.1. TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THE INTERVENTION SUCCESSFUL AND WHY?

This section examines the extent to which the programme has achieved its objectives by looking at its three levels of results. The first one about **exchange of information and cooperation** relates to outputs, the second one about the **preparation, implementation[24] and application of Union law** concerns its outcomes, and the third one on the **support to legitimate activities and prevention of illegal ones** refers to the impacts of the programme. Furthermore, this section presents the evaluation findings on the **cost-efficiency** of the programme activities as well as their **coherence** with broader EU policies.

4.1.1. To what extent has the programme contributed to facilitating and enhancing cooperation and exchange of information?

Customs 2020 programme has largely contributed to facilitating and enhancing cooperation and information exchange through its three types of activities which fully complemented each other. The contribution was strongest from IT capacity building activities and joint actions.

IT capacity building activities were **key to facilitate the secure and efficient information exchange** between customs authorities, but also with economic operators and other governmental authorities. As indicated in section 3, this has been achieved mainly by: 1) financing the functioning of the network infrastructure on which all EIS for customs operate (CCN/CSI and SPEED) and upgrading it (CCN2 and SPEED2); 2) developing and upgrading certain systems (in particular those linked to the UCC implementation); and 3) operating all of them.

As depicted in **Table 2**, the **availability[25] of CCN** met the target stipulated in Annex I of the Customs 2020 Regulation, and the **number of exchanged messages and their volume grew considerable** throughout the funding period.

Another important output of the Customs 2020 programme is the **increased number of EIS for customs (from 39 in 2014[26] to 56 at the end of 2020)[27].** Their availability is essential as they play a vital role in interconnecting customs authorities within the EU. **Table 3** below presents the availability of the New Computerised Transit System

---

[24] 'Implementation' as the process of moving Union law from concept to reality, namely translating it into concrete processes, including the systems that allow them, to ensure its application.

[25] CCN and EIS availability means that the network or the IT system is functional, up and running and that it works and can be used as designed.

[26] European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document – Customs 2020 Programme Progress Report 2014.

[27] European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document – Customs 2020 Programme Progress Report 2020 (DRAFT).

(NCTS), the Export Control System (ECS) and the Import Control System (ICS) as well as the centralised IT customs applications between 2014 and 2020, which has steadily improved. These systems allow **seamless, automated exchange of information on transit/export/entry movements** between Member States and with third countries and other stakeholders of the supply chain at international level. For instance, in 2020, operational exchanges included around 11.2 million transit movements, 14.74 million indirect export movements and more than 50 million entry summary declarations. **Figure 5** on the evolution of the messages exchanged through the main EIS for custom is also illustrative of the contribution of these EIS for customs to facilitating the exchange of information continuously.

Table 2: Reliability of the common infrastructure (2014-2020)

Indicator	Target	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Availability of CCN overall (%)	98	99.00	99.97	99.98	99.98	99.98	99.47	99.97
Number of messages on CCN (billions)	Grow or stable	2.7	3.2 (↗)	4.5 (↗)	4.3 (≈)	5.8 (↗)	6.9 (↗)	8.4 (↗)
Volume of CCN messages (Terabytes)	Grow or stable	4.3	4.7 (↗)	5.54 (↗)	22.89 (↗)	29.08 (↗)	32.23 (↗)	42.21 (↗)
Availability of SPEED2 (%)		N/A		99.85	98.46	99.24	99.51	99.68

Source: Customs 2020 Programme Progress Reports for 2014-2020

Table 3: Availability of the EIS for customs (2014-2020)

Indicator	Target	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Availability of NCTS, ECS, ICS (%)	**99%**	99.00	99.00	99.23	99.30	99.26	99.41	99.51
Availability of centralised IT customs applications (%)	**97%**	99.00	98.95	98.37	98.70	99.68	96.27	99.82

Figure 5: Evolution of messages exchanged by application.
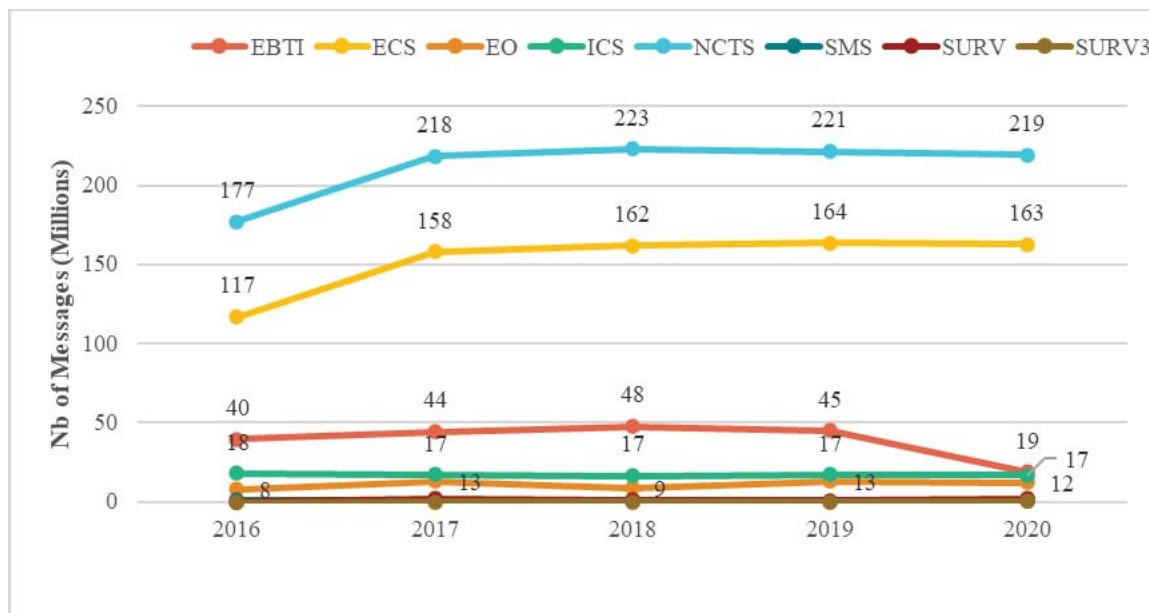
Source Table 3 and Figure 5: Customs 2020 Programme Progress Reports 2014-2020

The study emphasised the **important contribution of certain EIS to enhancing the exchange of information**. **The Customs Decision System** (**CDS)** for instance has allowed systematic, standardised and automated **consultation to other customs authorities** when required by the relevant procedure**.**

The European Binding Tariff Information-3 system (EBTI-3), the electronic system for quota management / allocation (QUOTA) and the integrated Tariff of the European Union (TARIC) are also central databases developed for the explicit purpose of exchanging information between customs authorities in the area of binding tariff information, quota management and classification of goods, respectively. All stakeholders interviewed highlighted the importance and usefulness of these central databases to ensure a uniform approach to the classification of goods within the EU, and were, overall, positive about the information exchanged in terms of content and quality. Timeliness was particularly valued.

These systems also supported the **exchange of information with economic operators**, Moreover, the implementation of the **EU Customs Trader Portal (EUCTP)** and of the Authorised Economic Operator (AEO), EBTI and INF trader portals specifically allowed automated data exchange between customs authorities and **economic operators** in a uniform way throughout the EU. They enabled economic operators to submit applications and additional information and to receive notifications from the customs authority.

The **EU CSW-CERTEX** system has contributed to **facilitating and enhancing the exchange of information with other (non-customs) governmental authorities**. This system has connected on a voluntary basis the national customs system of participating

16

countries to several EU non-customs databases[28], enabling the automated exchange of information on a number of non-customs regulatory formalities[29] required for the import and export of goods.

Some room for improvement in facilitating the exchange of information between customs administrations has been identified in the context of the interim evaluation of the UCC, where eight Member States responding to a survey indicated that the central CDS had poor communication functionalities, pushing Members States to resort to e-mails when they needed to consult others.

Beyond the information exchanges facilitated through the EIS, **cooperation between customs administrations in the context of customs EIS took two forms**: **1) when developing the systems and 2) when using them**. Evaluation findings showed that the programme has substantially enhanced cooperation for the development of customs EIS. Evidence on the extent to which the use of these systems has improved operational cooperation between customs authorities, beyond information exchanges, is however scarcer. Indeed, the development of the EIS for customs relied on the cooperation of Member States between each other and with the Commission, including through joint actions. Evidence of this cooperation includes the **CDS, which represents the largest joint deployment in DG TAXUD's IT history[30].** It enables economic operators to submit applications for 22 different types of authorisations electronically through a single electronic access point at EU level, which is linked to the central CDS. Importers in all Member States now use the same portal, and the information is automatically exchanged between all relevant customs authorities[31]. Another example is the Uniform User Management and Digital Signatures (UUM&DS) collaboration project group, which mapped the sharing of data, including identification, authentication, and authorisation data, as well as digital signature, so that central services could grant economic operators user access to authorised features. The UUM&DS system itself is the product of this cooperation.

---

[28]   i.e., TRAde Control and Expert System (TRACES) and ODS Licensing System.

[29]   Common Health Entry Documents, FLEGT licences for the import of timber and timber products, certificate of inspection for organic products, etc.

[30]   As of 2 October 2017, economic operators submit all new applications for customs decisions or authorisations electronically through a single electronic access point at EU level, which is linked to the central CDS. Importers in all Member States use the same portal, and the information is exchanged between all relevant customs authorities. CDS manages 22 different types of authorisations. It enables European economic operators to benefit from authorisations having been granted with EU wide validity and being managed in a harmonised way. The system allows economic operators to file electronically and in one place applications for these 22 customs authorisations. This development will considerably facilitate the flow of more than EUR 3 trillion worth of goods in and out of the EU each year. For more information, see section 6.2. in Commission Staff Working Document, Customs 2020 Programme – Progress Report 2017 (SWD (2019) 153 final, 1.4.2019).

[31]   For more information, see section 6.2. in Commission Staff Working Document, Customs 2020 Programme – Progress Report 2017 (SWD (2019) 153 final, 1.4.2019).

The Customs 2020 programme, in general, has created a collaborative IT environment, where customs authorities see themselves as working together towards the same end. There is little quantitative evidence to show that the use of customs EIS and the information exchanged through them have resulted in enhanced operational cooperation. Nevertheless, the Customs Risk Management System (CRMS) constitutes an example of the cooperation between customs authorities that stems from the use of the systems. Customs officials interviewed for the Risk Management case study judged the CRMS as vital for exchanging risk-related information. CRMS provides a fast and easy-to-use mechanism to store and exchange risk-related information directly between operational officials and risk analysis centres in the Member States. It facilitates EU-wide customs intervention for the highest risks at the EU's external borders and within its borders.

Joint actions provided a **platform for exchanging knowledge and good practices** between customs authorities and their officials and to promote their cooperation.

An example of **positive impact of joint actions in enhancing the exchange of information** and good practices is the **AEO network**, gathering relevant experts from all Member States. It was highly valued by interviewees, both in the context of this evaluation and in the UCC interim evaluation, as a forum to exchange expertise and to find practical solutions to problems arising in the implementation of the AEO programme. This work has crystallised in practical guidelines.

Adding to this, **working visits** were also a vehicle to facilitate the **exchange of information and expertise in a tailor-made way**. For instance, Czech officials visited their counterparts in Germany to exchange experiences in the field of authorisations (CDS)[32] and so did Portuguese officials who visited Spain and Italy on the Single Window area[33].

Overall, the evidence collected through the interviews showed that the **contacts established through joint actions led to durable professional relationships and fostered information exchange beyond the specific activities**. This was confirmed by the data collected through the event assessment forms (EAF), which evidence the high degree of networking generated through joint actions. Between 95.5% and 96.5% (2014-2019) of participants filling in the EAF indicated that joint actions provided a good opportunity to expand their network and contacts with officials abroad. In addition, most participants (between 70% and 77.7% for 2014-2019) reported that they had been in contact for work purposes with the officials they had met during a joint action since it ended[34]. These figures dropped in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic to 81.1% and 54.9% respectively in 2020. This could be due to traveling and meeting restrictions and/or to an unclear understanding/adjustment period to alternative ways to "be in

---

[32]   CWV/617 CZ.

[33]   CWV/433.

[34]   The programme poll used to cover this information. The data source changed from the programme poll to the event assessment form to improve data availability for years without poll.

contact", which increasingly include collaborative tools beyond the traditional contacts. Indeed, interviewed customs officials noted that the increased virtuality of exchanges and meetings brought by the pandemic had affected networking opportunities which were easier during face-to-face exchanges.

In terms of **enhancing cooperation**, **all joint actions brought together national customs officials from participating countries for cooperation purposes**. As presented in section 3, the **customs authorities' participation rate has increased throughout the life of the programme.** Monitoring data from the PMF also show that **all countries that could participate did so**[35]. Moreover, the countries with the highest level of participation in joint actions were usually those with the largest customs administrations, like Germany and France[36]. Countries with the lowest level of participation were usually those with significantly smaller customs administrations. In 2017, for example, Estonia[37] had the lowest level of participation with 15 officials involved in joint actions. For the other years of the programme, it was usually a candidate or potential candidate country that had fewer officials involved, although overall they have increasingly participated in joint actions[38]. Albania[39] then had the lowest level of participation in joint actions in 2018 and 2019.[40] Nevertheless, some smaller Member States had a notable participation in joint actions relative to the size of their administrations. For example, Estonia, the participating country with the lowest absolute number of participants in 2017, had 2.57% of its customs staff participating that year. This was less than 1% in the case of Germany in 2018, when they had the highest absolute number of participants. So, in relative terms, Estonia showed higher levels of participation of its customs staff in joint actions than countries with the largest customs administrations. Cyprus, Luxembourg, and Slovenia provide similar examples of high

---

[35]   No data available for Kosovo (This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.), as they joined the programme in 2020.

[36]   France (approximately 16 665 customs staff in 2014), Hungary (approximately 3 837 customs staff in 2015), the Netherlands (approximately 4 290 customs staff in 2016 and 2017), and Germany (approximately 35 661 customs staff in 2018 and 2019). World Customs Organisation, Annual reports 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2018-2019.

[37]   Estonia had approximately 583 customs staff in 2017. World Customs Organisation, Annual report 2017-2018.

[38]   Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey joined the programme in 2014, Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2015 and Kosovo in 2020. Turkey participated in joint actions from 2014 onwards, with a high level of participation throughout. Serbia started participating in 2016, and the others in 2017.

[39]   Albania had approximately 1 102 customs staff in 2018-2019. World Customs Organisation, Annual report 2018-2019.

[40]   European Commission, Customs 2020 Programme Progress Reports for 2014-2019.

participation relative to the size of their administration. In 2018 for example, there were 89 participants from Luxembourg, namely 20% of its staff[41].

As shown in **Figure 6**, the reported level of achievement of joint actions in enhancing cooperation between customs authorities[42] and between their officials was above the target from 2015 onwards. The average indicator is however not representative of all joint actions as the form was not filled in systematically by the respective action managers.

Figure 6: Level of achievement of joint actions aimed at enhancing cooperation
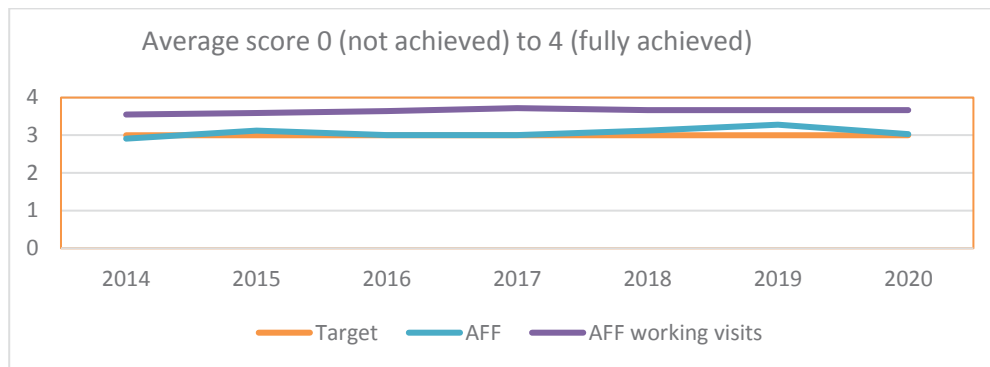
Source: Based on Customs 2020 Programme Progress Reports for 2014-2020.

Amongst joint actions, **expert teams,** the new collaboration tool between Member States aiming at pooling resources to perform tasks in specific domains or to carry out operational activities, **provide the best example in terms of enhancing cooperation:**

- **Customs Laboratories Expert Team (CLET)** was signalled by consulted stakeholders as the "best example of successful cooperation" where one Member State helped the customs authority of another that did not have the means to conduct the analysis of a product. This expert team, launched at the beginning of 2017, counts the participation of 11 Member States. It pools expertise and equipment in a network (meta-laboratory) to analyse samples and share analytical results;

- **Customs Eastern and South-Eastern Land Border Expert Team (CELBET)[43]** was also identified as a platform of expanding cooperation. This expert team

---

[41] Luxembourg had approximately 439 customs staff in 2018. World Customs Organisation, Annual report 2018-2019.

[42] The indicator is based on the monitoring data from the Action follow-up form (AFF) and represents the views of the action manager, who is the person in the Commission or in the national administration (grant beneficiaries) acting as the manager/leader of the collaborative activity (joint action).

[43] See CELBET. Customs Eastern and South-Eastern Land Border Expert Team (CELBET) is an initiative of 11 EU Member States: Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. CELBET works under the Customs 2020 programme. The aim is to strengthen and improve the operational co-operation using a new way of working based on real operational co-ordination, deeper sharing of information and pooling of human resources and thus contributing to the implementation of common customs legislation and policy.

pools expertise and makes proposals for further improvement of the operational management in EU Eastern and South-Eastern land border;

- The **Expert team on new approaches to develop and operate Customs IT systems (ETCIT)** constitutes an additional example of the programme contribution to cooperation enhancement. This expert team created in 2018 currently involves around 40 experts from 16 Member States and explores new approaches to develop and maintain decentralised customs IT systems, which fall under the responsibility of the Member States.

The **main issue identified in relation to expert teams was the difficulty to find a Member State to take the lead**. Taking leadership was considered as an extra-burden as it meant complying with procedures that are heavier than for other joint actions. Moreover, it entailed a legal responsibility, as the lead is also the grant coordinator.

Joint actions have also supported the **exchange of information and cooperation with other governmental authorities**. This was the case of **Prohibitions and Restrictions Customs Controls Strategy (PARCS) expert group** that gathers customs and other competent authorities responsible for regulatory formalities applicable to the import and export of goods**, the project group on best working practices related to non-compliance with import requirements of F-gas legislation**[44], or several joint actions supporting the development of the **EU Single Window Environment for Customs (SWE-C)** initiative.

Finally, there is evidence of **customs authorities cooperating with third countries** to tackle common challenges through joint actions. Data from the Activity Reporting Tool (ART) indicates that **46 out of 945 joint actions (5%) involved third countries**[45]. Consultations with customs officials corroborated this and referred to the project group on EU/Hong Kong Cooperation on intellectual property rights customs enforcement as example.

The human competency building activities did not aim at enhancing exchange of information and cooperation between authorities. By nature, they target individuals who benefit personally through increasing their understanding, knowledge and capacity, and in turn this is expected to improve competences in administrations. This is especially the case for eLearning modules which do not entail at all discussion among participants. Nevertheless, several training activities funded by the programme have enabled a better use of the EIS for customs and in this way indirectly contributed to these objectives.

---

[44] Regulation (EU) No 517/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 on fluorinated greenhouse gases and repealing Regulation (EC) No 842/2006 (OJ L 150, 20.5.2014).

[45] Figure based on search for the words 'third' and '3rd' in the ART extract of the Customs 2020 joint actions and their objectives, then only keeping those with a third country mentioned in the title, excluding (potential) candidate countries, and including intergovernmental processes such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). There is indeed no clear distinctions between (potential) candidate countries ("participating" countries), third countries and third parties in the ART.

4.1.2. To what extent has the programme supported the preparation, coherent application, and effective implementation of Union law in the field of customs and related matters?

As presented in the intervention logic, the programme aimed to address shortcomings related to the uniform implementation of the EU law by customs authorities, including difficulties in uniform implementation of interconnected IT systems and incoherent application of EU policies related to safety and security. More generally, it also pursued to support a modern customs that responds and adapts to changing policy context and environment. In this vein, the evaluation analysed the contribution of the programme to the preparation, effective implementation and coherent application of EU law in the field of customs and related matters.

The three types of activities contributed to and complemented each other in the preparation, implementation and application of customs legislation and related matters. While joint actions particularly supported the preparation of Union law, the IT capacity building activities were instrumental to the implementation of the UCC and the human competency building activities favoured its coherent application, as explained below.

Joint actions played a crucial role in **supporting the preparation of Union law** in the field of customs and related matters. They led in some cases to tangible results, in the form of specific proposals. In others, the joint actions contributed to the discussion of legislative issues, and the identification of changes and adaptations needed.

The case studies and the interviews provided the following **examples**:

The Financial risk management project group (CPG/076) provided an important input for the drafting of the **Financial Risk Criteria (FRC) Implementing Decision**[46], adopted by the Commission in May 2018.

The preparation of the **Proposal for a Regulation establishing the EU SWE-C**[47] was supported through different joint actions[48], which gathered the input from Members States and economic operators and served as target consultation activities for the initiative. In this particular case, the programme also funded an IT solution, the already mentioned EU CSW-CERTEX project that contributed to the legislative design of the EU SWE-C. The combination of the outputs of the related IT capacity building activities and joint actions ensured that the legislative proposal was based on solid grounds.

---

[46] Commission implementing decision laying down measures for the uniform application of customs controls by establishing common financial risk criteria and standards, available only on a need-to-know basis to the persons duly authorised.

[47] COM(2020) 673 final.

[48] CPG/130 to study a possible framework to develop the EU Single Window environment for customs (EU-SW) including the legal context and High-level seminar on EU SW environment for customs and EU SW integrated environment (CSM/022).

22

The **AEO Network** in its turn fed into the preparation of Union law by helping the Commission to **align specific legal provisions of the AEO concept with the civil aviation trusted trader programme for regulated agents or known consignor**. Furthermore, the AEO Network also actively supported the negotiation processes for the **Mutual Recognition Agreement** (MRA)[49]

Project groups in general also supported the preparatory work of comitology committees, which assist the Commission in exercising implemented powers granted in EU law. For example, the reports issued by the Classification of products in the Harmonised System and Combined Nomenclature (HS/CN) project groups[50] supported the work of the Customs Code Committee (CCC). Other project groups, worked directly with the CCC and Customs Expert group[51] (CEG) through joint meetings[52] supporting the process on e-customs legislation.

More generally, certain joint actions aimed at gathering participants' experiences on the implementation and application of the UCC fed into some of revisions of the UCC legal package. This was for instance the case of the project group on UCC delegated and implementing acts (UCC DA/UCC IA) Data Annexes Revision for Harmonisation of Customs Data Requirements (CPG/176)[53] whose work contributed to the amendments of the UCC delegated and implementing acts adopted in early 2021. Finally, candidate countries consulted considered the joint actions as crucial for closing negotiation chapters in their accession process.

The IT capacity building activities **mainly supported the effective implementation of Union law** and in particular the UCC, enabling the development and operation of multiple IT systems, without which many of the UCC rules would not have become a reality. The programme thus helped to modernise, computerise, and harmonise customs procedures, as per the objectives of the UCC. As reflected in **Table 4**, most of the budget of the IT capacity building activities was indeed dedicated to UCC projects.

---

[49] Through project groups like Mutual Recognition of AEO – Negotiations with Canada (CPG/048) and Mutual Recognition of AEO – Negotiations with Hong Kong (CPG/108).

[50] Chemical chapters (CPG/001), Food chapters (CPG/021), Other classification issues (CPG/068), and Mechanical/Miscellaneous (CPG/069).

[51] The Customs Expert Group advises the Commission when drafting customs legislation and policies.

[52] This was the case for instance during the 96th meeting of the CCC – General Customs Legislation section joint with the 57th ECCG and the 18th CEG – Data Integration and Harmonisation section and the Trade Contact Group (TCG) delegates.

[53] The main objective of the project group was to review the customs data annexes of the UCC DA and IA to prepare for and reach a formal agreement at the level of the CCC and CEG, based on the findings and proposals from ICS2, AES and NCTS-P5 projects.

Although none of the stakeholders consulted questioned the importance of the Customs 2020 programme in implementing the UCC, **there were delays in the stipulated deployment timeframes, which led to the revision of the Code**[54].

