



SIGMA

Creating Change Together



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Toolkit for the preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of PAR and sector strategies

Guidance for SIGMA partners

ANNEX 6: Part I

Checklist for evaluating the quality of reports monitoring implementation of specific planning documents

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Introduction

Monitoring and reporting is an essential part of the policy-making cycle. It provides both policy makers and decision makers with information on the progress made (or lack of it) in achieving policy objectives and implementing planned activities. The information presented in regular monitoring reports allows the identification of issues impeding the reform process, as well as the identification of any corrective measures that may be needed. Thus, monitoring and reporting is not a box-ticking exercise, but rather a hands-on management tool. Analysis of monitoring reports carried out by SIGMA in a number of countries has shown that they often lack the quality needed to perform the role of a management tool. They principally focus on the percentage of actions implemented rather than outcome-level results of the actions being monitored, and rarely set out issues that require the attention of decision makers and actions needed to improve implementation of reform.

This checklist establishes a framework for evaluating the quality of reports that monitor the implementation of any planned reforms, whether they are related to PAR or to any other policy area. It is based on key elements set out in the Toolkit, and specifically Annex 5, *Monitoring, reporting and evaluation tools*. The checklist has already been piloted in a number of administrations and has proved efficient in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the monitoring reports analysed.

The purpose of the checklist is to assist the officials responsible for drafting and/or assessment of the quality of monitoring reports to identify areas in which the quality can be further improved. It is primarily meant to be used as a self-assessment tool, to ensure that all of the crucial issues have been considered during the drafting process and that the report is ready for the attention of decision makers. It can be used alongside the *Annotated structure of contents for reports monitoring implementation of specific planning documents*, a tool that has been prepared in parallel with the current checklist (Part II of this Annex). Both tools provide practical assistance to administrations for improving the quality of their monitoring reports and making them more relevant for decision makers.

Overall quality questions

This set of questions addresses the overall quality of the monitoring report, i.e. whether it complies with the national regulatory framework in place, whether it reports specifically on all planned actions and measures, whether the structure of the report includes the necessary parts, whether the report is readable and visually appealing, whether the report includes information on the involvement of civil society in its preparation.

No.	Question to assess quality of certain aspect of monitoring report	Answer to question ¹	Brief explanation of criteria ²
1. Regulatory compliance of the monitoring report	Does the monitoring report comply with the quality requirements (minimal quality standards) set out by the national-level regulations and/or recommendations (if any such regulations have been adopted)?	Yes / No	<i>This criterion aims to assess whether the national-level requirements set out for the quality of monitoring reports were observed during preparation of the report. If such requirements / standards are set out, then they should be followed even if they are less demanding than those set out by the SIGMA Toolkit. If such requirements / standards are not set out, then it should be checked whether a central coordinating body responsible for strategic planning has checked the quality of the monitoring report.</i>
2. Consistency and completeness of the monitoring report	Does the monitoring report provide information on the same number of actions as envisaged by the relevant planning document?	Yes / No	<i>This criterion aims to assess whether the report is credible, complete and consistent with what has been set out in the planning document, or there are inconsistencies that might be seen as possible</i>
	Does the monitoring report provide information on the same performance indicators (and their baseline and target values) as envisaged by the relevant planning document?	Yes / No	

¹ Although it is sometimes difficult to give a straightforward answer, only “Yes” or “No” answers should be inserted. Any further comments explaining certain aspects can and should be put in as a remark under the next column. SIGMA advice is to avoid using the term “Partially implemented” in monitoring reports.

² When using this checklist for assessing a particular monitoring report, this column can be used for inserting remarks related to the answer provided in the previous column, i.e. to explain why the question has been answered positively or negatively. Currently it provides a short explanation of each quality criterion.

	Does the monitoring report provide information on the same financial information (totals) as envisaged by the relevant planning document?	Yes / No	<i>manipulation of information during the reporting process.</i>
	Are statements used in the monitoring report supported by relevant evidence in the report or by providing reference in a footnote?	Yes / No	
3. Structure of the monitoring report	Does the monitoring report have an executive summary?	Yes / No	<i>This criterion aims to assess whether the structure of the monitoring report includes the most important structural units that should be found in any typical monitoring report. There can be additional chapters, however, these constitute the absolute minimum that needs to be covered.</i>
	Does the monitoring report have an aggregate overview?	Yes / No	
	Does the monitoring report have a separate chapter explaining progress achieved under each policy objective?	Yes / No	
	Does the monitoring report have a separate chapter explaining information related to risks and their mitigation (if envisaged in the relevant planning document)?	Yes / No	
	Does the monitoring report have a separate chapter or annex that provides information on implementation status of each action as envisaged in the relevant planning document?	Yes / No	
4. Readability of the monitoring report	Does the monitoring report provide information in a readable and visually understandable form, i.e. use clear structuring of information (headings and sub-headings of chapters and sub-chapters), exploit graphs and charts to present statistics and quantitative data, use visual and graphical information to provide evidence of the most important achievements?	Yes / No	<i>This criterion aims to assess the overall presentation of the monitoring report and whether it is easy to read by for internal and external stakeholders.</i>

Specific quality questions

This set of questions is aimed at checking specific issues related to the quality of the monitoring report.

No.	Question to assess the quality of specific aspects of the monitoring report	Answer to the question	Brief explanation of criteria ³
<i>Questions related to the EXECUTIVE SUMMARY of the monitoring report</i>			
1.1.	Does the monitoring report have an executive summary?	Yes / No	<i>The executive summary is a crucial part of a monitoring report that can be used to provide decision makers, representatives of the media or the general public with a short snapshot of information on the key aspects linked with implementation of the reform.</i>
1.2.	Does the executive summary provide basic statistical information on the implementation of the planning document for the reporting period?	Yes / No	<i>The executive summary should include the basic statistics about implementation of the planning document, i.e. the overall implementation rate of planned (a) actions and (b) measures (as percentages and