Table 4: UCC projects in the Customs 2020 budget dedicated to the development of Union components of the EIS

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
UCC projects	3 846 623	8 631 000	5 691 000	6 676 537	14 429 997	9 547 000	3 324 350	**52 146 507**
Total customs projects	5 646 623	10 431 000	7 941 000	8 526 537	17 261 347	13 347 000	5 904 350	**69 057 857**
Proportion	**68%**	**83%**	**72%**	**78%**	**84%**	**72%**	**56%**	**76%**

Based on 2014-2020 e-customs annual progress reports

A 2018 audit from the European Court of Auditors (ECA)[55] looked at whether the Customs 2020 programme was likely to support the delivery of the IT systems necessary for implementing the UCC on time. According to the audit, the delays were due to several factors, including changing project scope, insufficient resources allocated by the EU and the Member States, and a lengthy decision-making process stemming from the multi-layered governance structure. The audit also noted that the Commission did not report appropriately on delays, and that the Customs 2020 programme objectives and reporting arrangements were not suitable for monitoring the implementation of the IT systems properly. However, it should be noted that the original planning for the deployment of the EIS for customs were extremely tight both in terms of time and budget.

The Customs 2020 programme therefore did support the implementation of the UCC, but not within the timeframes that were originally planned. The UCC was amended in 2019 to postpone the deadline for the deployment of three national systems to 2022 and of six trans-European systems[56] to 2025. This implies that the implementation of the UCC is not yet completed and the new iteration of the Customs programme will have to cover the development of the postponed EIS after 2020. In

---

[54] Regulation (EU) No 2019/632 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019amending Regulation (EU) No 952/2013 to prolong the transitional use of means other than the electronic data-processing techniques provided for in the Union Customs Code (OJ L 111, 25.4.2019, p. 54).

[55] European Court of Auditors, Special Report No 26 – A series of delays in Customs IT systems: what went wrong? (2018).

[56] The system dealing with entry summary declarations, the system dealing with external and internal transit, the system dealing with goods taken out of the customs territory, the system concerning guarantees for potential or existing debts, the customs status of goods and the centralised clearance.

24

addition, **following the amendment of the UCC, the Commission has to inform annually the European Parliament and the Council on the progress in the IT implementation of the UCC**. The 2020 progress report[57] identified the risks associated with the developments of the UCC EIS and outlined the mitigating actions envisaged to address them.

In addition to the UCC, some of the systems funded by the programme have supported (or will support) the implementation of other regulations, mainly related to non-customs formalities required for the import or export of goods. This is the case of **the EU SWE-C, including the EU CSW-CERTEX system,** which, as explained before, supports the customs enforcement of **regulatory formalities**[58] concerning animals and plants' health, the import of timber and organic products. In addition, the Customs 2020 programme has funded the initial work to put in place an **IT system to implement the new Regulation on the import of cultural goods.**[59]

Complementing the IT capacity building activities, **the joint actions that were most supportive of the effective implementation of Union law were those focused on the development of the customs EIS**. Interviewed customs authorities stressed the usefulness of project groups, as they served to discuss the technical aspects of the UCC and IT projects specifically. The case studies provided specific examples:

- Member States considered that the project group for the Shared Trader Interface (STI) was crucial to prepare the effective phased deployment of ICS2, which they expect to play an important role in ensuring the effective implementation of Union law (entry formalities) across the 27 Member States;
- The Project Group on the Import of Cultural Goods (CPG 185) supported the implementation of Regulation (EU) 2019/880 on the introduction and import of cultural goods, enabling discussions on business process models to develop the necessary IT solutions;
- The High-Level Project Group (HLPG) on the implementation of the UCC and e-Customs as crucial in supporting coordination of all the different activities linked

---

[57] Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council pursuant to Article 278a of the Union Customs Code, on progress in developing the electronic systems provided for under the Code (COM/2020/806 final, 14.12.2020).

[58] These include: 1) Regulation (EU) 2017/625 on official controls and other official activities performed to ensure the application of food and feed law, rules on animal health and welfare, plant health and plant protection products 2) Council Regulation (EC) No 2173/2005 on the establishment of a FLEGT licensing scheme for imports of timber into the European Community 3) Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products.

[59] Regulation (EU) 2019/880 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the introduction and the import of cultural goods (OJ L 151, 7.6.2019, P. 1).

to the UCC and the e-Customs Decision[60]. It allowed for strategic oversight of the effects of the implementation of the UCC on the governance of the Customs Union;

- Project groups on Mutual Recognition of AEO – Implementation of the MRA with China (CPG/104), Implementation of the MRA with US (CPG/125), and Implementation of the MRA with Japan (CPG/141) – also supported the implementation of the agreements with these countries;
- The workshops in EU Member States and regional seminars in the Western Balkans on the AEO programme also supported the implementation of the latter, for example in Montenegro since 2019.

Human capacity building activities also **supported indirectly the effective implementation of Union law by reinforcing customs officials' skills and competences on how to use the new EIS for customs**, therefore improving their use and increasing the benefits. **Table 5** provides an overview of the **number of IT trainings** organised as well as the feedback from participating customs officials, which was generally positive, both in terms of usefulness and expectations.

Table 5: PMF indicators related to IT trainings (2014-2020)

	Target	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of IT training sessions organised for given systems/ components	Grow or stable	22	45	58	40	39	46	6
			↗	↗	↘	≈	↗	↘
Number of customs officials trained in IT trainings	Grow or stable	124	293	374	472	503	722	273
					↗			↘
% of officials who found that the IT training met their expectations 'fully' or 'to large extent'[61]	Grow or stable	95	92.0	87.0	89.0	92.1	89.3	89.1
			↘			≈		
% of officials who found the IT training were 'very useful' or 'useful'	Grow or stable	99	98.0	97.0	97.0	100	98.3	97.8
					≈			

Source: Customs 2020 Programme Progress Reports for 2014-2020

Customs 2020's activities were complementary in supporting the coherent application of Union law.

---

[60] European Commission, Register of Commission Expert Groups and Other Similar Entities > C2020 CPG/082 – High Level Project Group (HLPG) on the implementation of the Union Customs Code (UCC) and e-Customs (E03265).

[61] DG TAXUD launched a new format for the satisfaction survey towards the end of 2014.

The evaluation identified several examples of the **important role that the EIS for customs** played in supporting Member States' coherent application of Union law. For instance, the **TARIC central database**, including all measures related to EU customs tariff, commercial and agricultural legislation, automatically updates the national systems, reducing human error, and strengthening the coherent and correct application of union law in the field of classification of goods. The **CDS** enables that all Member States customs authorities responsible for granting authorisations handle them in the same way, increasing consistency in the interpretation of the UCC. In addition, the **CRMS** has been recognised as important in ensuring consistency in the area of risk management. Furthermore, the **EU CSW-CERTEX system,** which standardises processes for customs authorities to verify compliance with non-customs formalities is another example where the EIS for customs have enabled greater coherence in the enforcement of certain prohibitions and restrictions at the border.

The programme's joint actions were an important tool to provide practical guidance for the correct and harmonised interpretation of legal provisions. **The guidance documents resulting from some of these actions**, such as the guidelines produced by the **Project Group on Customs Debt and Guarantees** under UCC (CPG/159), were indeed helpful in ensuring a coherent application of the UCC rules and would not have been possible without the collective knowledge of participating experts. The **AEO Network** is another example where outputs, like the EU AEO Guidelines and various guidance material on different aspects of the AEO programme, proved instrumental to support the coherent application of Union law. Expert teams and working visits were also considered important in supporting a more coherent application of Union law. For instance, the **expert team on binding tariff information decisions** (**BTI)** resulted in clear definitions that can be applied in the same way by all Member States, and **CELBET** expert team led to a closer harmonisation of customs procedures at Eastern and South-Eastern land border crossings. Officials from Czechia, for example, highlighted working visits under this programme as a vehicle to gain a clearer understanding of how another Member State applies the same rules, which benefits the coherent application of Union law promoting greater consistency through the introduction of good practices learned.

Human competency building activities are key to promote uniform application of Union law. Under the Customs 2020 programme, the eLearning modules were specifically aimed at promoting a common interpretation and coherent application of the new customs regulatory framework (UCC) throughout the EU.

Looking at the data from the PMF provided in Table 6, **2016** marked a change in the programme in terms of training, **increasing by more than seven times the number of customs officials trained**. This corresponded to the entry into force of the UCC on 1 May 2016, and to the introduction of related training material. The number of eLearning modules produced doubled those of 2015 (from 15 in 2015 to 30 in 2016). Generally, **customs officials appreciated the Customs 2020 programme's human competency building activities**, especially in countries where there is no dedicated place to learn about Union law in the field of customs and related matters.

Table 6: PMF indicators related to eLearning modules (2014-2020)

	Target	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of EU e-learning modules produced[62]	Grow or stable	9	0	35[63]	129[64]	32[65]	48[66]	104[67]
			↘	↗	↗	↘	↗	↗
Number of customs officials trained using EU common training material	Grow	4 776	3 092	23 685	34 214	17 547	40 400	18 109
			↘	↗	↗	↘	↗	↘
Number of EU e-learning modules used by participating countries[68]	Grow	174	183	305	271	279	377	321
			↗	↗	↘	↗	↗	↘
Average training quality score by customs officials (on a scale of 100)	Grow	73.369	70.3	74.3	73.1	72.9	75.0	78.6
			↘	↗	↘	↘	↗	↗

Source: External study on the Customs 2020 final evaluation based on Customs 2020 Programme Progress Reports for 2014-2020.

Despite of the effective support of the programme to the coherent application of the customs law presented above, there is evidence of discrepancies in the application of Union law in areas that were the focus of some Customs 2020 activities. This is particularly the case of customs controls, as recently pointed out by ECA in the Special

---

[62] This indicator counts the new modules as English (master version) and further localised versions in EU languages as requested by participating countries, as the resources needed to develop each localised version request approximately 60% of the resources spent for the original English version.

[63] 15 UCC modules, and 20 localised versions, adding up to 35.

[64] The Customs 2020 Programme – Progress Report 2017 refers to two newly produced e-learning modules and 127 national language versions of existing modules.

[65] The Customs 2020 Programme – Progress Report 2018 states that: "The number 32 relates to two newly produced modules and respectively 9 and 21 languages versions of each module."

[66] The Customs 2020 Programme Progress Report 2019 states that: "The number 48 relates to two newly produced modules and the update of other courses and their localisations."

[67] The Customs 2020 Programme Progress Report 2020 states that during 2020, three new e-learning modules related to IT systems: INF Special procedures, CLASS and Economic Operator System (EOS) were developed. Monitoring data provided by DG TAXUD nonetheless showed that there were nine modules developed in 2020 (these three as well as Radiation and nuclear detection Basic, and Advanced, and four Car Search modules), and 95 localised versions, therefore adding up to 104.

[68] Combined number of all modules used in each country.

report 04/2021 on customs controls[70]. While uniform application of controls is necessary to prevent fraudulent importers from targeting border entry points with lower level of controls, ECA found that Member States apply the financial risk framework[71] in different ways, resulting in a lack of harmonisation of controls that hampers the EU financial interests.

4.1.3. To what extent has the Customs 2020 programme supported legitimate economic activities and prevented illegal ones

It is challenging to measure the contribution of the programme to the long-term results it is intended to achieve. Firstly, the achievement of policy objectives is incremental by nature because it is the result of many subsequent policy actions and IT developments and it is thus difficult to quantify the exact benefits of this cycle of the programme with precision, plus there are conceptual challenges when translating certain type of benefits into quantifiable values. Secondly, even if these impacts could be quantified, it would be very difficult to give a precise indication of the programme contribution to them, also because the programme is not implemented in isolation of other policy actions. For these reasons, the analysis is mostly supported by specific examples from the conducted case studies. The Commission intends to address these limitations under the next programme by establishing a policy structure framework for the programme actions (see the section "implementation of the recommendations from the mid-term evaluation) that should allow the programme to be much more policy driven than activity driven.

Support to legitimate economic activities

The evidence collected shows that the **Customs 2020 programme has primarily supported legitimate trade by developing, maintaining and operating the EIS for customs**. The digitalisation of customs procedures has simplified and harmonised these procedures, reducing compliance costs and increasing legal certainty for importers and exporters. Although it was not possible to quantify these impacts, as digitalisation of customs processes is complex and has happened progressively for more than 20 years now, the following examples extracted from the case studies demonstrate these benefits.

The TARIC and **QUOTA** databases provide economic operators with a clear view of measures and quotas in place when importing or exporting goods into or from the EU. They therefore support legitimate businesses by enabling economic operators to correctly codify their goods.

The **EBTI3** system stores binding tariff information decisions issued by national customs authorities (BTIs) and contributes to eliminating differences in the application of

---

[70] European Court of Auditors, Special report – Customs controls: insufficient harmonisation hampers EU financial interests (04, 2021).

[71] The Customs 2020 programme (Financial risk management project group CPG/076) supported the preparation of this framework, composed by the FRC Decision adopted in 2018 and the 2019 Guidance accompanying the Decision.

classification rules amongst different economic operators within the EU, thus ensuring legal certainty for the operators and equality among them. In 2019, the EBTI3 system was updated and linked to the **Trader Portal, simplifying communication between the applicants and national customs authorities.**

The **updated AEO system**, with the implementation of the **EU AEO Direct Trader Access**, allows economic operators to submit requests (and additional information) and receive notifications from the decision-taking customs authority. As recognised by national customs administrations, the central AEO system and its update have resulted in the **improvement of the business processes for granting the AEO status** and contributed to more efficient, simplified, and standardised customs decision-making process.

The **EU CSW-CERTEX project** has also brought trade facilitation benefits in the participating Member States. By enabling the quick sharing of electronic data between different governmental authorities involved in goods clearance, this system has largely replaced manual documentary controls, which are time and resource consuming for both authorities and businesses, by automated ones.

Although both customs authorities and economic operators interviewed agreed that the programme IT capacity building activities had contributed to the harmonisation and simplification of customs processes and therefore the facilitation of trade, economic operators also noted that **digitalisation was still a slow and ongoing process.** Many benefits, like full digitalisation, harmonised data requirements and centralised clearance, have not materialised yet[72]. Furthermore, **economic operators also raised some challenges related to the more complex IT environment and the additional burden and technical difficulties that it represents**. In particular, they referred to the increasing data requirements and obligations. These have been especially challenging for small companies which do not have the resources necessary to adapt to these changes quickly.

In addition, certain economic operators expressed concerns that Member States did not always implement the new EIS for customs in the same timeframe, resulting in differences in their level of digitalisation that distorted competition. They also highlighted the lack of updated information on the timeframe for the deployment of the customs EIS by Member States, and on the technical guidelines and specifications on the EIS under development. However, these issues are beyond the scope of the Customs 2020 programme. Indeed, the implementation of national components of the EIS is the responsibility of Member States, and they can make use of a deployment window that explains the referred timing differences. Also, it is the responsibility of Member States to communicate with economic operators on the deployment of IT systems at national level, together with their technical guidelines and specifications. Beyond the notion of

---

[72]   This issue has also been raised in the interim evaluation of the UCC.

responsibility, **better engagement and information sharing with economic operators is an issue which could be addressed by the programme in the future.**

Although less prominently, joint actions and human competency building activities have also contributed to support legitimate economic activities. Through the identification, development and application of best working practices and administrative procedures, **joint actions have improved the administrative capacity of the customs authorities and the conditions and procedures for undertaking trade**. Both national customs authorities and economic operators pointed at the guidance and coordination in ensuring the correct interpretation of customs procedures and processes as the main benefit of joint actions. They also highlighted that joint actions have helped to arrive to a common understanding of procedures which has translated into the design, development and functioning of the related EIS, such as the planned Centralised Clearance for Import system. The BTI Expert Teams project on divergent tariff classification, is another good example of this contribution. By pooling expertise from the Commission and Member States to handle cases of divergent classification of BTIs, the project contributed to increasing the number of cases closed in the Committee, as well as reducing the average time it takes to close a case. This project group thus facilitated trade by **increasing legal certainty**.

Finally, the Customs 2020 programme provided funding for eLearning modules and training activities to enhance and align the competences of both customs officials and economic operators. The latter accessed the eLearning courses on the Europa website and used them mostly to train their staff involved with customs matters. Therefore, **these activities supported legitimate economic activities by ensuring that businesses have access to the information they needed to operate efficiently and effectively**. As explained in section 4.1.2, these activities also helped legitimate trade by enhancing legal certainty through improving the coherent application of customs law

Evidencing the above, Table 7 shows that the number of eLearning courses downloaded by economic operators and others multiplied by ten between 2014 and 2020. The increase is particularly high in 2016, coinciding with the entry into force of the new customs legislative framework (UCC) on 1 May 2016 and also in 2020, coinciding with the launching of new courses especially relevant to traders, like UCC – Level 3: 'eAEO Trader Portal' and 'eBTI Trader portal'. Moreover, the improvements done on the Europa website download portal allowed the download of multiple courses at once. The perception on the quality of the training also improved during this period and interviewed economic operators particularly recognised the value and usefulness of e-learning courses, such as those on Brexit.

Table 7: PMF indicators related to publicly available e-learning courses[73] (2014-2020)

	Target	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of downloaded e-learning courses on the Europa.eu website	Grow or stable	3 219	3 202	12 920	11 807	10 449	10 529	30 408
			≈	↗	↘	↘	≈	↗
Average training quality score by other users (on a scale of 100)	>70	64	69.2	78.5	73.1	72.9	75	78.6
			↗	↗	↘	↘	↗	↗

Source: Customs 2020 Programme Progress Reports for 2014-2020

Contribution to the prevention of illegal activities

Although it is not possible to assess by means of quantitative analysis the extent to which the Customs 2020 programme has contributed to prevent illicit activities, some of the activities funded by the programme are preventive in nature and it can be assumed that they allowed to detect non-compliance, thus contributing to fighting illicit activities. In this regard, the **digitalisation process** supported by the programme provides as such the possibility to automate checks and perform data validation, cross-verification and analysis, **increasing risk management and control capacities of customs administrations**. National customs authorities also highlighted the benefit of the EIS for customs in ensuring greater harmonisation and the coherent application of Union law, which supported the prevention of illegal activities.

Certain EIS have specially contributed to the prevention of illegal activities by ensuring the timely and secure exchange of fraud-related information between the competent national and EU administrations, or the exchange, storage and analysis of relevant data. For instance, the **Customs Risk Management System** plays a key role in this regard and was assessed positively by interviewed national customs authorities. The **EU CSW-CERTEX**, in its turn, contributes to enhancing the security and safety of the EU and the protection of the environment, by enabling customs to automatically verify compliance with a number of formalities required for the import or export of goods in different policy areas. **SURV3[74]** brings also important benefits in terms of data analysis capabilities at EU level, which are highly important in terms of fraud detection.

---

[73] Targeted at economic operators and individuals.

[74] Although the system has already been deployed, the data continues to be gathered in different formats until all Member States have aligned their national systems to the UCC data requirements.

Joint actions were positively considered by interviewees as **supporting the prevention of illegal activities. Expert teams constitute a good example of this. CELBET** for instance coordinated controls in 174 crossing points throughout the EU and trained 300 officers from all CELBET participating Member States on x-ray, mobile control, enhanced cooperation between Customs and border guards, car search, bus search, sniffer dogs and customs control process. Interviewees from national customs authorities all highlighted the positive impact of the work of CELBET in improving the control of external borders and preventing illegal economic activities. **Customs Laboratories Expert Team (CLET)** pooled in a network the expertise and equipment of 10 EU customs laboratories, to analyse samples, share results of analysis, elaborate an operational harmonised approach for analysis, contributing also to fight against fraud and contraband on the basis of seizures. By sharing the identification of potential noxious substances, CLET has for instance helped EU customs authorities to better protect the safety and security of the EU citizens.

Finally, **human capacity building activities have also contributed to the prevention of illegal activities by enhancing the competences of customs officials in certain areas** (i.e., in-person trainings which helped participants to rummage ships and cars better)

Undervalued or counterfeit goods from China, specially linked to e-commerce, were highlighted by interviewed economic operators as an **issue where the programme could play a stronger role** by proposing more cooperation activities[75] with third countries where these issues originate. The issue of e-commerce was also raised in a 2019 study from the European Parliament on the protection of EU financial interest[76], which recommended the development of an IT system for analysing financial transactional third-party data to detect fraud and in particular fraud related to e-commerce.

4.1.4. To what extent have the Customs 2020 programme's resources produced best possible results at the lowest possible cost?

The external evaluation found it difficult to measure the extent to which the programme's resources had produced the best possible results at the lowest possible cost. As it was not possible to monetise the benefits of the Customs 2020 activities, the findings on effectiveness presented above were considered alongside with the costs. Due to the high proportion of the budget spent on the customs EIS, the assessment was particularly focused on the funding of the functioning of existing customs EIS and the development of new ones.

---

[75] There are already several ASEM Joint Actions that aim to improve cooperation with third countries to increase safety and security and protect citizens and the environment. These include workshops (i.e., CWS/007), working groups (i.e., CWS/022) and Director Generals/Commissioners meetings (i.e., CSW/062).

[76] European Parliament, Study requested by the CONT Committee on the protection of EU financial interest on customs and VAT: Cooperation of national tax and customs authorities to prevent fraud (2019).

IT capacity building activities

As mentioned before, the Customs 2020 Programme spent[77] **EUR 464.5 million on IT capacity building,** accounting for 87% of the programme's budget expenditure. In addition to the budget spent at EU level, the Member States invested resources at national level to run the national components of the customs EIS. To assess the value for money of these activities, the external evaluation analysed the following systems in detailed, on the basis of the thematic case studies conducted: ICS2, SURV3, EBTI3, CDS, EU CSW-CERTEX, and AEO upgrade.

Table 8: Commission committed budget to the development of specific IT projects

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Total IT projects	**5 646 623**	**10 431 000**	**7 941 000**	**8 526 537**	**17 261 347**	**13 347 000**	**5 904 350**	**69 057 858**
ICS2	N/A	N/A	N/A	600 000	3 250 000	2 700 000	1 080 000	**17 313 087**
				7%	19%	20%	18%	**11%**
SURV3	200 000	400 000	800 000	N/A	800 000	300 000	200 000	**2 700 000**
	4%	4%	10%		5%	2%	3%	**4%**
EBTI3	350 000	300 000	200 000	500 000	300 000	200 000	100 000	**1 950 000**
	6%	3%	3%	6%	2%	1%	2%	**3%**
CDS	800 000	2 750 000	750 000	500 000	2 200 000	1 600 000	600 000	**8 600 000**
	14%	26%	9%	6%	13%	12%	10%	**13%**
AEO upgrade	100 000	100 000	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	**200 000**
	18%	1%						**0%**
EU CSW-CERTEX	N/A	N/A	N/A	200 000	924 350	650 000	1 450 000	**3 224 350**
				2%	5%	5%	25%	**5%**

Source: e-Customs annual progress reports 2014-2020

Most of the information used to evaluate these systems was gathered through a survey targeting national authorities. It is important to take into consideration that the cost data provided by the respondents varied widely across national authorities and the response rate remained low. This data was also complemented with high-level cost information available at Commission level and with the input from interviews conducted with both national authorities and Commission DGs. The table below shows the programme

---

[77] As the programme is still implementing activities funded, final data on payment appropriations budget is not yet available. Therefore, the expenditure of the programme presented in this evaluation is based on the data on the committed budgets. For Joint Actions, this data is complemented by actual expenditure data, which was extracted from ART.

expenditure on the development of the specific customs EIS covered in the case studies and their percentage of the total Commission committed budget for the development of these systems[78].

The costs of the customs EIS seem to be reasonable for national authorities[79], as most of them are covered by the European Commission through the Customs 2020 programme. According to the survey results, the ICS2 system is the costliest for Member States in general and, in particular, in relation to one-off development costs[80] and one-off and ongoing support costs[81]. One-off development costs were higher than average also for the CDS. Meanwhile, SURV3 is the most expensive in terms of infrastructure costs[82], both one-off and ongoing. However, this has to be put into context with the scope of the different EIS, their size and complexity. ICS2 and CDS for instance, are complex systems, implementing many functional requirements, and, therefore, imply different costs from a database such as the SURV3.

Customs authorities that responded to the cost-benefit survey considered all systems to be moderately cost-effective[83], except the SURV3, which appears to be only partly cost effective. This perception could be influenced by the intrinsic nature of this system, which records and centralises import and export data transmitted by the national customs authorities and therefore, unlike other systems, is not meant to reduce costs of customs administrations or to support their work but to increase data analysis capabilities at EU level. In addition, the system is not yet delivering its full potential as data continues to be gathered in different formats until all Member States align their systems to the UCC data requirements by end 2022 as provided by the UCC as amended in 2019.

The survey confirmed that all selected EIS[84] have brought relevant benefits to national authorities. As presented in Figure 7, and in line with what has been explained earlier in the section (see 4.1.1, 4.1.2 and 4.1.3), the benefits experienced by most national authorities are:

---

[78] These amounts do not take into consideration the development costs related to the Common Communication Network 2.

[79] In addition to the budget spent at EU level, the Member States invest resources at national level to run some of the national elements/components of the EIS for customs (more information is provided in Annex VIII).

[80] Analysis and process re-engineering, coding, project management, test, configuration and change management, deployment.

[81] Helpdesk, operations to support the system, its users, and end-users.

[82] Required to develop, support, operate and maintain the systems, including hardware costs (network, server, storage) for running the systems and software costs of applications, licenses, libraries required to operate the systems.

[83] See scale in Figure 7

[84] Information on the EU CSW-CERTEX was not collected through the survey, as it was already available in the impact assessment of the initiative for developing an EU Single Window environment for customs.

- Automated processes contributing to more efficient, simplified, and standardised customs procedures;

- More effective implementation and coherent application of Union law in the field of customs;

- Increased interoperability and information sharing between customs authorities.

Figure 7: key benefits deriving from selected Customs EIS
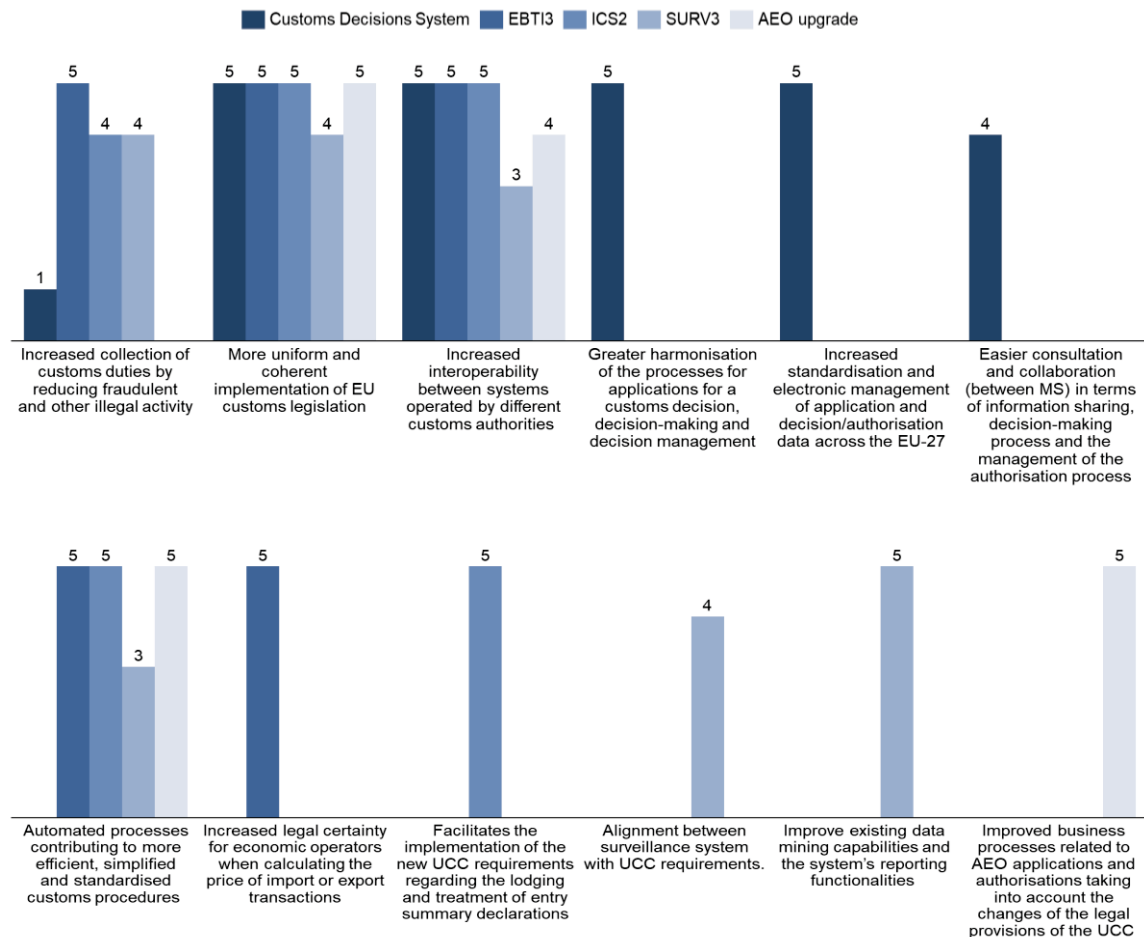
The answers provided by respondents were rated following a 1-5 rating scale: 1=Not at all; 2=To a limited extent; 3= To some extent; 4=To a moderate extent; 5=To a great extent. Eight of the benefits are system-specific, which explains why the figure presents values only for one system.

Source: Based on the survey to national customs authorities.

According to the respondents, the benefits of **SURV3, EBTI3, CDS and the AEO upgrade**, outlined above **have not resulted in increased or decreased costs regarding the time staff dedicated to their tasks** and other costs associated with the processes that the EIS supported.

Meanwhile, the benefits of **ICS2 have resulted in an increase in costs of up to 25% in comparison with the previous situation** for most respondents (33% of responses, 5 of 15) regarding labour costs and other operating costs associated with the system.

36

The main **benefits associated with the EU CSW-CERTEX** as identified in the evaluation of the project included in Annex 14 of the impact assessment of the EU SWE-C initiative[85] are:

- the **time savings in the clearance of goods** (for both authorities and economic operators) derived from the exchange of electronic data between competent authorities that enables to automate documentary controls, and;

- the **more effective implementation and coherent application of Union law** in the field of customs and related matters (namely the **non-customs regulatory formalities** covered), and the subsequent increase in safety and security.

In conclusion, although it is not possible to determine whether the analysed EIS for customs have achieved value for money, **the findings related to the cost-effectiveness of the six EIS** for customs and the respondents' perceived benefits of these systems, provide a **positive picture of their efficiency**. This positive assessment is also reinforced by the fact that the EIS for customs have contributed to economies of scale, compared to a situation where the Member States would have developed their own systems. In addition, certain of the realised benefits would not have been achieved in that case. For instance, the possibility to apply for and authorise multi-Member States customs decisions, which would not be possible without the CDS.

Joint actions

The Customs 2020 Programme spent **EUR 56.8 million** on joint actions (including external experts), accounting for around 11% of the programme's expenditure. The breakdown of this expenditure by main type of joint action (expert teams, external experts, studies and communication, and "other types of joint actions"[86]) is provided in Figure 8 below.

The analysis of the efficiency of joint actions was particularly focused on expert teams and "other type of joint actions", which accounted for 93% of the expenditure under this category and represented activities directly aimed at bringing together participating countries to cooperate towards the programme's objectives.

---

[85] Commission Staff Working Document Impact AssessmentEU Single Window Environment for Customs (europa.eu)

[86] "other types of joint actions" consist of seminars and workshops, project groups, working visits, monitoring activities, capacity building and supporting actions.

Figure 8: Distribution of programme expenditure on joint actions by type of action (2014-2020)
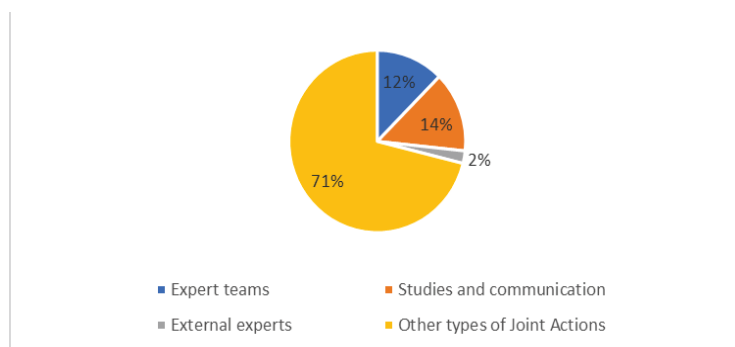
Source: Data on committed budgets

Expert teams are a new type of joint action introduced by the Customs 2020 programme. The first one was launched in 2016 and since then, there have been nine expert teams covering four topics[87]. The entire expenditure on expert teams amounted to EUR 7 million (12% of joint actions' expenditure). As previously highlighted (see sections 4.1.1, 4.1.2 and 4.1.3), **expert teams have been perceived positively by stakeholders for their contribution to the programme's objectives**. They have provided a place for national customs authorities to work together towards solutions in a practical way on a regional or thematic basis. CLET, CELBET and ETCIT expert teams are good examples of this cooperation. Although the different nature of this newly implemented activity (and therefore different monitoring data) makes it difficult to conclude on their cost-effectiveness in comparison to other joint actions, the **cost efficiency of expert teams** was highlighted by some stakeholders interviewed, **as they provide the opportunity for Member States to pool resources and expertise rather than acting separately.**

Most of the programme expenditure on joint actions (71%) relates to the category "other", which includes seminars and workshops, project groups, working visits, monitoring activities, capacity building and supporting actions. The total expenditure on these types of actions amounted to EUR 40.4 million.

Between 2014 and 2020, 1.117 joint actions were set up of which 948 incurred costs. The monitoring data extracted from ART[88] (Table 9) reveal that most of the budget was spent on project groups (76%), followed by workshops (9%) and seminars (6%).

While in absolute terms the most expensive "other" joint action type is project groups (EUR 120 800 per project group), this is mainly due to the high number of participants.

---

[87] BTI 1 and 2, CELBET 1, 2 and 3, CLET 1 and 2, ETCIT 1 and 2.

[88] These data are not fully comparable with the committed budget figures as they represent payment appropriation data and do not include all third countries participating in the programme.

By contrast, the **average cost of a project group meeting by participant was only EUR 676[89],** which represents the lowest cost per participant of all joint actions.

The average expenditure by participant of the different actions is about the same or up to 10% less than what was reported in the mid-term evaluation, with the exception of project groups which on average cost 22% less than what was reported at mid-term (EUR 676 instead of EUR 868). This reduction in cost may partially be due to the cost reduction from April 2020 onwards as meetings were held online due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

Table 9: Joint actions expenditure, number, and participants (2014-2020)

Type of joint action	Total budget spent (€)	% budget spent	Number of joint actions	% of joint actions	Average budget/ action (€)	Number of participants	% of total	Average expenditure/participant (€)
Project groups	22 350 028	76%	185	20	120 811	33 043	83	676
Workshops	2 788 777	9%	100	11	27 888	2 816	7	990
Working visits	1 933 100	7%	605	64	3 195	1 641	4	1 178
Seminars	1 777 891	6%	28	3	63 496	1 620	4	1 097
Capacity building	381 276	1%	12	1	31 773	371	1	1 028
Communication	206 637	1%	5	1	41 327	251	1	823
Monitoring	134 768	0%	13	1	10 367	97	0	1 389
Total expenses	**29 572 477**	**100%**	**948**	**100**	**31 195**	**39 839**	**100**	**742**

Source: Budgetary data extracted from ART as provided by DG TAXUD

One of the issues raised by consulted stakeholders was the need for invitations to be sent out more in advance. The **short notice makes it difficult for the participating countries to find the right expert(s) and increase the travelling cost**. In addition, national authorities bear certain expenses (i.e., the VAT incurred by the organising Member State, interpretation costs, participation of additional participants, informal activities linked to the formal event) or burdens (i.e., complexity of declaring expenses for expert teams or **time spent by administrative staff** overseeing the programme budget and producing final reporting) that they would like to see either covered by the programme or reduced.

Despite these observations, and as evidenced in sections 4.1.1, 4.1.2 and 4.1.3, the joint actions have produced a great amount of added value, enhancing cooperation and

---

[89] Excluding organisational costs, but including expenses for daily allowance, hotel, and travel.

working relationships among participants. They have also supported the preparation of Union law and the effective implementation of the legislation in force through the development of the customs EIS and best working practices for administrative procedures. They have ultimately contributed to the support of legitimate trade and, in certain cases, the prevention of fraud. **The overall opinion was that the cost of these actions was proportionate to the generated benefits.**

Human competency building activities

Overall, the Customs 2020 programme spent **EUR 10.4 million** on human competency building, accounting for **only 2% of the programme budget.** These activities included the development of eLearning modules, face-to-face training courses intended for different audiences (customs officials and economic operators) as well as the development of the EU Customs Competency Framework and Training Curricula.

Table 6 (see section 4.1.2) and 7 (see section 4.1.3) provide an overview of the reported outputs. As evidenced in those sections, the main benefits of Customs 2020 training activities are linked to a more **coherent application of customs law and ultimately a more effective and efficient functioning of the Customs Union, as they enhance the capacity of customs officials to perform their duties, as well as the understanding of customs rules by economic operators**.

Most stakeholders did not specifically comment on the value for money of the training organised and/or eLearning modules produced. Nevertheless, as presented in previous sections, the **participants in the activities perceived them as useful**. Some national customs officials even highlighted human competency building as one of the key benefits of the programme, due to its important role in supporting and reinforcing the skills of customs authorities. Although **this type of activity** only consumes about 2% of the total programme budget, it **can be considered to have one of the highest value for money, as it has produced a great number of training materials that can be used over and over without incurring any additional cost** (with the exception of making the necessary updates).

In response to the mid-term evaluation recommendation to "Refine the strategy for development and promotion of eLearning modules", **the Commission** has reinforced structured consultations with national administrations to identify training needs and **has developed an EU-level learning management system** (Customs & Tax EU Learning Portal)[90]. These developments are expected **to improve the value for money of training activities under the next iteration of the programme**.

---

[90] Customs & Tax EU Learning Portal (europa.eu)

4.1.5. To what extent is the Customs 2020 programme coherent with broader EU policies?

While the results of the mid-term evaluation on the strong internal coherence between the different levels and components of the programme and its design remain valid, the final evaluation has focused on the external coherence of the programme in the broader EU policy context.

The Customs 2020 programme is designed to support specific policies in the customs area and is therefore coherent with the priorities of the Customs Union. Beyond that, the programme has supported the work of other Commission services in EU policies and priorities outside the customs sphere. This is particularly the case of policy areas that impose regulatory requirements[91] for the import and export of certain goods, in order to protect the environment, human, animal and plant health, cultural and economic interests or other public policies in the area of safety and security. Customs authorities conduct customs controls, whereby the enforcement of these measures and the cooperation with the respective governmental authorities becomes crucial. It was therefore important to ensure that the programme aligned with and supported these policies.

The impact assessment for establishing the next Customs programme, as well as the mid-term evaluation of the Customs 2020 programme and the interviews conducted for this final evaluation, lead to **multiple examples in which the programme, through its different activities, has contributed to or benefited from other EU initiatives**:

- By supporting the development of the **EU SWE-C[92]**, the programme has enhanced coherence with multiple policy areas imposing regulatory requirements for the import and export of specific goods, as explained before. This has improved the implementation of the specific non-customs measures, facilitating their consistent application and enforcement at the border;

- In line with the above, the programme supported the **prevention of illegal trade of fluorinated greenhouse gases (F-gases)**, which pose a significant risk to the environment, by bringing together customs, environmental and surveillance national authorities in a project group on these substances (CPG/183). One concrete output of this group was a checklist for customs authorities with concrete instructions on what they need to do when confronted with the import of F-gases. The checklist has proved to be a useful tool for customs officials and is

---

[91] These requirements are listed in "EU Prohibitions and Restrictions for Customs, June 2018". Available at:https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/sites/default/files/prohibition_restriction_list_customs_en.pdf.

[92] The programme funded several activities to support the development of the EU SWE-C: IT capacity building – EU CSW-CERTEX project and joint actions – project group to study a possible framework to develop the EU SWE-C including the legal context (CPG/130), Customs Business Group meetings on SWE-C (CBG-CPG/031), Portugal working visit on implementation of a national Customs Single Window (CWV/433), high-level seminar on EU SWE-C (CSM/022) and project Group on the EUSWE-C examination and concretisation of the B2G dimension and functionality (CPG/208).

being broadly used.[93] The work of the project group also supported the review of the 2015 F-gases Regulation and the follow-up legislative proposal to update it[94], with the aim to make the enforcement by customs easier and more effective, ultimately supporting the EU broader policy objectives related to protecting the environment and combating climate change;

- The **Structural Reform Support Programme** (coordinated by DG REFORM)[95] provided tailor-made support to Member States, contributing to develop national customs administrations' capabilities needed for delivering the Customs 2020 objectives, especially in the areas of anti-fraud activities and customs controls. This includes, for example, equipment for border customs officials and funds for feasibility studies and mandatory IT systems. At the same time, the Customs programme also contributed to boosting capabilities of Member States through its own capacity building activities and therefore there are strong complementarities and linkages between the two programmes;

- By managing with similar structures both **Customs and Fiscalis 2020** programmes, **DG TAXUD optimises efficiency and achieves complementarity and synergies** between the two programmes. Furthermore, both programmes share some operational features that they co-fund and which are available for both customs and tax administrations (i.e., the CCN network). The mid-term evaluation pointed at some opportunities for coordination and cross-fertilisation in areas like excise duties as well as for shared approaches to human capacity building and training;

- In the case of **Hercule III programme** administered by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), both the interviews conducted under this evaluation and the evidence collected in the mid-term[96] and final[97] evaluation of that programme confirmed that there are **both formal and informal mechanisms across DG TAXUD and OLAF to avoid overlaps and facilitate synergies** between the two programmes. Their respective Annual Work Programmes are subject to inter-service consultation and there are fora, such as the Customs Cooperation Working Party (CCWP)[98], where representatives of both Commission services are

---

[93] Through the PARCS Expert Group, the checklist was also distributed to customs administrations in other Member States that were not part of the project group.

[94] See EU legislation to control F-gases (europa.eu)

[95] This has recently been replaced by the Technical Support Instrument (TSI).

[96] Mid-term Evaluation of the Hercule III Programme - Final Report, November 2017.

[97] Fraud prevention – final evaluation of the Hercule III programme (2014-20) (europa.eu)

[98] The CCWP is a Council Working Party that handles work regarding operational cooperation among national customs administrations with a view to increasing their enforcement capabilities. It defines strategic and tactical objectives for joint customs operations and focuses on achieving results in terms of seizures, identification of new threats and disruption of criminal gangs.

42

involved, allowing for opportunities to exchange information, reduce potential overlaps and look for synergies across the Customs and Hercule programmes.[99] New measures have also been taken to ensure future coherence and avoid potential overlap between the successor programmes[100]. Nevertheless, the mechanisms established have been more effective in avoiding overlaps, but, reportedly, there is still some room for improvement in terms of ensuring synergies, for instance by developing repositories of data that are useful for the two programmes as well as analysing the data jointly.

Overall, the evaluation identified the following **mechanism as currently used to ensure the external coherence of the Customs 2020 programme**:

- **Inter-DG meetings and inter-service consultations**, which have strengthened cooperation and communication between relevant DGs;

- **Project and expert groups, such as PARCS[101] bringing together Commission officials and Member States authorities from different policy areas**. In areas where both customs and other governmental authorities are competent for the enforcement of specific legislation, mixed project groups proved to be very fruitful. They have enabled sharing of best practices, development of joint documents and guidelines in cooperation with other authorities or provision of customs expertise and advice in the application and review of non-customs legislation when needed;

- **Participation of Commission officials as observers in customs project group meetings and activities.** In cases where the DGs are not formal members of the project groups, they were still able to participate in several project group meetings as observers, bringing advice and knowledge;

- **Assessment of project proposals by officials from different DGs**. To avoid overlaps of funding and maximise synergies and efficiencies, projects submitted to DG REFORM by Member States are reviewed by staff from other DGs (TAXUD, ECFIN). This also ensured that projects served the Commission common priorities;

Despite the positive outcomes presented above and apart from the observations raised in relation to Hercule III, this evaluation (and previous analysis[102]) also found room for improvement in:

---

[99] Mid-term Evaluation of the Hercule III programme, Op. Cit.

[100] Final Evaluation of the Hercule III programme, Op. Cit.

[101] Prohibitions and Restrictions Customs Controls Strategy expert group.

[102] Mid-term evaluation of the Customs 2020 and impact assessment establishing the next Customs programme.

43

- **Reinforcing the cooperation with third countries' authorities,** especially for supporting the **delivery of EU environmental goals and related multilateral environmental agreements** and **strengthening coherence** between **Member States and the Commission's positions at international fora** such as the World Customs Organization (WCO), as suggested by some customs administrations;

- **Enhancing complementarities with the Internal Security Fund and Instrument for Border Management and visa**, looking into a more joined-up and cross-sectoral approach at operational level, including through better use and interoperability between electronic systems or the development of synergies and technologies for joint operations and controls, as identified in the impact assessment for the next iteration of the programme;

- **Further structuring or formalising cooperation with other Commission DGs**, providing a more formal framework for discussions between DGs. This was suggested by Commission interviewees and was also highlighted as an area for improvement during the mid-term evaluation;

- **Raising the visibility of the programme and of complementary EU funding instruments within the Member States**. National authorities consulted both in the context of the final and the mid-term evaluation pointed at room to strengthen cooperation between DGs for raising the visibility of the Customs programme and for providing more information about other complementary EU funding instruments to national customs authorities and economic operators. IT synergies with other EU programmes that run significant electronic systems, in particular those impacting on business, could also be exploited by the Customs 2020 programme.

4.2.   HOW DID THE EU INTERVENTION MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

The Customs Union is an essential and integral element of the functioning of the Single Market. By virtue of being an exclusive EU competency, customs legislation is adopted at the EU level, but it is implemented by the Member States. Thus, cooperation is required to ensure a harmonised implementation and application.

The programme's role in the development, maintenance and operation of the customs EIS has particularly contributed to the simplification and harmonisation of customs processes and procedures at EU level. The upgraded paperless environment has significantly increased efficiency and effectiveness. Customs EIS have enabled the implementation of the new customs legislative framework (except for those systems and related provisions that were delayed), leading to economies of scale that would not have been possible if each Member State had developed similar IT systems on its own. Table 10 provides a number of examples evidencing that Member States working alone could not have achieved the same result.

Table 10: Examples of EU added value of the Customs EIS

EIS for customs	IT Systems added value
TARIC: multilingual database that centralises all measures relating to EU customs tariff, commercial and agricultural legislation.	**Increase in effectiveness**: The most effective way of securing a uniform presentation and coherent application of the customs Union law is for these measures to be integrated and coded at central level. Through TARIC and the Customs 2020 programme, the Commission provides all economic operators and customs officials within the EU a clear view of the measures to be undertaken when importing/exporting in/from the EU. **Increase in efficiency:** The day-by-day changes in Union legislation are recorded in the TARIC central database which is continuously updated. The Member States are given prompt daily electronic updates which feed into their national systems for customs clearance, with the goal of maximising automatic clearance. **All stakeholders recognised the EU added value of the TARIC** central database. Interviewees highlighted the reduction in errors, the increase in speed and the reduction in burden and cost as contributing factors to the added value of TARIC. Stakeholders consulted also recognised the coherent and harmonised application of EU law, the provision of harmonised and compatible data (which would not be the case if each Member State were to rely on national TARIC systems alone) and the collection of EU wide statistics.
EBTI3: centralises and stores all binding tariff information applications and decisions across the EU and acts as a reference point for Member States.	The **EBTI** supports the uniform tariff classification of goods in the EU and the application of the customs legislation which would not be possible without the existence of a central system at the EU level. It reduces the potential for issuing divergent BTI decisions and facilitates communication between stakeholders to a greater extent than could be achieved by Member States acting alone.
EU CSW-CERTEX links Member State customs systems to EU systems/databases managing non-customs requirements, such as <u>TRACES</u>	The **EU CSW-CERTEX** provides quicker and more efficient sharing of electronic data between customs and other competent authorities involved in goods clearance at the border. It increases efficiency by enabling customs authorities to automatically verify the compliance with EU non-customs formalities. It also improves the effective enforcement of non-customs policies by allowing national authorities to properly monitor and control the quantities of authorised goods imported or exported in the EU (**EU wide quantity management**), which could not be achieved by Member States acting alone
UUM&DS: ensures the uniform authentication and authorisation of economic operators, enabling their direct unified access to a number of central Customs EIS, by federating MS Identity and Access	The **UUM&DS** links to central systems, such as the **CDS, EORI or AEO** systems, which are operated at the EU level. Its development required extensive cooperation between Member States, which was only possible thanks to the Customs 2020 programme. Similarly, to other systems, it is an EU level central tool, which Member States could not have built alone in an interoperable way across the Customs Union.

45

Management systems.	
Customs Decision System (CDS): harmonises the processes for application and management of customs decisions across the EU	**The centrally developed CDS** brings **EU added value** compared to what Member Sates acting alone could achieve, as it allows economic operators to apply for and manage their customs decisions through a single EU interface and enables national customs authorities to consult each other on the granting and management of authorisations that are valid in more than one Member States. It provides system-to-system access for import, export and transit systems to authorisation data, allowing to automatically check their existence and validity.
Customs Risk Management System (CRMS) and Import Control System 2 (ICS2)	The **CRMS** and **ICS2** facilitate the exchange of information for risk management purposes. The added value lays at their potential to generate a concerted and coordinated EU-wide approach to risk management that would otherwise not be achieved by a single Member State acting independently.
SURV3: collects information provided in the customs declarations and stores it in a central database.	According to the survey results, the most relevant benefit and added value of SURV3 is the improvement of existing data mining capabilities at EU level. It centralises in one place the relevant information related to imports and exports in the EU, supporting the identification of fraud trends and patterns, providing insights on trade flows to better understand relations between the EU and other trading blocks, collecting statistics on specific goods requested by other DGs, etc.

Source: External study to support the final evaluation of the Customs 2020 Programme and DG TAXUD

In the context of **joint actions**, the programme has regrouped the expertise of participating countries, providing the opportunity for Member States to **access a wider pool of knowledge and experts** than if they had acted at individual level, particularly smaller Member States. The project group on enhancing the uniform tariff classification throughout EU and improving the functioning of the BTI system was highlighted as a successful example in this regard.

Increased cooperation and communication provided Member States with valuable insights into the functioning of the other Member States' customs and introduced a **forum for the exchange of best practices and solutions for a more efficient and effective Customs Union**. This added value was highlighted by all interviewees. This was particularly relevant for certain topics or activities which might not have had received the same level of attention at a national level. For instance, the Canine Unit Network (CUN) enabled Member States with a small number of customs dogs and/or limited experience in the field of customs dogs to participate and learn from other Member States' experiences.

Joint actions have also ensured the uniform application of EU legislation in all Member States, such as the rules of origin, and classification of goods. The Customs Project Group on the classification of products in the HS/CN nomenclature serves as a good example. It enabled the sharing of information and knowledge between the Member

States and the Commission, leading to a uniform application of common provisions, which would have been more difficult to achieve without the programme's activities.

Human capacity building activities have in its turn **contributed to a better understanding of EU customs legislation and related EIS and therefore to enhance uniformity**, ultimately improving effectiveness and efficiency of customs throughout the EU. ELearning modules accessed by a wide range of customs officials and economic operators have been critical for this. These are benefits that would not have been possible to achieve by national administrations acting on their own.

Building on the previous analysis, **the evaluation looked at the consequences of discontinuing the programme**. Consulted stakeholders found it difficult to imagine alternative ways of operating and cooperating, in particular with regard to the management of the customs EIS and the central role that they play in the Customs Union. In their view, these are the main potential impacts of discontinuing the programme's support:

- The discontinuation of the programme would require Member States to replace customs EIS systems that are managed by DG TAXUD through the programme. It would entail stopping the operation of the common IT infrastructure and components, which are the backbone of customs procedures, therefore causing a major disruption of EU international trade. Moreover, it will increase the cost and burden on Member States and reduce the effectiveness of having central harmonised IT systems.

- The cooperation element of the Customs programme's joint actions is critical in enhancing the uniform application and implementation of customs legislation, processes and procedures. The discontinuity of the programme and therefore, of its joint actions would considerably affect this harmonisation, eventually resulting in an uneven playing field for economic operators and distortion of competition in the internal market.

- More generally, the absence of co-funding mechanisms as currently provided through the Customs 2020 programme would increase the burden and cost on Member States, reducing economies of scale and resulting in a less efficient Customs Union.

4.3. IS THE INTERVENTION STILL RELEVANT?

As indicated previously, the Customs Union is an area of exclusive Union competence where the Union shares the responsibility for its implementation with the Member States. The direct needs to make the Customs Union work seamlessly are therefore predominantly on the side of customs administrations, which operate in conditions of increased necessity to exchange information, cooperate and build their administrative capacity. Secondary target audiences whose needs should be considered are also economic operators.

The relevance of the Customs programme was confirmed by the mid-term evaluation, which concluded that the programme's specific and operational objectives were relevant to the needs of stakeholder and that ambitious policies would not have been possible without the programme. **The final evaluation has therefore focused on** *continued* **relevance in light of** the developments that happened since the mid-term review, in particular **Brexit** and the **COVID-19 pandemic**. This asssessment is particularly important as needs may have evolved and new needs may have emerged due to these events. Moreover, **the evaluation examined whether the programme is aligned** with the problems and actions identified in the 2020 **Customs Action Plan** "Taking the Customs Union to the next level"[103] which proposes a revised Customs Union strategy.

During the final evaluation of the programme, all different groups of stakeholders consulted agreed that **the programme continues to be both relevant and necessary and that stakeholders' needs have remained largely unchanged since the mid-term evaluation**. The **Impact Assessment for the post-2020 customs programme,** also **confirmed these needs**. Adding to this, the **2020 Customs Action Plan proposed a set of actions that link to the specific and operational objectives of the programme**, therefore corroborating their continued relevance. The proposed actions, which align well to the objectives of the programme, were in the areas of risk management, management of e-commerce, promotion of compliance, and operational cooperation between customs authorities[104].

There was overall consensus among stakeholders, and especially among customs authorities, that the programme was relevant to addressing the needs related to the problems mentioned above. The continued relevance of the programme was particularly highlighted in relation to the **need to harmonise the application and effective implementation of the Customs Union rules**. Customs authorities, but also economic operators, considered that Member States were increasingly "on the same page" and that this was due to a large extent to the programme's activities. Networking and exchange of ideas were seen as important aspects of all programme activities, as well as the customs EIS which enable the exchange of information required by EU law, and ultimately its practical implementation.

In particular, according to customs authorities, **the guidance documents produced in project groups,** which clarify different aspects of the legislation and illustrate them with concrete examples, **have played a major role in addressing the need to harmonise the application of customs rules by Member States.** Customs authorities also considered that the formulation and definition of common standards has been critical to align the different approaches that Member States have applied to date.

---

[103] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee "Taking the Customs Union to the Next Level: A Plan for Action", COM(2020) 581 final.

[104] In the Action Plan, this area is referred to as "customs authorities acting as one".

Moreover, customs authorities confirmed the **continued need for the programme to support Member States in the digitalisation and modernisation of customs procedures** such as updating customs IT systems and adapting them to new requirements, for which they need the support of the programme. Indeed, digitalisation is an ongoing process and therefore the programme's focus on IT systems is still very much relevant and necessary.

On the side of economic operators, customs rules and procedures are mainly associated with administrative burdens, which need to be minimised. At the same time, they need legal certainty to be maximised. In the interviews, **economic operators in general demanded even further simplification and harmonisation of customs legislation and processes, confirming that this is a continued need**. Finally, in relation to the programme's management, **some economic operators called for a more proactive engagement and communication with the business sector**, as well as better provision of information to business, earlier on in the process. In line with this, one national administration indicated that further cooperation with the business sector could help to align new technological developments (e.g., detection technologies) to customs requirements. It is worth recalling that improving the engagement with economic operators was a recommendation of the mid-term evaluation, which will be addressed in the next funding period.

The evaluation also explored whether the programme was sufficiently flexible to respond to new and evolving needs of customs authorities and economic operators, stemming from unexpected developments such as Brexit and the COVID-19 outbreak, and in the context of new policy initiatives such as the Customs Action Plan.

In principle, the programme structure and the development of Work Programmes on an annual basis, provides flexibility for the programme to adapt to changing needs and tailor actions to national authorities's demands. In addition, the wide range of activities which can be funded under the programme allows it to be flexible.

Although Brexit added a layer of complexity to the programme, causing delays in some projects and absorbing a significant amount of resources, there was general agreement across the different groups of stakeholders consulted that **Brexit did not seem to have affected the relevance of the programme's objectives**. **On the contrary, the programme's activities contributed to preparing the ground for the UK's departure from the EU, showing its flexibility to address unforeseen developments**. For instance, customs authorities consulted indicated that they were regularly updated by DG TAXUD about progress on Brexit and that they participated in various meetings and seminars[105] on the matter, which helped them prepare for the changes, as well as prepare economic operators and passengers for the new situation. Adding to this, the annual progress reports indicated that under the objective of supporting the preparation,

---

[105] An example of this is the Technical expert seminar (EU27) on the impact of withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU on Customs IT (CPG/054/047) held on 13 February 2019. This meeting was addressed to experts regularly attending the Electronic Customs Coordination Group (ECCG).

application and implementation of Union law, some of the 114 joint actions ongoing in 2018 were in key areas such as Brexit. Specific training support was also provided in 2019 in the context of the preparation for Brexit[106] and all courses and materials have been adapted and updated to include Brexit-related considerations. Also, the changes required to the trans-European systems such as Export Control System (ECS), New Computerised Transit System (NCTS) and others, were prepared and implemented in a timely and coordinated manner and meeting the requirements of the political agreements, even if not initially planned at the start of the 2020 programme. Despite this positive assessment, some customs authorities indicated that **further support from the programme was still needed** on this matter (e.g. more training activities), especially **to harmonise the way in which Member States deal with VAT- and classification-related issues after Brexit**.

In relation to the **COVID-19 pandemic**, customs authorities consulted agreed with the assessment of the Customs Action Plan that the **Commission's customs services reacted swiftly to the crisis**, adopting legislation, issuing guidelines and actively supporting Member States and businesses to ensure flexibility in relation to customs obligations and customs clearance. Interviewed economic operators also recognised that the there was flexibility in the application of the customs legislation, as well as sufficient guidance from the Commission.

In terms of the programme activities, primarily in April-May 2020 **the pandemic caused interruptions or delays in some joint actions** (e.g. suspension of working/monitoring visits, practical demonstrations, 'hands on' training sessions), **as well as testing of new IT system**s. However, despite these initial difficulties, consulted customs authorities considered that **the programme adapted well to the new reality**. Most interviewees expressed though that **virtuality had nevertheless affected networking opportunities**. In addition, some customs authorities considered the **programme's management systems, in particular** the Programmes Information and Collaboration Space (**PICS**) **and ART, to be outdated and not adapted to the new reality of increased virtuality** and demanded more advanced technical support from the programme, for instance by providing a stable, secure and user-friendly platform for online meetings, exchange of data and collaboration between customs authorities.

On their side, economic operators pointed at new or evolved **needs that were not sufficiently addressed by the Commission and the Member States via the programme**. These were mainly related to **e-commerce**, which some considered as a key priority for the future programme, and **technological innovation for customs processes** that should be further promoted. This innovation was considered to be necessary not only in relation to IT systems but in transitioning to digital documents, such as invoices and certificates of origin. Exploring the use of highly sophisticated tools, like blockchain technology, for customs clearance was also suggested. Some

---

[106] Through the development of fast-track upskilling and on-boarding customs training programmes for direct use by national authorities.

economic operators considered that working together and learning from trade processes and systems could be beneficial for having more technologically advanced customs processes.

5. WHAT ARE THE CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED?

The Customs programme has been in place for already 30 years now, evolving with the single market. The latest iteration, Customs 2020, was set up for the years 2014-2020 as a multiannual action programme to facilitate and enhance cooperation between customs administrations. The present evaluation assessed the programme in terms of the effectiveness and efficiency in achieving its objectives, its relevance to the needs of the customs administrations, economic operators and the Customs Union as a whole, coherence with other initiatives and its EU added value. This evaluation has been supported by an external study, in line with Article 18(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1294/2013.

Here are the key conclusions and lessons learnt stemming from this exercise.

With the core objective of UCC being to achieve more simplicity and uniformity in the application of customs rules and to provide a fully electronic environment for the completion of customs formalities, **the Customs 2020 programme has been especially important in relation to the development and functioning of customs EIS,** providing for their financial sustainability and ensuring the availability and sharing of supply chain data and risk-relevant information. This represented **87% of the programme's budget dedicated to IT capacity building.** The remaining budget was dedicated to **joint actions (11%)** and **human capacity building activities (2%)**. The three types of actions played a specific role and complemented each other in pursuing the programme's objectives.

The Customs 2020 programme **fostered exchange of customs data and information through the customs EIS**. They provided the means for an automated, solid and reliable **exchange of data between national customs administrations, but also with economic operators and other governmental authorities**. The number and volume of messages exchanged over the Common Communication Network/Common Systems Interface increased continuously since 2014, reaching nearly 8.4 billion and 42.1 terabytes in 2020 (35.8 billion and 140.95 terabytes in total during the programme's period). Only in 2020, around 11.2 million of transit movements were released through the NCTS, 14.74 million indirect export movements were recorded in the ECS and more than 50 million entry summary declarations were lodged through the ICS. The implementation of the **EU Customs Trader Portal and the e-AEO, EBTI and INF trader portals** were important contributions of the programme to **improving information exchanges with economic operators**, while the **EU CSW-CERTEX** was particularly **relevant to enhance the data exchange with non-customs authorities**. The programme also provided a platform for **exchanging knowledge and good practices between customs authorities and their officials through the joint actions**. They contributed to promoting working relationships and knowledge/experience exchanges that continued beyond the specific programme activities.

51

Although the evaluation found only limited evidence on how the use of customs EIS has enhanced cooperation between customs authorities (beyond the information exchanges), the **development of such systems, supported by both IT capacity building and joint actions activities, represents in itself a tangible result of that cooperation**. The evaluation especially highlighted the role of joint actions in enhancing cooperation. They brought together an increasing number of customs officials from participating countries to cooperate in different areas. Amongst **joint actions, the new action type "expert teams" provided the best examples of enhancing operational cooperation (i.e. CELBET, CLET and ETCIT).** A challenge identified in relation to expert teams was the difficulty to find participating countries to lead them, because of the administrative burden it represents, and the lack of clarity surrounding the specificities of this type of joint action. This may point at the convenience of refining the "expert team" concept, based on the experience gained, to ensure that this type of activity is exploited in the most effective way under the next programme period.

Customs 2020 largely supported the preparation, effective implementation and more coherent application of Union law in the field of customs. The different programme activities served different purposes and complemented each other in this regard. Several **joint actions supported the preparation of Union law** (e.g. the proposal for a Regulation on the EU Single Window Environment for Customs adopted by the College in October 2019), while **IT capacity building activities mainly served to implement the UCC**, putting in place and operating the necessary systems. However, the development of **some of these systems suffered delays that affected the timely implementation of the Code**. This was addressed by postponing the legal deadline and putting in place a proper monitoring and reporting mechanism for the future. In turn, **training activities were key to support the coherent application of the new legislative framework**, facilitating its understanding among both customs authorities and economic operators. Despite this support, there is still **evidence of divergences in the application of Union law** in areas that were the focus of the programme activities. **This is the case of customs controls and in particular, the application of the financial risk framework**, which could be further tackled under the next funding period.

The programme had a **positive impact on the functioning and modernisation of the Customs Union and the internal market, supporting legitimate trade and preventing illegal activities**. Although it was not possible to monetise these impacts, the **digitalisation of customs procedures funded by the programme has simplified and harmonised such procedures to a certain extent**, reducing compliance costs and increasing legal certainty for traders, ultimately strengthening competitiveness of European businesses. Nonetheless, **digitalisation is still an ongoing process and many of the expected benefits have not yet materialised**. Consulted economic operators raised challenges related to the complexity of the IT environment, the staggered development of national components by Member States and the insufficient communication thereof, which reveal that engagement and information sharing with economic operators could be improved. On the **prevention of illegal activities**, specific **EIS, such as the CRMS and the EU CSW-CERTEX**, have contributed to this goal by

facilitating the exchange of relevant information to better target controls. **Expert teams like CELBET and CLET** were also an effective instrument in that respect. Economic operators pointed at **fraud related to e-commerce as an outstanding issue.** The issue of e-commerce had already been raised by the European Parliament in a 2019 study on the protection of EU financial interest.

From an **efficiency** perspective, the impossibility to monetise the benefits of the programme made it difficult to assess the value for money of its activities. Nonetheless, qualitative evidence collected through the interviews, a dedicated survey as well as the information provided by the PMF indicators allowed the external study to draw certain conclusions. Regarding IT capacity building activities, the analysis focused on six customs EIS, five of which were considered by consulted customs authorities as moderately cost-effective. The **EIS benefits** experienced by customs authorities relate to the **automation of processes,** resulting in more **efficient and simplified customs procedures,** the more **effective implementation and harmonised application of customs law** and the **increased interoperability and information sharing** between authorities. The **economies of scale and specific benefits** linked to the development of these systems at EU level **reinforce this positive picture**. When considering **joint actions**, the overall opinion was that their **cost was proportionate to the generated benefits**. **Cost-efficiency of expert teams was particularly highlighted** for their ability to pull resources and expertise, rather than acting individually. Finally, **human competency building activities are considered to generate a high value for money**, especially regarding eLearning trainings that can be used repeatedly without incurring in additional costs. In line with this and implementing the recommendation of the mid-term evaluation to "refine the strategy for development and promotion of eLearning modules", the **Commission has developed an EU-level Learning Management System**, that is expected to increase the value for money of training activities under the next iteration of the programme.

While the results of the mid-term evaluation on internal coherence of the programme remain valid, the final evaluation focused on its **external coherence** and found that the **Customs 2020 programme has both supported other EU initiatives and benefited from them**. This is particularly the case of other policy areas that impose regulatory requirements for the import and export goods in order to protect the EU, its financial interests, its citizens and the environment or of other spending programmes, such as Fiscalis 2020, the Structural Reform Support Programme or Hercule III. Several mechanisms were used to ensure this coherence, such as inter-DG meetings, interservice consultations, mixed project and expert groups, participation of observers from other Commission DGs in project group meetings or activities or the assessment of project proposals by officials from various DGs. Despite the observed positive outcomes, the assessment pointed at room for further complementarities and synergies in certain areas. For instance, additional synergies could be explored with the successor of Hercule III programme on the development of data repositories or on joint data analysis, or with the Internal Security Fund and Instrument for Border Management and visa, on seeking a more joined-up and cross-sectoral approach at operational level. Cooperation with third

countries on the fulfilment of EU and international environmental goals was also highlighted as potential area for enhancing coherence. Finally, the evaluation suggested additional ways to improve coherence, such as further structuring or formalising cooperation between involved Commission DGs, raising the visibility of the programme and its complementarity with other EU funds in the Member States or exploring IT synergies with other EU programmes that run significant electronic systems.

The evaluation findings confirmed the added value of the programme, which constitutes a cooperation instrument to ensure the proper functioning and modernisation of the Customs Union and its harmonised implementation. In this regard, the programme's role in the development, maintenance and operation of the **customs EIS** has **particularly contributed to the simplification and harmonisations of customs processes and procedures at EU level**. The upgraded paperless environment has significantly increased efficiency and effectiveness. It has led to **economies of scale and a degree of integration** that would not have been possible if each Member State had developed similar IT systems on its own. Similar conclusions can be drawn on joint actions and human competency building activities. By regrouping the expertise of participating countries in **joint actions**, the programme provided the opportunity for Member States, especially the smaller ones, to **access a wider pool of knowledge and experts** than at individual level. Joint actions provided a vehicle to **exchange best practises and knowledge and to find common solutions**, resulting in a more uniform application of EU law, which would have been more difficult in their absence. **eLearning modules** accessible to a wide range of customs officials and economic operators also demonstrate an added value, **contributing to a better and uniform understanding of the new legislative framework and related EIS** that would not have been possible through national action.

Based on these programme contributions, participating countries do not consider discontinuing the programme as a plausible option. That would entail stopping the operation of the common IT infrastructure and components, which are the backbone of customs procedures, therefore causing a major disruption of EU international trade. More generally, discontinuing the programme would likely result in increased burden and cost on Member States. In such a scenario, harmonisation in the application of Union law would be challenging, and potential divergences would result in an uneven playing field and distorted competition in the internal market, impacting negatively on economic operators, for whom compliance would be more burdensome.

Underpinning the conclusions of the mid-term evaluation, **the final evaluation corroborated the continued relevance of the Customs programme**, **especially in relation to the needs of national customs administrations**, who are its main beneficiaries. Overall, the programme continues to respond to stakeholders' needs, adapting well to unforeseen events (such as COVID-19 and Brexit) and addressing problems and priorities identified in the impact assessment of the next customs programme and in the 2020 Customs Action Plan. There was **consensus on the continued relevance** of the programme particularly in relation to **the need to harmonise the application and effective implementation of the Customs Union rules**. Moreover,

customs administrations confirmed the continued need for the programme **to support the ongoing digitalisation and modernisation of customs procedures**. **Economic operators**, in general, **advocated further simplification and harmonisation of customs legislation** and processes and some of them **called for a more proactive engagement and communication** with the business sector, coinciding with the recommendation of the mid-term evaluation on improving the engagement with economic operators that the next programme intends to address.

The **programme proved to be sufficiently flexible in view of new or changing needs**. The programme activities satisfactorily contributed to prepare stakeholders for Brexit. However, customs authorities still pointed to additional training needs in this matter. In terms of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were some initial challenges in adapting to the new reality but overall, the programme did it well and continued to respond to stakeholders' needs. Nevertheless, there is a **general perception of decreased networking opportunities**, which are considered as a key element of the programme and a **consequent demand from customs administrations of** continued **support of the programme in the new reality** through **better adapted means and channels** that can ensure networking even through virtual means. Finally, **economic operators** pointed at the **management of e-commerce and the technological innovation for customs processes**, as two evolved needs, thus confirming its continued relevance.

The evaluation considered that the Customs Programme is still a relevant support tool at EU level to strengthen cooperation and coordination between countries in support of a well-functioning and modern Customs Union. This is especially important in a world that is fast changing in terms of trade (e-commerce) and technology, posing challenges to custom systems and administrations. In this context, the programme remains relevant to fund the development, implementation and operation of IT infrastructure and systems in the field as they are resource intensive and can benefit from economies of scale and scope. It also is important to ensure regular cooperation and mutual learning, improving the capacity of customs authorities. As such, the programme would continue to be relevant in support of effective implementation and coherent application of Union law in the field of customs as a result of the UCC reform planned for 2022.

1. Lead DG, Decide reference

The final evaluation is a non-major initiative (PLAN/2020/8197) organised in accordance with article 18(1)(3) of Regulation (EU) No 1294/2013 of 11th of December 2013 setting up Customs 2020 as a multiannual action programme for customs in the EU, to facilitate and enhance cooperation between national administrations.

The lead Directorate General for the evaluation was the Directorate General for Taxation and Customs Union (DG TAXUD).

2. Organisation and timing

The Commission carried out the present evaluation with the help of an external consultant. The evaluation study was commissioned to a consortium led by Economisti Associati Srl[107]. The specific contract was signed on the 14th of October 2020 for a period of 12 months.

The evaluation was supported by an inter-service group (ISG) with the following Commission's services who expressed their wish to participate in the group:

DG Budget (BUDG)

DG Economic and Financial Affairs (ECFIN)

DG Environment (ENV)

DG Health and Food Safety (SANTE)

DG Migration and Home Affairs (HOME)

DG Informatics (DIGIT)

DG Justice and Consumers (JUST)

DG Secretariat General (SG)

DG Structural Reform Support Service (REFORM)

DG Trade (TRADE)

European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)

The ISG met four times on 17th of June 2020, 12th of November 2020, 15th of January 2021 and 9th of July 2021. In the last meeting the external consultant presented the draft

---

[107] Framework Contract TAXUD/2019/CC/150;

Final Report introducing the findings of the evaluation, the conclusions and recommendations. These were discussed with the group, which confirmed their validity and credibility.

3. Evidence, sources and quality

The present evaluation SWD is based on the works carried out by the external consultant. The material informing this evaluation consisted of (1) programming documentation, (2) the Performance Measurement Framework (PMF), (3) previous studies, reports and evaluations and (4) other DG's IT systems, as detailed in **Table 11,** which presents as well the intended purpose of use. The evaluation gathered also primary data on the programme's implementation, functioning, results and use directly from the best-placed stakeholders: EU representatives, the customs administrations from Member States, candidate and potential candidate countries and, to a smaller extent, from economic operators. That evidence was collected through in-depth interviews, a benchmarking exercise, and a series of five thematic cases studies, which are described in more detail in Annex II.

The details of the stakeholder consultation strategy containing stakeholders mapping, engagement methods and feedback can be found in Annex V.

Table 11. Sources of information used for final evaluation of Customs 2020 programme

References	General	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Relevance	Coherence	EU added value
Customs 2020 Regulation: • Regulation (EU) No 1294/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing an action programme for customs in the European Union for the period 2014-2020 (Customs 2020)	X	X	X	X		

Previous programmes: • Decision No 624/2007/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 May 2007 establishing an action programme for customs in the Community (Customs 2013) • Decision No 253/2003/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 February 2003 adopting an action programme for Customs in the Community (Customs 2007) • Decision No 105/2000/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 1999 amending Decision No 210/97/EC adopting an action programme for customs in the Community (Customs 2000) and repealing Council Decision 91/341/EEC • Decision No 210/97/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 December 1996 adopting an action programme for customs in the Community (Customs 2000) • 91/341/EEC: Council Decision of 20 June 1991 on the adoption of a programme of Community action on the subject of the vocational training of customs officials (Matthaeus programme)	X				
Future programme: • Regulation (EU) 2021/444 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2021 establishing the Customs programme for cooperation in the field of customs and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1294/2013					
Other DG TAXUD programmes: • Regulation (EU) 2021/1077 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing, as part of the Integrated Border Management Fund, the instrument for financial support for customs control equipment		X	X		X
e-customs and UCC: • Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council pursuant to Article 278a of the Union Customs Code, on progress in developing the electronic systems provided for under the Code • Regulation (EU) No 2019/632 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 amending Regulation (EU) No 952/2013 to prolong the transitional use of means other than the electronic data-processing techniques provided for in the Union Customs Code • Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2016/578 of 11 April 2016 establishing the Work Programme relating to the development and deployment of the electronic systems provided for in the Union Customs Code • Regulation (EU) No 952/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 October 2013 laying down the Union Customs Code (recast) • Decision No 70/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 January 2008 on a paperless environment for customs and trade • Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EEC) No 2913/92 establishing the Community Customs Code	X	X	X		

58

Union law in matters related to customs: • Regulation (EU) 2019/880 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the introduction and the import of cultural goods • Council Directive (EU) 2018/2057 of 20 December 2018 amending Directive 2006/112/EC on the common system of value added tax as regards the temporary application of a generalised reverse charge mechanism in relation to supplies of goods and services above a certain threshold • Regulation (EU) 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on official controls and other official activities performed to ensure the application of food and feed law, rules on animal health and welfare, plant health and plant protection products, amending Regulations (EC) No 999/2001, (EC) No 396/2005, (EC) No 1069/2009, (EC) No 1107/2009, (EU) No 1151/2012, (EU) No 652/2014, (EU) 2016/429 and (EU) 2016/2031 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Regulations (EC) No 1/2005 and (EC) No 1099/2009 and Council Directives 98/58/EC, 1999/74/EC, 2007/43/EC, 2008/119/EC and 2008/120/EC, and repealing Regulations (EC) No 854/2004 and (EC) No 882/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Directives 89/608/EEC, 89/662/EEC, 90/425/EEC, 91/496/EEC, 96/23/EC, 96/93/EC and 97/78/EC and Council Decision 92/438/EEC (Official Controls Regulation) • Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 of the European Parliament of the Council of 26 October 2016 on protective measures against pests of plants, amending Regulations (EU) No 228/2013, (EU) No 652/2014 and (EU) No 1143/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Directives 69/464/EEC, 74/647/EEC, 93/85/EEC, 98/57/EC, 2000/29/EC, 2006/91/EC and 2007/33/EC • Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2016/1842 of 14 October 2016 amending Regulation (EC) No 1235/2008 as regards the electronic certificate of inspection for imported organic products and certain other elements, and Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 as regards the requirements for preserved or processed organic products and the transmission of information • Regulation (EU) 2016/429 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on transmissible animal diseases and amending and repealing certain acts in the area of animal health ('Animal Health Law') • Regulation (EU) No 517/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 on fluorinated greenhouse gases and repealing Regulation (EC) No 842/2006 • Regulation (EU) No 995/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2010 laying down the obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the market • Commission Regulation (EC) No 1235/2008 of 8 December 2008 laying down detailed rules for implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 as regards the arrangements for imports of organic products from third countries • Council Regulation (EC) No 2173/2005 of 20 December 2005 on the establishment of a FLEGT licensing scheme for imports of timber into the European Community • Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 of 22 December 2004 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations and amending Directives 64/432/EEC and 93/119/EC and Regulation (EC) No 1255/97 • Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 January 2002 laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Safety Authority and laying down procedures in matters of food safety • Regulation No 515/97 of 13 March 1997 on mutual assistance between the administrative authorities of the Member States and cooperation between the latter and the			X		X	X

Other legal acts:						
• European Commission, Legal bases and technical adjustments, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/legal-bases-and-technical-adjustments_en						
• Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the EU Anti-Fraud Programme. COM/2018/386 final						
• Regulation (EU) No 250/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 establishing a programme to promote activities in the field of the protection of the financial interests of the European Union (Hercule III programme)						
• Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the programme for single market, competitiveness of enterprises, including small and medium-sized enterprises, and European statistics. COM (2018) 441 final						
• Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Internal Security Fund, COM (2018) 472 final	X			X	X	
• Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Digital Europe programme for the period 2021-2027, COM/2018/434 final						
• European Commission, Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Protection of the European Union's financial interests — Fight against fraud 2014/2015/2016/2017/2018/2019, Annual Reports						
• OLAF, 2019, Fighting fraud: 31st Annual Report on the Protection of the EU's financial interests						
• Commission Staff working Document SWD (2020) 160 final, Statistical evaluation of irregularities reported for 2019: own resources, agriculture, cohesion and fisheries policies, pre-accession and direct expenditure						
• European Parliament, 2019, Protection of EU financial interest on customs and VAT: Cooperation of national tax and customs authorities to prevent fraud						
• European Court of Auditors, 2019, E-commerce still vulnerable to VAT and customs duty evasion, say EU Auditors						
Strategic documents:						
• Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee of 8 February 2001 concerning a strategy for the Customs Union						
• Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee – A simple and paperless environment for Customs and Trade				X	X	
• Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee on the role of customs in the integrated management of external borders						
• Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social						

60

Committee – Strategy for the evolution of the Customs Union • Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee – Taking the Customs Union to the Next Level: A Plan for Action						
Other programming documentation: • Annual work programmes (Annex I to the Commission implementing decision – Budget line 140201: Customs 2020 Work Programme for 2017/2018/2019/ 2020) • Multi-Annual Strategic Plan for Customs (including annexes and different revisions) • Documents detailing internal procedures associated with the Customs 2020 programme, including those shared on PICS	X	X	X	X		
Performance Measurement Framework: • Commission staff working document: Customs 2020 Programme – Progress Report 2014/2015/2016/2017/2018, and Draft Customs 2020 Programme Progress Report 2019 • Raw data collected through the Action Follow-up Forms and the ART • PMF management and design documentation Monitoring of human competency building activities	X	X	X			
Previous programme evaluations: • Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the mid-term evaluation of the Customs 2020 programme, 2019 • Mid-term evaluation of the Customs 2020 programme, final report, 2018 • Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Final evaluation of the Customs 2013 programme, 2015 • Final evaluation of the Customs 2013 programme, Final report, 2014; Customs 2013 Final evaluation results • European Commission, Mid-term evaluation of the Customs 2013 programme, Final report • Commission staff working paper – Impact Assessment Accompanying the document Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an action programme for customs and taxation in the European Union for the period 2014-2020 (FISCUS) and repealing Decisions N°1482/2007/EC and N°624/2007/EC • Commission staff working document – Impact Assessment Accompanying the document Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the 'Customs' programme for cooperation in the field of customs • Study contributing to an Impact Assessment concerning a possible legislative proposal for an EU action programme for Customs for the period post-2020, Final report, 2018 • European Court of Auditor (2018), Special report no 26/2018: A series of delays in Customs IT systems: what	X	X	X	X	X	X

went wrong?

- Study on Performance Measurement Framework (Oct 2020)
- Evaluation of the electronic customs implementation in the EU
- Study on Performance Measurement Framework (Oct 2020)
- Evaluation of the electronic customs implementation in the EU
- European Commission (2015), Evaluation of the electronic customs implementation in the EU, Final report

Other DGs' IT systems

- World Horse Welfare comments to the consultation amending Regulation (EU) No 2019/1715 (2021)
- Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1715 of 30 September 2019 laying down rules for the functioning of the information management system for official controls and its system components (the IMSOC Regulation)
- Directive (EU) 2019/884 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 amending Council Framework Decision 2009/315/JHA, as regards the exchange of information on third-country nationals and as regards the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS), and replacing Council Decision 2009/316/JHA
- Regulation (EU) 2019/816 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 establishing a centralised system for the identification of Member States holding conviction information on third-country nationals and stateless persons (ECRIS-TCN) to supplement the European Criminal Records Information System and amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1726
- Regulation (EU) 2018/1726 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018 on the European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (eu-LISA), and amending Regulation (EC) No 1987/2006 and Council Decision 2007/533/JHA and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1077/2011 **X X**
- Regulation (EU) 2018/1862 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 November 2018 on the establishment, operation and use of the Schengen Information System (SIS) in the field of police cooperation and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, amending and repealing Council Decision 2007/533/JHA, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1986/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Commission Decision 2010/261/EU
- Regulation (EU) 2018/1861 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 November 2018 on the establishment, operation and use of the Schengen Information System (SIS) in the field of border checks, and amending the Convention implementing the Schengen Agreement, and amending and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1987/2006
- Regulation (EU) 2018/1860 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 November 2018 on the use of the Schengen Information System for the return of illegally staying third-country nationals / Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the use of the Schengen Information System for the return of illegally

62

staying third-country nationals), COM/2016/0881 • Report from the European Union and the Council on the state of play of preparations for the full implementation of the new legal bases for the Schengen Information System (SIS) in accordance with Article 66(4) of Regulation (EU) 2018/1861 and Article 79(4) of Regulation (EU) 2018/1862 • Wavestone, Feasibility study and cost assessment of the establishment of a centralised ECRIS TCN solution, June 2017 • Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the use of the Schengen Information System for the return of illegally staying third-country nationals • Report from the European Union and the Council on the evaluation of the second-generation Schengen Information System (SIS II) in accordance with art. 24 (5), 43 (3) and 50 (5) of Regulation (EC) No 1987/2006 and art. 59 (3) and 66 (5) of Decision 2007/533/JHAl • Feasibility study on the inclusion of pseudonymised fingerprints in ECRIS TCN exchanges, June 2016 • Report from the European Union and the Council on the implementation of Council Framework Decision 2009/315/JHA of 26 February 2009 on the organisation and content of the exchange of information extracted from criminal record between Member States • Council Framework Decision 2009/315/JHA of 26 February 2009 on the organisation and content of the exchange of information extracted from the criminal record between Member States • Impact Assessment Accompanying the proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Framework Decision 2009/315/JHA, as regards the exchange of information on third country nationals and as regards the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS) and replacing Council Decision 2009/316/JHA						
Additional Sources • Presentation of the European Commission at the 69th Electronic Customs Coordination Group (ECCG) • World Customs Organisation, Annual reports 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2018-2019 • European Court of Auditors, Special Report No 26 – A series of delays in Customs IT systems: what went wrong? (2018). • European Commission, 96th Customs Code Committee General Customs Legislation section joint with 57th ECCG, 18th CEG-DIH AND TCG – Adopted Meeting minutes (Ares(2020)1469163, 10.3.2020).	X	X	X			

Source: 'Study on the final evaluation of the Customs 2020 programme'

63

Approach and method

The evaluation followed a **two-pronged approach** that allowed to examine the programme from different angles and levels of detail, as well as engaging with different groups of stakeholders. The figure 9 below depicts the methodology used for this evaluation.

Figure 9: Overview of the methodology of the final evaluation of Customs 2020 programme

Tasks	Data collection method	Description
Programme level assessment	1. Desk review	Legal acts Strategic and programming documents Management documentation Performance Measurement Framework (PMF) Previous evaluations, impact assessments and other studies
	2. In-depth interviews (43)	DG TAXUD officials (12) Officials from DG CLIMA, OLAF and DG REFORM (4) National authorities (17) Economic operators (10)
	3. Benchmarking exercise	Desk review In-depth interviews with officials from DG JUST and DG SANTE (3) involved in three selected IT systems (SIS, ECRIS, TRACES)

Contribution analysis	4. Case studies	Desk review
		In-depth interviews with:
		  DG TAXUD (17)
		  National customs officials (47)
		  Economic operators (12)
		  Other DGs (4)
		Costs and benefits survey of national customs authorities (36 responses)

Source: 'Study on the final evaluation of the Customs 2020 programme'

No public consultation was carried out as the programme only targets specific audience within the customs administrations and is only known to these who are expected to use it. The broader public is only very indirectly affected by the programme's results and these will not be directly felt by a non-specialised audience. The previous experience with public consultation at the time of the mid-term evaluation of the programme did not yield much usable information. The public may have an opinion on the broader policies supported by the Customs 2020 programme but collecting these will not contribute to the assessment of the programme's performance.

The **programme assessment** served to collect and analyse data on the Customs 2020 programme as a whole. It focused on what the programme was doing in terms of implementation and performance towards objectives. This assessment was comprised of three main methods as shown:

- **Desk research**: The purpose of the desk research was to collect information on the programme's design, implementation and performance to answer the evaluation questions. The information was collected from multiple sources such as programming documents, the PMF, the ART and previous studies, reports and evaluations.

- **In-depth interviews**: In total 45 in-depth interviews were conducted to collect the views and opinions of stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in the programme. More specifically, interviews were organised with 20 representatives from DG TAXUD and other 6 Directorates General (DGs), customs authorities from 14 EU Member States and 6 candidate and potential candidate countries, and 10 economic operators.

- **Benchmarking exercise**: A benchmarking exercise was conducted with the aim to provide suggestions and guidelines for the management of the EIS for customs. For this exercise, three EU IT systems that are comparable in scale and complexity with those funded under the Customs 2020 programme were selected, namely:
  o the Schengen Information System (SIS) – DG HOME
  o the European Exchange of Criminal Records system (ECRIS) – DG JUST
  o the Trade Control and Expert System (TRACES) – DG SANTE

  The benchmarking exercise included both a desk review and in-depth interviews with IT officials. The objective was to identify the: i) challenges and constraints faced by the initiatives when implementing and operating the systems; ii) the strategies and resources employed; iii) the key outcomes of the IT systems; iv) best practices that could be useful for the EIS for customs.

The **contribution analysis** that complemented the programme-level assessment contained the development of five thematic case studies. The case studies aimed to examine how a set of Customs 2020 activities contributed to progress towards the objectives of the programme. The themes of the case studies were: i) customs risk management; ii) classification of goods; iii) customs decisions through the lens of imports; iv) economic operator management and the EU Customs Trader Portal; v) the EU Single Window environment for customs. These themes were selected based on the IT capacity building activities to allow for insightful analysis of the EIS for customs in the context of the objectives they serve and in conjunction with other Customs 2020 activities. The case studies therefore looked at the Commission's committed budget to select those EIS for customs that were particularly significant in terms of resource allocation.

The methodology used for the cases studies involved the following elements:

- **Sampling of activities and of participating countries:** As a first step, based on the agreed set of case study themes, preparatory work included the selection of relevant joint actions and human competency building activities for each case

study topic. The second step was to sample the participating countries. The elements that were taken into consideration for the sampling of the participating countries included: i) the usage of the EIS for customs and any national specificities: ii) the geographical coverage of all the consultation activities of the study to give the opportunity to all the Member States to contribute to the evaluation.

- **Desk research:** As part of each case study, the available documentation, data on the IT capacity activities, joint actions, and human competency building activities sample was collected.

- **Case study interviews**: In total 74 in-depth interviews with stakeholders were conducted to fill in the data gaps and to complete the evidence base for the different case studies.

- **Online survey on costs and benefits of selected EIS:** Each case study included a cost-benefit assessment of the main EIS for customs. For this, the costs associated to the Customs 2020 programme, as well as costs for national customs authorities and economic operators (to the extent possible) were taken into consideration. As regards the data on the costs associated with the IT capacity building activities linked to EIS for customs and on their benefits, these were collected through a survey targeting national authorities. The survey allowed to collect information on the costs of implementing the EIS for customs at national level, namely those that the Customs 2020 programme did not cover, and the benefits associated with both Union and national components of the EIS for customs. The survey was open on ALCHEMER® from 10 to 31 May 2021. In total 36 responses were received from 18 Member States, out of which 31 responses were received through the online tool and 5 responses were sent in writing via email.

For each of the EIS covered in the case studies, the following cost categories were examined:
   - **Infrastructure costs**: required to develop, support, operate and maintain the system:
     - **hardware costs**: total (anticipated) costs of the hardware (network, server, storage) for running the systems.
     - **software costs**: total (anticipated) costs of applications, licenses, libraries required to operate the systems.
   - **Development costs**: analysis and process re-engineering, coding, project management, test, configuration and change management, deployment.
   - **Maintenance costs**: including additional activities related to both corrective and evolving maintenance (in person days per year to maintain the system).
   - **Support costs**: helpdesk, operations to support the system, its users, and end-users.
   - **Training costs**: to train the systems' users.

This annex presents the evaluation questions matrix used for the study on the final evaluation of the Customs 2020 programme.

Effectiveness

Sub-question	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Information source and tools
EQ1: To what extent has the Customs 2020 programme contributed to facilitating and enhancing cooperation and exchange of information between customs authorities and their officials within the European Union?			
1.1. To what extent has the programme contributed to facilitating and enhancing the exchange of information between customs authorities and their officials?	The programme played a role in bringing about the improvements in capacity that enabled greater electronic information sharing between customs authorities.	(Change in) number of programme-funded IT systems allowing automatic information sharing Reliability of the common infrastructure (CCN/CCN2) Use of key systems aimed at increasing interconnectivity and exchanging information	Desk review of the MASP-C and its annex (IT project fiches) Case study interviews with national customs officials
1.2. To what extent has the programme contributed to facilitating and enhancing cooperation between customs authorities and their officials within the EU?	Customs authorities' participation rate in programme activities increased	(Change in) number of participants and countries represented in programme-funded activities	Desk review of ART data and Annual progress reports
	There was an observable increase in instances of customs authorities working together to tackle common challenges.	Evidence of customs authorities collaborating to tackle common challenges through formal means, such as joint actions Views of customs authorities regarding the programme's contribution to increasing their capacity to collaborate in tackling common challenges	Joint actions analysed for the thematic case studies based on PICS groups, feedback gathered through the EEF and AAF and interviews (regarding specific instances of programme support leading to increased capacity) – contribution analysis Programme assessment interviews (regarding the extent to which customs authorities consider the programme more widely has increased their capacity to collaborate in tackling common challenges) Programme assessment interviews with national customs officials Case study interviews with national customs officials
	The programme played a role in bringing about the increase in instances of	Documentary evidence of customs authorities formally working together, through formally established joint actions or other official channels, such as PICS	Desk review of PMF raw data and Annual progress reports, of documents linked to the joint actions analysed as part of the thematic case studies and of those shared on PICS Programme assessment interviews

	customs authorities working together	Degree of networking generated through the programme Anecdotal evidence of cooperation and information sharing through personal links between customs officials Anecdotal evidence from customs officials regarding informal collaboration (for example picking up the phone to speak to a contact in another Member State as a connection made through a programme-funded activity) Anecdotal evidence from customs officials regarding informal cooperation in 'real world' situations (namely outside of programme actions)	with national customs officials Case study interviews with national customs officials
EQ2: To what extent has the Customs 2020 programme supported the preparation, coherent application, and effective implementation of Union law in the field of customs and related matters?			
2.1. To what extent did the programme support the preparation of Union law in the field of customs and related matters?[108]	The programme supported the preparation of Union law in the field of customs and related matters	Number of programme outputs contributing to the legislative process Extent and quality of contribution Coherence between new law and existing rules Anecdotal evidence of instances in which the programme can reasonably be said to have improved the (identified aspects of the) legislative process	Desk review of programme outputs linked to the preparation of EU law Programme assessment interviews with national customs officials Thematic case studies, for example the one on the Single Window, which can show the contribution of the Customs 2020 programme's contribution to the legislative process on the matter
2.2. To what extent did the Customs 2020 programme support the effective implementation of Union law in the field of customs and related matters?	The programme supported the effective implementation of Union law in the field of customs and related matters	Evidence of effective implementation of Union law in the field of customs	Desk review of Union law in the field of customs and related matters, and documents related to the EIS
2.2. From the perspective of customs authorities, economic	There were objective improvements in the coherence of	Evidence of improvements in application of Union law and policy in the field of customs: - consistency of interpretation	Desk review of databases-related documents Thematic case studies, such as the one on classification of goods Programme assessment interviews

---

[108] Original question was: From the consultation process through to the passage of legislation, to what extent did the programme contribute to supporting the preparation of Union law in the field of customs and related matters, therefore improving the legislative process?

operators, and other users of customs processes and procedures, to what extent did the programme support the coherent application of Union law and policy in the field of customs and related matters?[109]

Improved coherence of the application of Union law and policy in the field of customs across EU Member States | application and in the enforcement of EU law during the programming period and across the Member States. | - clarity among customs authorities applying the law and economic operators operating under the law
Evidence of improvements in application of Union law and policy in the field of customs, for example through a common approach to sanctions for those in breach of the law
Evidence of acceptance of Union law across a varied group of stakeholders, and of programme-funded databases as references
Anecdotal evidence of tangible improvements in the application of EU law | with national customs officials and economic operators |
| | The programme played a role in bringing about the improvements identified | Anecdotal evidence of instances in which the programme can reasonably be said to have improved to specific instances of improvements in the application and enforcement of EU law
Anecdotal evidence from customs authorities regarding the programme's contribution to improving the application and implementation of Union law and policy in the field of customs | Thematic case studies
Programme assessment interviews with national customs officials and economic operators |

EQ3: To what extent has the Customs 2020 programme supported legitimate economic activities and prevented illegal ones?

3.1. To what extent did the programme contribute to facilitating legitimate trade, including through enabling legal certainty, the simplification and	Customs processes within the scope of the programme were simplified and took less time to complete.	There is evidence of simplified e-procedures for economic operators (number of steps, digitalisation and automatic electronic exchange of the documents required, etc.), a reduction in length of time taken to complete customs processes.	Desk review
Programme level interviews (national customs administrations and economic operators)
Thematic case studies (analysis of benefits to economic operators including as part of the trader portal, Single Window environment for customs, and classification of goods case studies and associated joint actions supported)
effectiveness of customs processes and procedures, the availability and access to	The programme played a role in bringing about the improvements	Documentary evidence of programme support for trade facilitation
Anecdotal evidence of the programme's contribution to improving the application and	Desk review
Programme assessment interviews with national customs officials and economic operators
Thematic case studies, such as the one on good classification, trader

---

[109] Original question read: From the perspective of customs authorities, economic operators, and other users of customs processes and procedures, to what extent did the programme contribute to…?

information?	identified.	implementation of Union law in the field of customs	portal, Single Window environment for customs (analysis of contribution of programme to benefits realised)
3.2. To what extent can the Customs 2020 programme be considered to have helped customs and other authorities involved in the detection and prevention of illegal cross-border activity, in relation to…?	There was an increase in the prevention and/or detection of fraudulent movements and infringements of Union law in the field of customs.	Incidence of fraud cases and of wildlife crime, traffic of harmful and waste products poisoning the Earth, etc. Documentary evidence in relation to risk management, such as the UCC report	Desk review of risk management related documents, UCC reports, reports on the Protection of the European Union's financial interests – Fight against Fraud, documents related to the Hercule III programme Thematic case studies, especially the one on risk management, but also the one on the Single Window environment for customs
• the fight against fraud in the EU • the protection of the security and safety of EU citizens • the protection of the environment	The programme played a role in bringing about the improved prevention and/or detection of fraudulent movements and infringements of Union law in the field of customs.	Role of relevant EIS in the fight against fraud Anecdotal evidence regarding the programme's contribution to improving the prevention and/or detection of fraudulent movements and infringements of customs law	Desk review of risk management related documents, UCC reports, reports on the Protection of the European Union's financial interests – Fight against Fraud, documents related to the Hercule III programme Programme assessment interviews with national customs officials, EC officials from other DGs (SANTE, ENV) and economic operators Thematic case studies, especially the one on risk management, but also the one on the Single Window environment for customs

Efficiency

Sub-question	Judgement Criteria	Indicators	Information Source
EQ4: To what extent have the Customs 2020 programme's resources produced best possible results at the lowest possible cost?			
4.1. To what extent have the **Joint activities** produced the best possible results at the lowest possible cost?	The cost of the joint actions is justified, given the changes/effects they have achieved	Budget allocated/spent for joint actions funded for the period 2014-2020 Number and type of joint actions funded 2014-2020 *See indicators on effects of joint actions under Evaluation Questions related to the Effectiveness criteria.*	Desk research (Budgetary data from DG TAXUD) *Answers to the Evaluation Questions for Effectiveness related to joint actions.*

70

Sub-question	Judgement Criteria	Indicators	Information Source
4.2 To what extent have the funded **human capacity building** activities produced the best possible results at the lowest possible cost?	The cost of the human capacity building is justified, given the changes/effects they have achieved	Budget allocated/spent for human competency building funded for the period 2014-2020 Number and type of human capacity building actions funded 2014-2020 *See indicators on effects of human capacity building under Evaluation Questions related to the Effectiveness criteria.*	Desk research (Budgetary data from DG TAXUD) *Answers to the Evaluation Questions for Effectiveness related to human competency building.*
4.3. To what extent have the funded **IT systems** produced the best possible results at the lowest possible cost?	The cost of the EIS is justified, given the changes/effects they have achieved The programme's budget spent on IT capacity building is in line with the planned expenditures at EU level.	Budget allocated/spent EIS funded for the period 2014-2020 *See indicators on effects of EIS under Evaluation Questions related to the Effectiveness criteria.*	Desk research (Budgetary data from DG TAXUD) Case studies (survey and cost assessment) *Answers to the Evaluation Questions for Effectiveness related to the funded EIS.*

Sub-question	Judgement Criteria	Indicators	Information Source
	The costs associated to the Customs EIS (infrastructure, development, maintenance, support, and training) are in line with the planned expenditures at national level and considered as proportionate by national authorities and economic operators	Documentary and anecdotal evidence of costs (not monetised) associated to the Customs EIS (infrastructure, development, maintenance, support, and training) at national level Stakeholder perception of benefits (including reduced administrative burdens and cost savings) associated to the Customs EIS, including those generated by shared developments model and IT architecture	Case studies: - Cost-assessment: Desk research on secondary sources to build upon cost data of Customs EIS already collected and analysed in previous or ongoing relevant studies - Previous evaluations, impact assessments and other studies (assess the evolution since the ECA's report on the delays in Customs IT systems) - Previous evaluations and impact assessments of similar systems - Union Customs Code upcoming evaluation - Performance Measurement Framework related documentation (State of play) - Legal acts (Recall the objectives of the Customs 2020 programme) - e-Customs related documentation (Assess rationale behind Customs 2020-funded IT systems) - Online survey on costs and benefits for the selection of EIS - Case study interviews with national custom authorities and economic operators
4.4 To what extent has the programme provided for a certain degree of budgetary flexibility to respond to changes in policy priorities?	The programme allowed budgetary flexibility when prioritisation was needed	Confirmation by EU officials that plans could be changed when needed, and concrete examples of cases in which this was possible Number of activities funded where the budget initially allocated was reallocated to other programme activities / policy priorities	Programme level interviews (TAXUD officials) Budgetary and accountancy data from DG TAXUD.

Sub-question	Judgement Criteria	Indicators	Information Source
4.6 To what extent can the design, development, governance, and implementation of the Customs EIS be improved in the context of the programme, learning from best practices across other trans-European IT systems?	There is scope to improve the design, development, governance, and implementation of the Customs EIS in the context of the programme, learning from best practices across other trans-European IT systems.	Comparison of relative costs associated to the Customs EIS compared to other European IT systems.	Budgetary and accountancy data from DG TAXUD. Findings on the cost of Customs EIS from the case study cost assessment Programme level interviews (TAXUD and other EC DGs officials) Benchmarking exercise: Desk research on the cost of the selected trans-European IT systems.
		Comparison of relative benefits associated to the Customs EIS against other European IT systems.	Answers to the Evaluation Questions related to the Effectiveness criterion (for example 1.1 and 1.2) Benchmarking exercise: Desk research on secondary sources to collect data on lessons learnt and best practices across other trans-European IT systems
		Confirmation by stakeholders that they are satisfied with the management of the Customs EIS and/or suggestions from stakeholders on how to improve the design, development, governance, and implementation of the Customs EIS.	Programme level interviews (TAXUD officials) Case study interviews
		Confirmation by stakeholders that the recommendations from the mid-term evaluation of the Customs 2020 programme related to the customs EIS have been addressed	Programme level interviews (TAXUD officials) Case study interviews

Relevance

Sub-question	Judgement Criteria	Indicators	Information Source
EQ5: To what extent does the Customs 2020 programme continue to respond to the needs of the customs administrations, businesses and, ultimately, the EU Customs Union?			
Q.5.1 In what ways do the Customs 2020 programme's **specific objectives** continue to respond to the	The programme's specific objectives correspond to the **needs of the customs administrations**	Customs' administrations confirm that the programme continues to support them in: the fight against fraud the protection of intellectual property rights increasing safety and security the protection of citizens and	Desk review Scoping interviews (EU officials) Programme level interviews (national customs administrations) Case study interviews (national customs

73

Sub-question	Judgement Criteria	Indicators	Information Source
needs of the customs administrations and businesses?		the environment improvement of the administrative capacity of the customs authorities strengthening of the competitiveness of European businesses	administrations)
		Existence of needs of national customs administrations that are not sufficiently addressed in the programme specific objectives	Programme level interviews (national customs administrations) Case study interviews (national customs administrations)
	The programme's specific objectives correspond to the needs of the **businesses ('economic operators')**	Economic operators confirm that the programme continues to support them in: the fight against fraud, the protection of intellectual property rights increasing safety and security improvement of the administrative capacity of the customs authorities strengthening of the competitiveness of European businesses	Desk review Scoping interviews (EU officials) Programme level interviews (economic operators) Case study interviews (economic operators)
		Existence of perceived needs of economic operators that are not well addressed in the programme specific objectives	Scoping interviews (EU officials) Programme level interviews (economic operators) Case study interviews (economic operators)
	The programmes' specific objectives are sufficiently flexible to allow the programme to respond to the new/evolving needs of custom authorities and businesses	EU officials, custom authorities and economic operators confirm that the programmes' specific objectives are sufficiently flexible to allow the programme to respond to new/evolving needs stemming from unexpected events such as COVID-19 outbreak, Brexit, and/or new policy initiatives such as the Customs Action Plan	Scoping interviews (EU officials) Programme level interviews (national customs administrations and economic operators) Case study interviews (national customs administrations and economic operators)
		Existence of actions supported by the programme that could be adapted to face the challenges/needs brought by unexpected events such as the COVID-19 outbreak, Brexit, and/or new policy initiatives such as the Customs Action Plan	Desk review Scoping interviews (EU officials) Programme level interviews (national customs administrations and economic operators) Case study interviews (national customs administrations and economic operators)
Q5.2 In what ways does the Customs 2020 programme **operational objectives**	The programme's operational objectives correspond to the needs of the **customs**	Customs' administrations confirm that the programme continues to support them in: the preparation, coherent application and effective **implementation of Union law and policy in the**	Desk review Scoping interviews (EU officials) Programme level interviews (national customs administrations)

74

Sub-question	Judgement Criteria	Indicators	Information Source
continue to correspond to the needs of the customs administrations and businesses?	**administrations**	**field of customs** the development, improvement, and operation of the **European Information Systems for customs** the development and sharing and application of **best working practices and administrative procedures,** especially further to benchmarking activities reinforcement of the **skills and competences of customs officials** **improving cooperation** between customs authorities and international organisations, third countries, other governmental authorities, including Union and national market surveillance authorities, as well as economic operators and organisations representing economic operators	Case study interviews (national customs administrations)
		Existence of needs of national customs administrations that are not sufficiently addressed in the programme operational objectives	Programme level interviews (national customs administrations) Case study interviews (national customs administrations)
	The programme's operational objectives correspond to the needs of the **businesses ('economic operators')**	Economic operators confirm that the programme continues to support them in: the preparation, coherent application and effective **implementation of Union law and policy in the field of customs** the development, improvement, and operation of the **European Information Systems for customs** the development and sharing and application of **best working practices and administrative procedures,** especially further to benchmarking activities reinforcement of the **skills and competences of customs officials** **improving cooperation** between customs authorities and international organisations, third countries, other governmental authorities, including Union and national market surveillance authorities, as well as economic operators and organisations representing economic operators	Desk review Scoping interviews (EU officials) Programme level interviews (economic operators) Case study interviews (economic operators)
		Existence of needs of economic	Programme level interviews

Sub-question	Judgement Criteria	Indicators	Information Source
		operators that are not sufficiently addressed in the programme operational objectives	(economic operators) Case study interviews (economic operators)
	The programmes' operational objectives are sufficiently flexible to allow the Programme to respond to the new/evolving needs of custom authorities and businesses	EU officials, custom authorities and economic operators confirm that the programmes' operational objectives are sufficiently flexible to allow the Programme to respond to new/evolving needs stemming from unexpected events such as COVID-19 outbreak, Brexit, and/or new policy initiatives such as the Customs Action Plan	Scoping interviews (EU officials) Programme level interviews (national customs administrations and economic operators) Case study interviews (national customs administrations and economic operators)
		Priorities for programme funding set under the Annual Work Programmes responded to new/evolving needs (addressing Brexit-related issues in the AWP for 2017 and onwards and mentioning COVID-19 outbreak in AWP 2020)	Desk review Scoping interviews (EU officials)
		Existence of actions supported by the programme that could be adapted to face the challenges/needs brought by unexpected events such as the COVID-19 outbreak, Brexit, and/or new policy initiatives such as the Customs Action Plan	Desk review Scoping interviews (EU officials) Programme level interviews (national customs administrations and economic operators) Case study interviews (national customs administrations and economic operators)

Coherence

Sub-question	Judgement Criteria	Indicators	Information Source
EQ6: To what extent is the Customs 2020 programme coherent with broader EU policies?			
6.1 To what extent and by which mechanisms the programme remains coherent to broader EU policies?	The programme has concretely supported specific EU initiatives outside of the direct sphere of 'customs'	Practical examples of how the programme supported other EU initiatives beyond the direct purview of customs policy (e.g., the European Green Deal and its Investment Plan; the Agenda to shape Europe's digital future) Explanations and evidence of the mechanisms in place to ensure coherence with such EU initiatives Gaps identified in terms of coherence with relevant specific EU initiatives (e.g.,	-Desk review -Benchmarking exercise -Programme level interviews (EC officials) -Case study interviews (TAXUD officials)

		inconsistencies, duplications and/or overlaps found)	
	The programme has supported the work of other Commission services more broadly (i.e., relevant programmes managed by other DGs and agencies (OLAF))	Practical examples of the programme's contribution to / synergies with Commission services (e.g., the Health Programme, the Reform Support Programmes, Horizon2020, Single Market Programme)	-Desk review -Benchmarking exercise -Programme level interviews (EC officials) -Case study interviews (TAXUD officials)
		Explanations and evidence of the mechanisms in place to ensure coherence with such programmes (e.g., the results of the action plan from the mid-term recommendations)	
		Gaps identified in terms of coherence with other EU programmes (e.g., inconsistencies, duplications and/or overlaps found)	

EU added value

Sub-question	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Information Source
EQ7: To what extent is the Customs 2020 programme a vehicle to achieve more than the Member States would do alone?			
7.1 To what extent and in what ways does the Customs 2020 programme deliver EU added value in the customs field?	The programme allows national customs authorities to work more efficiently 'as one' than individually	Examples of reduced administrative burden and costs for national customs administrations due to interventions supported by the programme (e.g., economies of scale of EU wide infrastructure for communication and exchange of data – or 'common components' of IT systems; provision of databases /reference material for the correct application of EU customs law, etc.)	Summary of findings from efficiency, from: • Case study reports • Programme level interviews (Customs officials) • Desk review
		Examples of limits to efficiency savings (e.g., reticence of larger Member States to join EU-wide solutions to common problems and therefore develop / invest in national systems) and areas where national systems or solutions are preferred by certain/all Member States over EU systems/solutions	
	The programme allows national	Examples of how the programme enabled national	Summary of findings from effectiveness, from:

	customs authorities to work more effectively 'as one' than individually	administrations to achieve better and quicker results than would have been possible without Customs 2020 (e.g., quick sharing of data / knowledge to inform more effective decision-making, development of systems that require common usage to be effective)	• Case study reports • Programme level interviews (Customs officials) • Desk review
		Examples of limits to the results achieved by the Customs programme (e.g., areas where collaboration or uptake is low or stagnates) and why (e.g., sensitivities of data, legacy systems, etc.)	
7.2 What would be the most likely consequences of discontinuing the programme's support today?	The programme is unique in its capacity/ function to support collaboration between EU customs authorities	Key informants agree that the discontinuation of the programme would leave customs authorities without an equivalent structure or means to collaborate in an area of exclusive EU competence	Summary of findings from 7.1 and relevance (5)
		Areas where collaboration could continue irrespective of programme support (if any)	

78

79

Table 1. Overview of costs and benefits identified in the evaluation[110]							
	Citizens/Consumers		Businesses		Administrations		[Other …] _ specify
	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment	
[Cost or Benefit description]:							
Mark the type of cost/benefit, each on a separate line: **Costs:** **IT capacity building** **(EIS for customs)**	NA		NA		464.5 million (Programme budget) 861 million (Member States investments) 56.8 million		
Joint Actions **Human competency building**	NA NA		NA NA		10.4 million		
Benefits: **IT capacity building (EIS for**			Time savings in customs clearance	Automated processes contributing to more efficient,		Automated processes contributing to more efficient,	

---

customs) **Direct Benefits**			*from the EU CSW-CERTEX (annual estimates provided in the impact assessment of the EU SWE-C[111] initiative for four of the participating countries amounted around EUR 44.000)*	simplified and standardised custom procedures *(4.5 average, scale 1-5)* More effective implementation and coherent application of Union law in the field of customs *(4.8 average score scale 1-5)*		simplified and standardised custom procedures *(4.5 average, scale 1-5)* More effective implementation and coherent application of Union law in the field of customs *(4.8 average score scale 1-5)* Increased interoperability and information sharing between customs authorities *(4.4 average, scale 1-5)*	
Indirect Benefits		Increased safety and security thanks to the better implementation of non-customs regulatory formalities (EU SWE-C)					

---

[111] Commission Staff Working Document Impact AssessmentEU Single Window Environment for Customs (europa.eu)

Joint Actions **Human competency building**				82				

Outline of the consultation strategy

Consultation objectives

A stakeholder consultation was necessary to:

- Capture stakeholders' needs and experiences, and their evolution since the last consultation conducted in the framework of the midterm evaluation of the Customs 2020 programme.

- Ensure the pertinence of the findings of the final evaluation of the Customs 2020 programme in relation to developments not captured in the documentation, or which require interpretation.

Identified stakeholders

In line with the Better regulation guidelines[112], the following stakeholder groups were identified as relevant to the Customs 2020 programme:

- **European Commission officials**

    o Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union (DG TAXUD), as decision-makers, managers, and users of the programme

    o Other Directorate-Generals (DGs), as other EU authorities that engaged with the Customs 2020 programme, such as DG for climate action (CLIMA), DG for health and food safety (SANTE), and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)

- **Customs authorities from participating countries, as beneficiaries of the programme**

    o EU Member States

    o Candidate and potential candidate countries

- **Economic operators**

    o Organisation representing economic operators, namely Trade Contact Group (TCG) members, as external experts participating in certain activities

    o Individual economic operators, as users of certain outputs of the programme

- **Customs officials from third countries and international organisations**

---

[112] European Commission, Better regulation guidelines: Chapter II – Stakeholder Consultation.

Consultation methods and tools

The consultation was designed to be of minimal burden to stakeholders and therefore focused on those who were directly involved in the programme[113].

The study followed a two-pronged approach with an overall programme assessment and a contribution analysis through thematic case studies. The study team in charge of the external study conducted in-depth interviews for both elements of the approach, which allowed them to interpret and qualify data gathered through the desk research.

In total, the study team consulted 123 stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in the programme (43 for the programme assessment and 80 as part of the case studies):

- **37 European Commission officials**: 16 officials were interviewed for the programme assessment, including two from DG CLIMA, one from OLAF, and one from DG REFORM, and 21 as part of the case studies, including two from DG CLIMA and two from DG SANTE

- **64 national customs officials**: 17 national customs officials were interviewed for the programme assessment (from 14 Member States[114] and three candidate and potential candidate countries[115]), and 47 for the case studies (from 21 Member States[116] and two (potential) candidate countries[117]). Overall, all participating countries had the opportunity to contribute to the study, through the programme assessment and/or the case studies.

  In addition, a survey targeting national authorities allowed to collect data on the costs associated with the IT capacity building activities linked to the sampled EIS for customs and on their benefits. The survey was open on ALCHEMER® from 10 to 31 May 2021 and received a total of **36 responses from 18 Member States**.

- **10 representatives of organisations representing economic operators at EU level** as part of the programme assessment, **and 12 individual economic operators** from eight Member States[118] as part of the case studies.

---

[113] In addition to individual economic operators that although did not directly engage with the programme, were consulted as part of the case studies.

[114] Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Slovakia

[115] Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey

[116] Austria, Cyprus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Romania.

[117] Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of North Macedonia

[118] France, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the UK.

No officials from third countries, apart from the two (potential) candidate countries, or representatives of international organisations were consulted. No public consultation was conducted.

Results of consultation activities

This section presents the results of the consultations by stakeholder category.

European Commission officials

- **Contributions from the in-depth interviews with DG TAXUD officials**
  - Effectiveness

Most DG TAXUD officials interviewed were highly positive about the Customs 2020 programme's contribution to facilitating and enhancing cooperation and exchange of information between customs authorities and their officials within the EU. They provided examples of programme activities in their area that facilitated and enhanced cooperation and/or exchange of information between participating customs authorities. DG TAXUD officials qualified cooperation on the development of the EIS common components as part of IT capacity building activities as "very good". Several cited ICS2 as an example of "exceptional cooperation" between Member States. The Customs 2020 programme also facilitated and enhanced cooperation on a national component[119] through the Expert team on new approaches to develop and operate Customs IT systems (ETCIT). DG TAXUD officials also highlighted the importance of the networking opportunities taking place before and after the meetings (before COVID-19).

According to DG TAXUD officials consulted, all the Customs 2020 activities aimed to support the preparation, implementation, or coherent application of Union law whether directly or indirectly. Customs law and policy units (from Directorate A) specifically used the outputs of the joint actions to support their work, which eventually fed into the preparation of Union law. For example, one interviewee considered the work of the Financial risk management project group (CPG/076) as "invaluable" to ensure the appropriate drafting of the Financial Risk Criteria Implementing Decision[120]. Some joint actions' outputs also reportedly eased the work of the Customs Code Committee.

Officials from Directorate B (Digital delivery of customs and taxation policies) were vocal about the EIS for customs effectively allowing to implement Union law. For them, the delivery of the policy objectives happens through the EIS for customs and implicitly requires the existence of the Customs programme, as there are no other means to develop the systems that implement Union law. While alignment with Union law is fully part of

---

[119] For UCC Notification of Arrival, Presentation Notification and Temporary Storage.

[120] Commission implementing decision laying down measures for the uniform application of customs controls by establishing common financial risk criteria and standards, available only on a need-to-know basis to the persons duly authorised (not published).

the IT capacity building activity, associated joint actions also contributed to ensuring the effective implementation, by improving user-friendliness and supporting the revision of some functionalities. For example, the project group on the Customs Decision System (CDS) helped Directorate B to solve the issues of alignment with Union law when deployed in 2017, by regularly inviting participating countries to discuss the issues they encountered. In addition, the EU Customs Single Window Certificates Exchange (EU CSW-CERTEX) system supported both the effective implementation and the preparation of Union law. The Customs 2020 programme served to set up the pilot, building the concept of single window presented in the e-customs decision[121]. DG TAXUD officials indicated that the Proposal for a Regulation establishing the EU Single Window Environment for Customs[122] was based on this experience, in addition to discussions with Member States through joint actions. Moreover, the databases maintained and operated through the Customs programme also supported the coherent application of Union law. For example, TARIC includes all legislation related to the import activities, namely everything an importer needs to know regarding Union law in customs and related matters, like prohibition and restrictions for instance. Most importantly for law and policy units, joint actions supported the production of guidance documents, which were useful tools for participating countries to apply Union law more coherently. For them, all the joint actions and human competency building activities increased participants' knowledge and understanding to apply Union law more consistently.

DG TAXUD officials consulted agreed that the Customs 2020 programme largely supported legitimate economic activities through the EIS for customs, which reduced compliance burden and ensured economic operators are treated in the same way across the EU.

According to DG TAXUD officials, the Customs 2020 programme prevented illegal activities by supporting risk analysis and contributing to the fight against fraud. Specific EIS allow automation in performing checks, which help to identify inconsistencies and discrepancies, reducing the scope of the fraud and supporting the risk analysis. More generally, for DG TAXUD officials, digitalisation, and the real time exchange of information between Member States help avoid fraud linked to the use of paper documents. One recalled that the first EIS for customs[123] was set up specifically to fight fraud. By financing the operation and maintenance of such systems, which is a big part of the Customs programme, it contributes to preventing illegal activities.

   o Efficiency

---

[121] Decision No 70/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 January 2008 on a paperless environment for customs and trade (OJ L 23, 26.1.2008).

[122] Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Union Single Window Environment for Customs and amending Regulation (EU) No 952/2013 (COM (2020) 673 final 2020/0306 (COD, 28.10.2020).

[123] Now the new computerised transit system (NCTS).

It was difficult for DG TAXUD officials to indicate whether the Customs 2020 programme's resources produced the best possible results at the lowest possible cost as they indicated not having sufficient analytical data that would allow them to assess this, especially in relation to the IT capacity building activities. For example, while their financial tools allow to control the overall expenditure per contract or unit, they do not have the accounting to analyse each system as the data are available per EIS only for the development costs. In addition, officials from Directorate B (Digital delivery of customs and taxation policies) highlighted that as the datacentres support the EIS for customs and taxation, it is difficult to assign the amount of budget from the Customs programme specifically[124]. Even so, they indicated that the processes in place for the development of the customs EIS ensures that the programme funding is well spent, since each IT project starts with a business case providing analysis of the costs and benefits of the proposed customs EIS, which is reviewed and approved at different levels.[125]. They also mentioned that the Customs 2020 programme has allowed to operate and maintain more systems. Directorate B highlighted their ability to work on more systems in parallel than ten years ago, thanks to the methodology they optimised over the years. Yet, since they also depend on Member States' own IT development, setting and meeting deadlines for the launch of the EIS for custom can remain challenging.

While DG TAXUD officials saw the potential for further efficiency gains for some centralised EIS for customs, in cases where Member States still chose their national components, this would only be possible if they gave them up. As such, DG TAXUD officials believed the Customs 2020 programme's resources produced the best possible results under the constraints linked to accommodating Member States' choices.

DG TAXUD officials who managed joint actions thought these provided a good return on investment, as they led to better approaches and solutions. Some noted however that face-to-face meetings could be organised in a timelier manner, to ensure the lowest possible cost (especially in Brussels, where dates are important in terms of prices and facilities).

     o   Relevance

For DG TAXUD officials consulted, the Customs 2020 programme continues to respond to customs administrations' needs through the joint actions. Indeed, they allow them to

---

[124] The Fiscalis programme (for taxation) also funds the datacentres.

[125] First the business case is reviewed by the Electronic Customs Coordination Group (ECCG), which is made up of national customs authorities and organisations representing economic operators at EU level. On this basis a preferred implementation option is chosen, which is reviewed and approved by the DG TAXUD IT Steering Committee and the ITC Board. The project methodology for UCC electronic systems then includes several other steps, including the development of a vision document, business process modelling, the development of the technical specifications to the project rollout (from preparation and development to construction, conformance testing, migration, and operations).

get information on customs administrations' needs specifically. Many were also set up to address specific needs.

- o Coherence

DG TAXUD officials consulted thought the Customs 2020 programme was generally coherent with broader EU policies. They indicated that they have strong cooperation with and directly contribute to several policy areas. For example, EU CSW-CERTEX has linkages with phytosanitary, climate, environmental, product safety, and maritime policy. DG TAXUD also cooperates with DG BUDG on guarantees.

- o EU added value

DG TAXUD officials considered the Customs 2020 programme as a vehicle to achieve more than the Member States would do alone, noting that without it there would be 27 customs authorities and no Customs Union. Some even went as far as saying without the programme there would be no international trade, as it relies on the EIS for customs operated and maintained through the programme.

DG TAXUD officials further highlighted that the programme allows for informal contact and therefore open discussion about problems participating countries are facing unlike in other fora. Consequently, discontinuing the programme would, according to DG TAXUD, create "insurmountable" barriers on accomplishing their mission.

- • **Contributions from the in-depth interviews with officials from other DGs**
  - o Effectiveness

Consultations with other DGs confirmed that the Customs 2020 programme has indirectly supported the prevention of illegal economic activities in their policy areas. For example, DG CLIMA noted the positive contribution the programme has had in terms of the prevention of illegal trade in Fluorinated gases ('F-gases').

- o Efficiency

Consultations with other DGs also confirmed that the Customs 2020 programme's resources produced the best possible results at the lowest possible costs in relation to the activities they participated in. DG CLIMA highlighted that they achieved a lot in only three meetings.

- o Coherence

Officials from other DGs consulted thought the Customs 2020 programme was **coherent with their policies**. DG CLIMA's F-gas Regulation[126] and quota system require import controls. So, they have been working in close contact with DG TAXUD, including through a Customs 2020 project group, in which OLAF also participated. This created a positive avalanche of cooperation outside the framework of the Customs 2020 programme, including common customs surveillance exercises for instance. DG

---

[126] Regulation (EU) No 517/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 on fluorinated greenhouse gases and repealing Regulation (EC) No 842/2006 (OJ L 150, 20.5.2014).

REFORM also indicated that there are complementarities between the Customs programme and the Technical Support Instrument. They can, for example, provide feasibility studies to develop specific aspects of the EIS for customs. Yet, according to the DG REFORM official consulted, there is potential for improvement regarding synergies.

○ EU added value

Finally, consultations with other DGs confirmed that the Customs 2020 programme is a vehicle to achieve more than the Member States would do alone regarding their policy. The exchange of best practices and the discussions regarding what customs authorities needed to perform their responsibilities in their respective policy areas would not have happened otherwise.

- **Consideration for the evaluation**

The information gathered and feedback received through consultation of Commission officials helped to better understand the programme and its functioning. That fed into the answer to all the evaluation questions. Nevertheless, their views on the success of the programme needed confirmation from the other stakeholder groups. Two DG TAXUD officials specifically indicated that they could not comment on whether participating countries eventually apply Union law more coherently, noting that they could not know what happened on the ground. For example, they noted that although they are aware of the exchange of information, they have less visibility on customs authorities' use of such information. More generally, two other DG TAXUD officials also indicated that they could not answer questions related to impacts of the programme (EQ3) simply because they are not the right stakeholders to ask about these. In addition, programme activities are still ongoing, and it was too early for them to identify and assess long term impacts. For broader EU policies, not linked either to customs or taxation, it was difficult for most DG TAXUD officials to further comment. They mainly mentioned cooperation on customs or taxation-related policies, such as the e-commerce initiative.

When consulted for the case studies, DG TAXUD officials generally provided information and feedback on the activities within the scope of the case studies specifically. Where relevant, this fed into the general assessment of the programme as well.

National Customs Officials

- **Contributions from the in-depth interviews with national customs officials from EU member states**
  ○ Effectiveness

Officials from national customs authorities considered that the programme played a significant role in building IT capacity that enabled greater electronic exchange of information between customs authorities as well as with other governmental authorities and economic operators. For them, this increase in real-time exchange of information resulted in greater cooperation and coordination between customs officials, and with the

89

Commission. It also supported legitimate economic activities and helped prevent illegal ones.

Customs officials also considered that the EIS for customs played an important role in supporting Member States' coherent application of Union law. For instance, national customs officials interviewed as part of the risk management case study cited the design of the CRMS as important for ensuring consistency in its usage and thus a more coherent application of relevant law.

Moreover, customs officials agreed that the IT capacity building activities supported the simplification, modernisation and harmonisation of the import and export processes. For instance, they considered the changes in the management of applications and authorisations in the AEO system as particularly positive in that regard.

Customs officials highlighted that the joint actions were particularly useful for the exchange of information and expertise and an important platform for communication between the Commission, EU national customs officials, and authorities from third countries. This resulted in enhanced cooperation between these stakeholders. Customs officials also highlighted that joint actions were a good opportunity to expand their network and contacts. They noted that they liaise regularly with the contacts they developed through the joint actions and that the exchange of information has happened not only during and within the joint actions, but also beyond them.

Customs officials also mentioned that the joint actions were a means to examine issues in the legislation and identify adaptations needed. Customs officials indicated that project groups were particularly useful during the last five years of the programme, as they served to discuss the technical aspects of the UCC and IT projects specifically. In addition, customs officials considered that joint actions had supported the coherent application of Union law by promoting a common interpretation of the related procedures. They highlighted the guidance documents developed as part of the joint actions as particularly helpful in that regard.

In their view, expert teams also contributed to the exchange of relevant information, increased cooperation and supported the coherent application of Union law.

Customs officials provided positive feedback on the IT training in terms of usefulness and expectations. They appreciated the human competency building activities in general, especially officials from countries where there are no (or very few) places to learn about customs Union law and processes. Customs officials also appreciated the in-person training components such as in the case of car search training. Lastly, customs officials noted that training activities continued during the pandemic, through video conferences and online courses. They considered that virtuality had allowed more officials to participate in the training which they viewed as a positive outcome emerging from the pandemic. They appreciated this flexibility.

　　　　o Efficiency

Overall, national officials considered that the costs of the customs EIS were reasonable and explained that these were covered mostly by the Customs 2020 programme. Customs

officials considered that the development of the EIS for customs had reduced duplication of efforts, time, and costs for Member States.

In terms of design and management of the EIS for customs, most customs officials did not mention any specific areas for improvement. Instead, they said they were satisfied with DG TAXUD's management and coordination tasks. Only a few customs officials highlighted issues related to the complexity of the systems and the division between EU and national components; the need for a more holistic approach to the Commission's management of the IT systems; and the need to further streamline the Commission's communication by considering one single channel of information for national administrations.

Customs officials considered the costs associated with their participation in joint actions to be proportionate to the benefits they generated. However, several customs officials reported issues related to the reimbursement of expenses such as: VAT not being reimbursed; reimbursement being covered for only one expert; the lack of funding for informal networking or social gathering following an official event; and the lack of comprehensive reimbursement for working visits. A few national customs officials also highlighted the need for the programme to cover the costs of translation and interpretation to allow their staff to participate in the joint actions.

In relation to training activities, two customs officials noted that they would like to see their national experts being paid for their time when training other national authorities (on a voluntary basis), as they are currently only reimbursed for travel, accommodation, and basic costs.

Summary of responses to the cost benefit survey

With regards to the survey on costs and benefits on the case study EIS, a total of 36 responses from 18 Member States were received. Of those 18 Member States that responded to the survey, national authorities from only 5 to 8 Member States (depending on the IT system) [127] reported detailed breakdown of costs of the systems assessed.

Costs: For those 5-8 Member States for which this data was available, the authorities considered ICS2 as the costliest, especially in relation to one-off development costs and one-off and ongoing support costs. While SURV3 was considered the most expensive in terms of both one-off and ongoing infrastructure costs. However, this needs to be put into context with the scope of the different EIS, their size and complexity.

Benefits: The national authorities that responded to the survey noted relevant benefits for each of the selected EIS for customs, most notably (1) the automated processes contributing to more efficient, simplified, and standardised customs procedures, (2) more effective implementation and coherent application of Union law in the field of customs, and (3)

---

[127] Five Member States provided information on EBTI3; five on the AEO upgrade; six on CDS; seven on ICS2; eight on SURV3.

increased interoperability and information sharing between customs authorities.

Cost effectiveness: Most national authorities that responded to the survey believed the costs borne at national level were reasonable and considered most of the systems to be moderately cost-effective. Only SURV3 was considered less cost-effective. However, it should be noted that, SURV3, like other EIS, is not meant to reduce costs of customs administrations, but to bring important benefits in terms of data analysis capabilities at EU level. In addition the system is not yet delivering its full potential (as data continues to be gathered in different formats until all Member States align their systems to the UCC data requirements), which may influence survey respondents' perception of its partial cost-effectiveness.

o Relevance

Customs officials highlighted the continued relevance of the programme, noting that their needs had remained largely unchanged since the mid-term evaluation. They confirmed the continued need for the programme to 1) harmonise the application of Union law in the field of customs and 2) support Member States in the digitalisation and modernisation of customs procedures, including updating national IT systems and adapting them to new requirements.

Customs officials also noted that Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic did not affect the relevance of the programme and its objectives. On the contrary, they noted that the programme's activities had contributed to preparing the ground for the UK's departure from the EU and that the Commission had reacted swiftly to the challenges imposed by the pandemic by adopting relevant legislation, issuing guidelines, and actively supporting Member States and economic operators to ensure flexibility in relation to customs obligations and customs clearance.

Nevertheless, they noted that the increased virtuality of exchanges and meetings brought by the pandemic had affected networking opportunities which were easier during the face-to-face exchanges. Adding to this, some customs officials pointed to the programme's management systems, for example, PICS and ART, as being outdated, namely not adapted to the new reality of increased virtuality. They, therefore, demanded more advanced tools and support from the programme, for example by providing a stable, secure, and user-friendly platform for online meetings, exchange of data and collaboration between national customs authorities.

o Coherence

Customs officials acknowledged that the programme aligned well with broader EU initiatives and mentioned for instance the European Green Deal, Horizon 2020, the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), and the Internal Security Fund (ISF). Customs officials also claimed that there is scope to strengthen cooperation between DGs for raising the visibility of the Customs programme and other complementary funding instruments *within* the Member States, (meaning both across different levels of management in the central administration and across the country). Customs officials also suggested increasing cooperation with third countries' authorities, especially for

92

supporting the delivery of EU environmental goals and the prevention of illegal activities, in relation to e-commerce for instance.

- o EU added value

Customs officials generally reported that the EIS for customs led to increased efficiency and effectiveness linked to the automated procedures and paperless processes. They considered that Member States working alone could not have achieved the same results.

Similarly, customs officials also noted that the establishment of joint actions was more cost–effective than having each Member State setting up cooperation frameworks with other Member States, either on a bilateral or multilateral basis. In addition, by gathering the expertise of different participating countries in the joint actions, the programme provided the opportunity for participating countries to access a wider pool of knowledge and experts than they would otherwise have had access to at an individual level (this was the case particularly for smaller Member States).

Lastly, they highlighted that the access by a wide range of customs officials to standardised and comprehensive information through the eLearning modules was a key factor contributing to a better understanding of Union law and therefore, a more coherent application through the IT systems.

- **Contributions from the in-depth interviews with national customs officials from candidate and potential candidate countries**
  - o Effectiveness

Customs officials from (potential) candidate countries highlighted the exchange of information, networking, and cooperation between customs authorities as the most important benefits of the programme. They all mentioned joint actions and working visits specifically as beneficial in raising awareness of technical issues and possible solutions, and in ensuring the correct implementation of the EIS for customs.

Lastly, in their view, the programme supported the implementation of national laws in line with the UCC. Participation in project groups enabled them to align their national laws in the field of customs with Union law.

- o Efficiency

Officials from (potential) candidate countries considered the programme to be efficient. One official reported that the costs related to the programme's activities were negligible in view of the benefits that the programme activities bring. However, one official from a candidate country also noted that the 2020 programme had set up new and more complicated rules and procedures for joint actions than in previous iterations. While this did not have an impact on the level of participation in joint actions, it had increased the administrative burden.

- o Relevance

Officials from (potential) candidate countries considered the programme to be relevant. They noted that while the COVID-19 pandemic had created issues, notably regarding

93

networking and working visits, the programme had been flexible in its response and mitigated the effects of the pandemic by adopting virtual modalities such as videoconferencing and moving most of the events to an online format.

Regarding needs that the programme has found more challenging to respond to, one official highlighted the increase in e-commerce fraud while another mentioned the lack of flexibility of IT solutions for coordinators notably regarding ART and PICS.

- **Consideration for the evaluation**

Officials from national customs authorities are the main beneficiaries of the Customs 2020 programme and were therefore consulted on all the evaluation criteria and their feedback integrated into findings of the evaluation. More limited feedback was collected from officials from the candidate and potential candidate countries given that they were less involved in the programme activities and therefore were less aware of their results.

Economic Operators

- **Contributions from the in-depth interviews with representatives of EU level organisations representing economic operators (programme assessment) and individual economic operators (case studies)**
  - Effectiveness

Both individual economic operators and EU-level organisations representing them were overall positive about the outcomes of the programme. They highlighted the support the programme had provided in relation to the development of the EIS for customs, which simplified and harmonised electronic procedures, reducing the time it takes to complete customs processes and provided legal certainty to importers and exporters. EU-level organisations representing economic operators also positively assessed the joint actions noting that they increased cooperation, communication, and information-sharing. However, individual economic operators were less aware of the existence of joint actions. Similarly, not all were aware of the existence of the eLearning modules, but those who were, highlighted the eLearning courses as valuable. For instance, one economic operator referred to the eLearning courses on Brexit as being particularly useful, while another mentioned having integrated all programme eLearning modules into an internal university course. Despite overall positive feedback on the Customs 2020 programme, economic operators also identified several areas of improvement, as presented below.

- Several individual economic operators and EU-level organisations representing economic operators highlighted that the increased digitalisation has resulted in a more complex IT environment that has been challenging for smaller economic operators to manage. In addition, the increased focus on risk management has resulted in additional requirements for the economic operators and therefore increased administrative burden.

- More than a third of EU-level organisations representing economic operators interviewed reported the gradual implementation of the EIS across the Member

94

States, which means that the systems are deployed at different times across the EU, as an issue distorting competition. Several individual economic operators and EU-level organisations representing economic operators also highlighted the lack of adequate and timely communication and information received from the Member States on the EIS to be implemented. This was noted as creating uncertainty and leading to errors and delays.

- EU-level organisations representing economic operators were less aware of the programme's activities regarding the prevention of fraud and illegal activities but noted that economic operators and society in general were well protected. However, they also highlighted an increase in e-commerce fraud, which economic operators are liable for[128]. While recognising the Commission and Member States' work on the latter, several economic operators still noted this as an issue to address.

- Lastly, several EU-level organisations representing economic operators highlighted that some Member States interpret and thus apply Union law in the field of customs differently resulting in distortion of trade and unpredictability for economic operators. They noted that this has improved, but different interpretation can still be found both between Member States as well as within Member States.

  o Efficiency

Overall, both individual economic operators and EU-level organisations representing economic operators considered that the benefits of the Customs programme outweigh the cost and while the cost was high at the implementation phase of the EIS at the national level, they saw it as an investment for the future. They noted that digitalisation has resulted in increased efficiency and speed and had reduced cost and administrative burden. It has also reduced errors and falsification by making processes more transparent. They mentioned automatic clearance as an important development in that regard. Yet, economic operators also noted that the IT environment has become more complex, resulting in additional burdens and technical difficulties. In particular, the increased focus on risk control procedures (that stem from Union law) has resulted in additional data requirements and obligations.

  o Relevance

Both individual economic operators and EU-level organisations representing economic operators agreed that the programme continues to be both relevant and necessary. EU-level organisations representing economic operators considered that Member States were increasingly "on the same page" and that this was due to a large extent to the

---

[128] The economic operators are generally liable for the declarations, although there are cases where they are not aware of or have no expertise to assess whether goods had been undervalued or counterfeited. This was specifically linked to the issue of e-commerce, which exacerbated opportunities for fraudsters to abuse the small consignment exemptions.

programme's activities. They also recognised that there was flexibility in the application of Union law in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the UK's departure from the EU. However, several highlighted that the situation could have been handled more swiftly at the beginning.

Both individual economic operators and EU-level organisations representing economic operators also noted that there was still a need to further simplify and harmonise customs processes and procedures to further reduce costs, confirming the continued need for the programme. They considered that the EU should keep being a frontrunner in customs legislation and controls, but that it also needs to investigate innovative techniques that would improve the EIS for customs by making them faster and simpler to operate. Mobile technology, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi connectivity, digital documents and blockchain technology were among the tools identified as needing to further explore. Economic operators also demanded a more proactive engagement and communication with the business sector, as well as better provision of information to business, earlier on in the process.

- **Consideration for the evaluation**

Feedback from representatives of EU-level organisations representing economic operators was integrated into the findings on the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and EU added value of the programme. However, some of the views above related to Union law and policy more generally, and therefore only indirectly to the Customs 2020 programme, and this caveat was made in the presentation of the findings where relevant. Some of the "needs" that economic operators mentioned in relation to the interview questions on relevance have been integrated into the answers on effectiveness and efficiency where this was more appropriate. Moreover, as the programme has been engaging mostly with representatives of organisations representing economic operators (TCG members), individual economic operators' views were more critical in terms of the extent to which they had been able to engage with the programme or had a limited awareness of it. This also led to the identification of some lessons learnt in relation to the engagement with economic operators.

96

Table 12: Implementation of the recommendations on programming and design

	RECOMMENDATION	UNIT'S PROPOSED MEASURES	STATE OF PLAY IN MARCH 2022

PROGRAMMING AND DESIGN

1	**Summary:** Make more practical use of the Annual Work Programme projects and consider multi-annual programming. In the short term this could mean more discussion of the projects, while in the longer-term (as is already proposed for the next funding period) multi-annual programming would help increase coordination. **Detail:** In the short term, DG TAXUD could make the projects come to life simply by referring to and discussing them more regularly (and based on ad-hoc needs) with national coordinators, DG TAXUD officials and other users of the programme. Setting up common PICS groups for relevant actors could also be considered. Knowledge sharing around the identified policy projects could also increase their relevance. In the longer term (as is already proposed for the next period) we recommend that a multi-annual programming process is put in place that would correspond better to the nature the programme and the activities it supports. Such a multi-annual process could be flexible, setting broad priorities that are still operationalised in annual programmes, with some contingency for emerging needs. This would help further increase the coordination between activities, improving the quality of planning documents and their practical implementation as well as the programme's coherence.	1.1 Reinforce the strategic, objectives-oriented planning of actions, and consider more top-down actions planning.	Implemented
		1.2 Communicate clearly on the strategic, objectives-oriented planning of actions, by setting up project-based and content-oriented newsletters on evolutions/highlights, including executive summaries and activity schemes (e.g. quarterly, or biannually) within TAXUD and to Participating Countries	Implemented
		1.3 Establish multiannual work programmes in the post-2020 Regulations and investigate the options for breakdown of work programme periods in the financing period of 7 years (e.g. 2+3+2 or 2+2+3)	Implemented
		1.4 Create national strategies and priorities for the participation in programmes' activities.	Partially implemented

2	**Summary:** Designate long-term, platform-like joint actions as such, so that appropriate criteria can be defined for funding applications and monitoring of such actions. **Detail:**	2.1 Identify current long-term (platform like or similar) activities and collect their key functions (by nature and content)	Implemented

	When the operational details of the next programme are defined, we recommend <u>categorising platform-like project groups as such, and defining and applying appropriate criteria for funding applications and monitoring</u>. This would make it easier to take funding decisions about these actions, gauge success and learn lessons that can be used for future improvements.	2.2 Establish a non-exhaustive list of platform-like activity types including their definition, funding criteria and linked performance measurement structures (e.g. platform, network, steering group, etc.)	Implemented
3	**Summary:** Refine strategy for development and promotion of eLearning modules, so that the training programme addresses identified needs. **Detail:** We recommend <u>developing a strategy based more on addressing identified training needs.</u> A first step could be an initial survey conducted with the help of the Training Support Group to take stock of needs and interest. Leading from this, a strategy could be devised, ideally for multiple years, listing priorities to be taken up in future training modules and promotional plans. Importantly, this could mean prioritising those countries whose needs and likelihood to actually use the modules are greatest.	3.1 Deepen consultation with national administration's training managers (TSG and beyond) to identify specific national support needs in 'training and staff development' that go beyond the already established and agreed processes and topics. This may be realised through EU workshops/events (including online surveys) that are specifically dedicated to the exploration of such further-going national needs. In consequence, the roll-out and implementation of the current multi-annual Strategic EU Training Action Plan (2017 – 2020) may be adapted to resulting findings.	Postponed
		3.2 Integrate identified national training/staff development needs and topics (for eLearning development and other formats) strategically with the future-envisaged multi-annual work programmes of the post 2020 programmes.	Postponed
4	**Summary:** Investigate ways to improve the technological platform for the delivery of eLearning modules, based both on solutions on the market and best practices and synergies from other Commission services and initiatives. **Detail:** We recommend <u>exploring alternative solutions that currently exist on the market which could meet national administrations' needs</u> in terms of security, limited distribution, central management and flexibility. <u>Best practices and synergies</u> could also be identified with other Commission services and initiatives such as for e.g. the World Customs Organisation's Learning and Knowledge Community (for Customs) or the OECD (Fiscalis).	4.1 Assess the feasibility of an EU-level electronic platform (type: Learning Management System – LMS) with regard to its potential added value in supporting the development and delivery/publication of EU eLearning materials. Compatibility with national LMS applications and e-training portals of other Commission services/initiatives will be a key criterion.	Implemented
		4.2 Piloting a set of identified relevant online platform support functionalities on a pilot LMS application that has proven its suitability on the market, with national administrations and/or other Commission Services/Learning Institutes (e.g. Moodle).	Implemented
		4.3 Develop and rollout an EU electronic Learning Environment (ELE) to support training and staff development of customs and tax professionals across the Union (post 2020 programme).	Implemented

98

| 5 | **Summary:**
Improve the procedures for the translation, localisation and updates to eLearning modules. This could lead to quicker localisations and updates, and solutions that are more tailored to the needs of individual countries.

Detail:
We recommend <u>prioritising an agile and flexible management of eLearning modules,</u> focused on improving the procedures for the translation of the modules and on facilitating quick localisation and updates of the training material. In relation to translation of the eLearning modules, we suggest communicating more clearly that national administrations can request at any moment the localisation of an EU eLearning course through the signature of partnership agreements with the Commission, and that no requests have been turned down in the current programming period. If national administrations miss the window of opportunity for the translation of a given module, it is purely because of national limitations.
In relation to localisation and updates to the eLearning modules, <u>alternative strategies should be investigated to facilitate changes in the content of the modules</u> to reflect local characteristics as well as emerging issues, such as new legislation, changes in IT systems and guidelines. | 5.1 Introduce 'central localisation' concept as the by-default procedure for translation/localisation of EU eLearning modules. This way, translation costs and related efforts are shifted back from national administrations to the Commission services (under 2020 programmes), which is supposed to considerable lighten the work part of national administrations in translations/localisation projects and shorten drastically the duration the development of national versions of EU eLearning modules. | Implemented |
| | | 5.2 Assess, test and introduce further resource-friendly mechanisms, tools and processes that are best-suited to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the development and use of common EU eLearning modules and related translated/localised versions, such as e.g. use of electronic voice (versa current human actor voice) or short learning modules (micro/nanolearning modules) etc. | Partially implemented |

IMPLEMENTATION

| 6 | **Summary:**
Increase coordination with other EU programmes, both in terms of operational coordination with the Fiscalis programme and establishing a forum for working with other Commission Directorates-General.

Detail:
In relation to Customs and Fiscalis cooperation, we recommend that the two programmes <u>explore opportunities to enhance operational coordination and the sharing of information on shared components,</u> including IT systems and approaches for human competency building and training. The Multi-Annual Strategic Plan for Customs EIS and the EU Competency Framework for Customs should serve as baselines and examples for the development and implementation of these initiatives under Fiscalis. Flagship Fiscalis initiatives should also be identified that could | 6.1 Investigate opportunities to streamline and simplify the establishment and implementation of cross Customs and Fiscalis programme actions, especially where similar methodologies can be followed (e.g.: competency framework for customs and competency framework for taxation). | Implemented |
| | | 6.2(a) Collect and examine all EU funding programmes and list those that have links with the Customs and Fiscalis programmes, including the future Customs Control Equipment Instrument (CCEI)

6.2(b) Collect and examine all other programmes (e.g. by international organisations, Frontex, CCWP), including the future Customs Control Equipment Instrument (CCEI), and list those that have links with the Customs and Fiscalis programmes. | Implemented |

99

	be taken as examples in Customs. In relation to Customs/Fiscalis cooperation with other Commission DGs, while acknowledging that officials in DG TAXUD and other DGs are already burdened with meetings and other obligations, we recommend that a <u>common coordination forum is established between relevant officials in DG TAXUD, DG GROW, DG HOME, TRADE DG ECFIN and OLAF in particular</u>. This could start with a single meeting and evolve as appropriate, with a view to establishing more formal links and identifying and exploiting more links where possible.	6.3 Flag the need for a COM-level network and steering body for customs and taxation related funding activities especially in view of the possibility for combined funding under the post-2020 funding period.	Discarded
		6.4 Set up bilateral and multilateral working arrangements within TAXUD and with other DGs regarding the implementation of the post-2020 programmes	Partially implemented
		6.5 Establish the Multi-Annual Strategic Plan for Taxation (MASP-T) on the example of the MASP-C	Implemented
		6.6 Review TAXUD programme implementation coordination and governance	Implemented

7	**Summary:** Optimise the procedures and resources for the implementation of joint actions, so that the workload for available human resources and administrative burdens on different actors are appropriate. **Detail:** We recommend that DG TAXUD, where appropriate involving the national coordinators<u>, review the workload on the available human resources, the steps for applying for and reporting on joint actions,</u> with the aim of establishing more effective and efficient administrative processes and reduce the workload on staff. This could involve the introduction of a project-based approach (replacing an event-based management) resulting in the reduction of micro management and related administrative burden. The central and national programme management levels could also produce easy-to-use guides and templates to lighten the burden.	7.1 Map and review programme processes for joint actions, with focus on the programing and implementation features and tasks, including financial management. Identify elements for streamlining, simplification and modernisation with a view to establishing proportionate administrative processes for all joint actions.	Implemented
		7.2 Review the strategic coordination role and related positioning of the national programme coordinators in the participation of national administrations in the programme activities.	Implemented
		7.3 Optimise the use of physical meetings: map options for virtual meetings, promote their use and set conditions for real-life meetings.	Implemented
		7.4 Establish a change management plan, including communication activities.	Partially implemented

100

MONITORING AND REPORTING

	Summary: Streamline the monitoring system so it meets actual needs while reducing administrative burdens. This could include both quick fixes like simplified forms and a study to refine and reduce the number of monitoring indicators.	8.1	Simplification of the Action Follow-up Forms and Event Assessment Forms.	Implemented
8	**Detail:** A simplified framework could be both more useful and less time-consuming for stakeholders. In the short term, DG TAXUD could put in place some <u>quick fixes to reduce burdens on programme managers and participants</u>. For example, the action-follow-up form and event assessment form could be simplified so as to place a smaller burden on participants. DG TAXUD could also focus on a limited number of core indicators rather than reporting equally on all of them, especially given numerous overlaps and some inconsistencies. We also recommend that DG TAXUD conduct an <u>evaluation of the performance measurement framework</u> to assess the monitoring system in detail. This should lead to specific recommendations <u>to reduce the number of indicators</u> and eliminate irrelevant indicators and overlaps in order to ultimately lighten administrative burdens and establish firmer links between monitoring and performance management. <u>Since indicators at impact level</u> relate more directly to specific customs/taxation policies than to the programme, a small set of impact indicators has been defined for data collection during monitoring and evaluation of these policies. In theory, the data collected should then be made available to the programme management unit to feed into the monitoring system. However, for this to work, the impact indicators, monitoring and evaluation of relevant policies will need to be used to collect data on these indicators at regular and sufficiently frequent intervals. The evaluation of the Performance Measurement Framework should assess this challenge and propose recommendations for tackling it.	8.2	Share the feedback from participants to an event (EAFs) with the action managers (from participating countries or from TAXUD's units) to enable a more evidence-based decision-making at operational level.	Implemented
		8.3	Launch a study to evaluate the Performance Measurement Framework (PMF) with a view to simplify it. In particular, the study will consider: • Reduce the number of indicators, focusing on the most relevant for monitoring progress of the programmes (e.g. EIS, networking) • Reconsider the approach for measuring impact (see also point 8.4) • Revise data collection tools: forms to gather feedback from managers/participants have to be streamlined; revise frequency and coverage • Adapt the PMF to the new approach for actions (based on projects).	Implemented
		8.4	Create an SG for the PMF study involving all associated TAXUD units and other DGs	Implemented
		8.5	Communication on the need to establish monitoring frameworks for specific policy measures allowing for more systemised collection of policy-relevant indicators	Implemented
	<u>Other changes</u> are also worth exploring. For example, some surveys and satisfaction forms could be replaced by less frequent (but more in-depth) consultations with key stakeholders. Electronic tools for data collection, analysis, and presentation (such as automatically updating dashboards) could reduce the effort needed for these tasks while making the reports more timely and usable. Since much of the programme's achievements rely on networking, coming up with indicators on this should be a priority.	8.6	Stronger emphasis for correct preparation of the future monitoring and evaluation provisions at the time of impact assessments accompanying policy initiatives supported by C2020 or F2020 programmes.	Implemented

101

9	**Summary:** Develop a more coherent approach to assessing programme performance to reduce burdens and lead to more purposeful reports. **Detail:** While certain requirements are fixed, the options to minimise the burden on national administrations of providing information, data and other contribution should be explored. Such options include: - Combine the impact assessment / ex ante evaluation of future funding periods with the mid-term evaluation of the current period, which several DGs (such as DG Education and Culture) have done successfully. - Make the mid-term evaluation lighter, focused more on operational matters and implementation. This could be sensible, especially considering that many impacts cannot be identified at such an early stage of implementation. - Combine studies related to the Customs and Fiscalis programmes. This would build on the coordinated approach taken to the present mid-term evaluations and further reduce overlap and the duplication of administrative and other work as well as helping to generate synergies between the programmes. - Undertake more evaluations focused on policy-related issues, and use their results to inform smaller, more focused evaluations of the programme. Each policy evaluation in the customs / taxation area, particularly areas that draw from the programme support, should regularly and specifically examine the role of the Customs / Fiscalis programme, including the programme-funded IT systems. Successive programme evaluations have provided evidence that the programme is successful and that major changes are not required. What could be more relevant would be the assessment of key policies and how well the various programme instruments and activities support them.	8.7 Mid-term evaluations of the programmes combined with impact assessment for the future proposals (back-to-back approach, tool #52 of the BR). *However, feasibility is dependent on corporate timelines for these exercises.*	Relevance under the 2021-2027 programming period's interim evaluation in 2024-2025
		8.8 Use the synergy between the Annual Progress Report and the Mid-term evaluation for the year when the mid-term evaluation should be carried out in order to avoid duplication of efforts. The focus should be on programmes' management aspects and not on policy areas benefiting from the programme. This would result in producing a single report to cover both regular monitoring of the programme as well as lessons learned from the first years of implementation.	Relevance under the 2021-2027 programming period's interim evaluation in 2024-2025
		8.9 For operational, management and the common IT infrastructure, consider combining studies touching upon both the Customs and Fiscalis programmes (for example any studies on the Performance and Monitoring Framework, the training aspects or the common IT tools). Same approach for policy areas, where relevant and feasible.	Partially implemented
		8.10 Update of the Evaluation and Impact Assessment Charter with a view to make it more explicit that policy evaluations should cover, amongst other topics, the measurement of the effect of programme funded activities	Implemented
		8.11 Update of: • the collaborative space for evaluations to flag out the importance of including aspects related to the Fiscalis and Customs programmes in evaluations of policy measures supported by the programme • the study fiche to include a "Customs/Fiscalis-financed/relevant" box, in case the programmes have financed any activities in their area of interest. In this way, the operational units would be aware from the start of the project that they need to also ask the contractors to look at the consequences of the financing provided by the programmes.	Postponed
		8.12 Regular inclusion of the request to examine the Fiscalis and Customs role and support in the Terms of Reference for contracts commissioning evaluations or impact assessment related studies of policy measures supported by the two programmes	Implemented
		8.13 Communication on the need to assess aspects related to the Fiscalis and Customs programmes in evaluations of policy measures supported by the programme during the TAXUD training on evaluation	Implemented

10	**Summary:**	9.1 Map all programme processes and identify elements where supporting tools	Implemented

		are required	
Improve reporting and information-sharing tools, so that these can be made more user-friendly while still meeting demands for security and functionality.

Detail:

We recommend that DG TAXUD <u>conduct an (internal or external) audit of these tools and their use and, based on the results, decide on next steps</u>. Given shifting security and file-sharing needs, PICS in particular could be either revamped or replaced, while ART could be refined so that its formidable functionalities are made more user-friendly.

Any changes should then be <u>communicated in an accessible way to stakeholders</u> in the Commission and administrations, particularly the national coordinators who are responsible for sharing information about the programme among potential joint action and training participants. Such communication could include online tutorials as well physical training sessions as appropriate. | 9.2 Review and evaluate all functionalities of ART and PICS (and also CIRCABC, EU Survey, etc.) | Implemented |
	9.3 Improve the knowledge sharing via PICS evolutional upgrades in short term, e.g. by completing the Programmes Output Group project.	Implemented
	9.4 Improve the reporting functionality of ART, by including the Expert Teams reporting.	Implemented
	9.5 Launch an external study in order to identify available tools in the market that could cover the functionalities of ART and PICS and possibly replace them in the next future.	Implemented

COMMUNICATION

11	**Summary:**
Increase senior level buy-in and political will among national administrations to boost participation and engagement.

Detail:
We recommend that the <u>senior leadership of national administrations engage more actively with the programme</u>, with a view to expressing any concerns or needs that are not being met and helping DG TAXUD to address them. National coordinators, as the 'ambassadors' of the programme in their respective countries, have a particular role to play in communicating about the programme throughout their administrative hierarchies. This is <u>especially true in candidate countries</u>, some of which participate relatively little in the programme. | 11.1 Review the programmes communication strategy and include a specific section (series of actions) targeting the senior management of the national administration.
In support of the actions develop a consistent message (stressing the importance of participation and engagement) and ensure that it is properly communicated – e.g. by including it systematically in briefings. | Partially implemented |
| | | 11.2 As part of the communication strategy and in order to develop the targeted communication actions, identify all events and fora (visits, forums, conferences, meetings etc. such as Customs Policy Group, TADEUS, ECNTC etc.) where TAXUD senior management meet/interact with their peers from national administrations. Use the briefings supporting the meetings in order to pass on messages relating to the programmes. | Implemented |

12	**Summary:**
Communicate more actively about the possibilities of the programme, with national coordinators and other officials taking a more active role in finding out about and spreading awareness of the programme.

Detail:
We recommend that <u>national coordinators and other officials take a more active role in</u> | 12.1 Create policy-based and content-oriented newsletters on evolutions/highlights (e.g. quarterly, or biannually) within TAXUD and to MS/PCs | Postponed |

103

		finding out about and spreading awareness of the possibilities of the programme within their administrations. Relevant action could range from sharing materials produced by DG TAXUD on local intranets and translating such materials to organising information sessions and asking other administrations for success stories and other forms of assistance.	12.2 Review the programmes communication strategy and tools and include a specific section (series of actions) targeting the national coordinators. Ensure synergies and efficiencies with the TAXUD communication strategy. As part of the plan: - clarify the purpose and the role of the national coordinators in raising awareness on the programme activities; - provide the national coordinators with a communication toolbox (set of tools provided at their disposal in order to achieve the objective of the recommendation) - compile success stories with evidence/contributions from each national coordinator. Use it to raise awareness. - investigate the need to set coordinators network at national level (similarly to the current coordinators network at EU level) to raise awareness and encourage participation - consider the possibility to create programme communication identity that is easily recognisable (branding, marketing tools) and provide it to national coordinators, in line with Art.20.2 of future Grant Agrements on "Visibility of funding".	Postponed
			12.3 Extend the next Programmes' Poll to check specifically the awareness and satisfaction among tax/customs officials – this will not only test the knowledge of the programmes, but it will also further raise awareness and help prepare a plan to fill in the knowledge gaps accordingly.	Implemented

13	**Summary:** Review strategy for dealing with economic operators and citizens, with a view to arriving at a common understanding of whether and to what extent actors beyond administrations should be targeted. **Detail:** We recommend that DG TAXUD review the communication strategy for the programme, with a view to arriving at a common understanding of whether and to what extent actors beyond administrations should be targeted. This could include some intermediate action, such as surveying certain subsets of economic operators to gauge needs and interest. Later on, DG TAXUD could decide whether any Customs / Fiscalis branding would be appropriate, and design activities for reaching given types of stakeholders.	13.1 Review the programmes communication strategy and tools and include a specific section (series of actions) targeting the economic operators and citizens. Ensure synergies and efficiencies with the TAXUD communication strategy. As part of the plan: - make use of social media in order to reach economic operators and citizens as the most efficient way - identify and make use of the existing TAXUD forums where economic operators and citizens are represented. E.g. Platform for Tax Good Governance. Compile a list of such events (establish an annual events calendar for TAXUD) and ensure a consistent communication message that should be systematically conveyed. Linked to action 11.2 - consider the use of surveys as both communication and needs identification tool - consider the possibility to create programme communication identity which is easily recognisable (branding, marketing tools)	Postponed
			13.2 Meet with trade and civil society associations in the various fora where they may have an interest in the programmes' activities (such as the Trade Contact group, the Platform for Tax Good Governance, amongst others) in order to identify communication opportunities and to establish an effective communication	Postponed

104

		channel with economic operators and citizens. 105	

Source: DG TAXUD

Table 13 Description of EIS for customs

EIS for customs	Description of the system
TARIC	Multilingual database in which all measures relating to EU customs tariff, commercial and agricultural legislation are integrated. The tariff system is a reference data system for other EIS.
QUOTA 2	The electronic system for quota management/allocation tracks the overall EU usage of "First come first served" import quotas in force granted to products originating from certain third countries.
EBTI3	A Binding Tariff Information (BTI) is a decision issued by the customs authorities that is binding on all Member States' customs authorities and on the holder of the decision. The European Binding Tariff Information-3 system (EBTI-3) is the IT system by which applications are submitted and BTI decisions issued and managed (i.e. revoked). All BTI applications and BTI decisions are stored in this database (hereinafter the "EBTI-3 database") managed by the European Commission.
EU CSW-CERTEX	EU CSW-CERTEX connects participating customs authorities' national systems to EU databases managing supporting documents related to non-customs requirements, such as TRACES . EU CSW-CERTEX enables customs authorities to automatically verify the respective non-customs formalities. This means that when an economic operator submits a customs declaration requiring the compliance with Union non-customs law, customs and partner competent authorities can automatically and effectively exchange and verify the required information for the customs clearance process.
Direct trader access to the EIS	Ensures the uniform authentication and authorisation of economic operators, enabling their direct unified access to a

106

(UUM&DS):	number of central Customs EIS, by federating MS Identity and Access Management systems. The **UUM&DS** links to central systems, such as the **CDS, EORI or AEO** systems, which are operated at the EU level.
Customs Decision System (CDS):	It is a system for all new applications for customs decisions or authorisations in an electronic way. It allows economic operators to apply for and manage their customs decisions through a single EU interface and enables national customs authorities to consult each other on the granting and management of authorisations that are valid in more than one Member States. It provides system-to-system access for import, export and transit systems to authorisation data, allowing to automatically check their existence and validity.
Customs Risk Management System (CRMS)	The **CRMS** facilitates the exchange of information for risk management purposes.
SURV3	It centralises in one place the relevant information related to imports and exports in the EU. SURV3 provides an upgrade of the Surveillance 2+ system to ensure its alignment to the UCC requirements such as the standard exchange of information by electronic data-processing techniques and the establishment of adequate functionalities needed for processing and analysing the full surveillance dataset obtained from Member States. While deployed in 2018, it will not be fully used until December 2022 when all Member States have upgraded their national import systems (gradual implementation linked to input from the upgraded national import systems).
Import Control System 2 (ICS2)	This system aims to strengthen pre-arrival safety and security of goods entering the Union by implementing the new UCC requirements regarding the lodging and treatment of entry summary declarations (ENS), namely the provision of ENS data in more than one submission and/or by different persons and the exchange of that data and the risk analysis results among the customs authorities. ICS2 is implemented in three releases, the first in 2021, second in 2023, and third in 2024.
AEO system	The upgrade of the AEO system aimed to improve the

107

	business processes related to AEO applications and authorisations considering the changes of the legal provisions of the UCC. The first phase aimed at implementing the major enhancements to the AEO system in view of the harmonisation to the customs decision taking procedure. The second phase implemented in 2019 the electronic form of the AEO application and decision and provided for the economic operators an EU harmonised interface to submit the AEO application and receive the decision electronically (eAEO).
Information Sheets (INF) for Special Procedures (SP)	This system ensures the administrative and standardised exchange of information between economic operators and customs authorities, and between customs authorities themselves involved during the customs procedures of inward and outward processing. The INF SP has two main components, which are the INF Specific Trader Portal (STP) – accessible through the EU Customs Trader Portal (EUCTP) – and the INF central system. It replaced the transitional arrangements for the INF Special Procedures in 2020 as defined in the UCC Work Programme. The centralised INF SP system is operational to all Members States and economic operators. The main objective of the INF SP System is to make all INF data available and to streamline the processes of INF data management.

Source: DG TAXUD

Table 14. Key features of the Customs 2020 joint actions

seminars and workshops	create unique opportunities for exchange in a group setting and compare strategies and methodologies between countries
	provide space for networking, building contacts and reinforcing relationships with other national administrations
	gather more expertise (including from external stakeholders such as the World Customs Organisation) than would be possible in a national setting
	ensure common understanding and interpretation of EU legislation
	improve relevance and focus among participants that share both historical and geographical links, and face similar challenges
project groups	allow for in-depth and recurrent group work on specific issues and policy areas
	develop concrete solutions to common problems across range of policies and practical areas
	strengthen networks and working relationships through continuous communication
	pool knowledge and experience between and within participating countries as well as with the Commission
	act as catalysts, creating the conditions for the generation of more concrete outputs in other fora (such as dedicated project groups)
	many of them are quasi-permanent and serve as standing platforms for coordination at various levels
working visits	provide opportunity for focused in-depth exploration of (often defined at operational level) topics of mutual interest, often on a bilateral basis as this is the only type of action focused mainly on individual exchanges
	lead to exchange of information and experience by engaging in real working, business-level situations, allowing participating countries to reassess their own performance while considering practices of their counterparts
	gain inspiration on good administrative and organisational practices or approaches from host country to be adopted to national circumstances
	useful for candidate and potential candidate countries to learn about EU legislation, national implementation and Member States working practices, praised for the direct operational exchanges
expert teams	structured form of operational collaboration on topics of mutual interest driven by participating countries and enhancing close collaboration
	provide a strong mandate and financing to tackle a specific challenge
monitoring actions	identify gaps and lead to recommendations/solutions for improvement
	provide possibility for exchange of experiences and working methods

110

|	between and within participating countries as well as with the Commission
	provide opportunities for joint monitoring visits, including with the Commission
capacity building and supporting actions	provide technical assistance which targets specific capacity needs
	exploit synergies with the Structural Reform Support Service, which provides technical support to administrations
joint communication actions	raise awareness about specific topics among customs administrations within and outside the customs union
	supports the development of a communication policy towards national stakeholders
	help with coordinating communication and serve as structured thinking around future communication needs
studies	useful to examine specific issues in depth (used for evaluations, impact assessments, economic analysis, etc.)

Source: Mid-term evaluation of the Customs 2020 programme

111

The e-Customs annual progress reports present Member States' expenditure on each project of the MASP-C[129], as reported in their national annual reports to the Commission.

The figure shows that the total investment fluctuates between EUR 85 million in 2014 to almost EUR 180 million in 2020. However, as mentioned in the report, the cited figures are not directly comparable due to the inconsistent number of Member States reporting over the years, which is respectively presented at the bottom of each bar for all years, in which data was collected.

Figure 10: Member States' costs related to IT capacity building (2014-2020)[130]
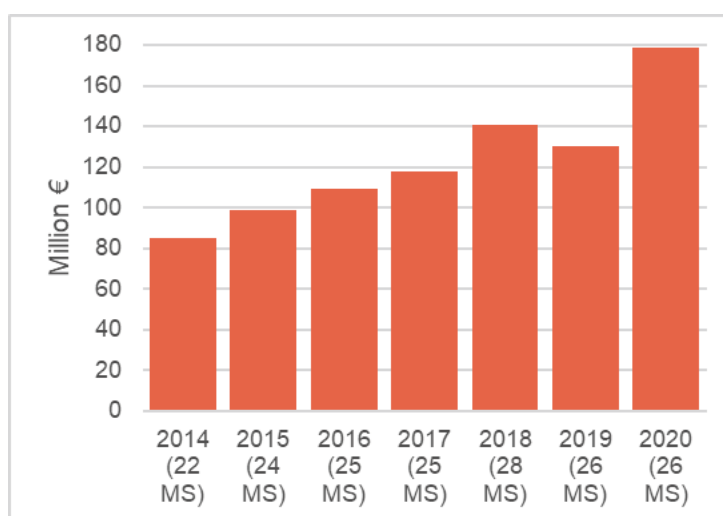
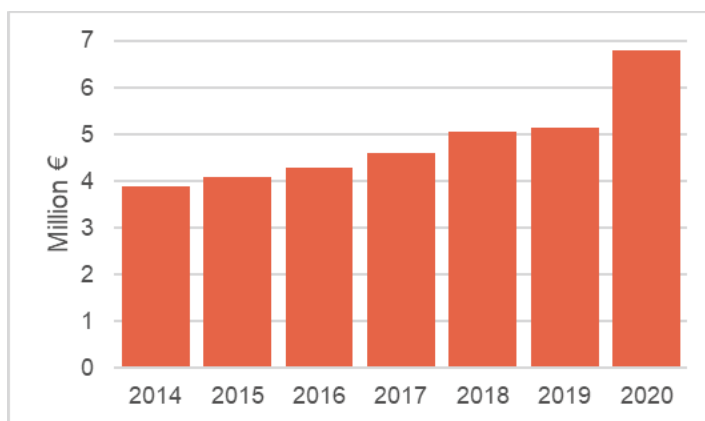Source: European Commission, 2020 e-Customs annual progress report

Figure 11 sets out the average cost per Member State for the years 2014-2020. The total sum allocated by Member States for each year is divided by the number of Member States that reported during this timeframe[131]. As can be seen, the average dispensed cost per Member State has only increased since the Customs 2020 programme started in 2014.

---

[129] This covers customs IT systems and corresponding budgetary resources; coordination of the systems with other e-Government systems; promotion and implementation of e-Customs services and Single Window; trainings in respect of e-customs systems; consultation with economic operators on various aspects of the e-Customs systems and services.

[130] 2014: 1 from 22 MS costs were not reported; 2015: 1 from 24 MS costs were not reported; 2016: 1 from 25 MS costs were not reported; 2020: 2 from 26 MS costs were not reported.

[131] The number of Member States that contributed budgetary information is not the same throughout the years. Since 2008, between 22 and 28 Member States have reported on their budget allocation, except for 2011, when only 12 reports were received.

112

Figure 11: Average Member States' costs for MASP-C projects (2014-2020)

Source: European Commission, 2020 e-Customs annual progress report

AEO	Authorised Economic Operators
AFF	Action Follow-up Form
ART	Activity Reporting Tool
ASEM	Asia-Europe Meeting
AWP	Annual Work Programme
BTI	Binding Tariff Information
CCC	Customs Code Committee
CCEI	Customs Control Equipment Instrument
CCN/CSI	Common Communication Network/Common Systems Interface
CCWP	Customs Cooperation Working Party
CDS	Customs Decision System
CEG	Customs Expert group
CEG-DIH	Customs Expert Group – Data Integration and Harmonisation section
CELBET	Customs Eastern and South-Eastern Land Border Expert Team
CIRCABC	Communication & Information Resource Centre for Administrations, Businesses & Citizens
CLET	Customs Laboratories Expert Team
CPG	Customs Project Group
CRMF	Customs Risk Management Framework
CRMS	Customs Risk Management System
CSM	Customs Seminars
CWV	Customs Working Visit
DG	Directorate General
DG BUDG	Directorate-General for Budget
DG CLIMA	Directorate-General for Climate Action

114

DG DIGIT	Directorate General for Informatics
DG ECFIN	Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs
DG GROW	Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs
DG HOME	Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs
DG JUST	Directorate General for Justice and Consumers
DG REFORM	Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support
DG SANTE	Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety
DG TAXUD	Directorate General for Taxation and Customs Union
DG TRADE	Directorate-General for Trade
EAF	Event Assessment Forms
EBTI-3	The European Binding Tariff Information-3 system
EC	European Commission
ECA	European Court of Auditors
ECCG	Electronic Customs Coordination Group
ECRIS	European Exchange of Criminal Records system
ECS	Export Control System
EIS	European Information Systems
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
EORI	Economic Operator Registration and Identification
EOS	Economic Operators' System
EU-LISA	European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice
ETCIT	Expert team on new approaches to develop and operate Customs IT systems
EU	European Union
EU CSW-CERTEX	EU Customs Single Window Certificates Exchange
EU SWE-C	EU Single Window Environment for Customs

115

EUCTP	EU Customs Trader Portal
FRC	Financial Risk Criteria
FRONTEX	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
F-gases	Fluorinated gases
HLPG	High-Level Project Group
HS/CN	Harmonised System and Combined Nomenclature
ICS2	Import Control System 2
INF SP	Information Sheets for Special Procedures
ISG	Inter-Service Steering Group
IT	Information Technology
LMS	Learning Management System
MASP-C	Multi-Annual Strategic Plan for Customs
MASP-T	Multi-Annual Strategic Plan for Taxation
MEF	Monitoring and Evaluaton Framework
MRA	Mutual Recognition Agreement
NCTS	New Computerised Transit System
OLAF	European Anti-Fraud Office
ODS	Ozone Depleting Substances
PARCS	Prohibitions and Restrictions Customs Controls Strategy
PICS	Programmes Information and Collaboration Space
PMF	Performance Measurement Framework
QUOTA	The electronic system for quota management / allocation
REX	Registered Exporter System
SIS	Schengen Information System
SPEED	Single Portal for Entry or Exit of Data
STI	Shared Trader Interface

116

SURV	The surveillance management and monitoring system
SWD	Staff Working Document
TARIC	The integrated Tariff of the European Union
TCG	Trade Contact Group
TRACES	Trade Control and Expert System
TSG	Training Support Group
UCC	Union Customs Code
UCC DA	UCC Delegated Act
UCC IA	UCC Implementing Act
UK	United Kingdom
UUM&DS	Uniform User Management and Digital Signatures
VAT	Value-Added Tax
WCO	World Customs Organisation

117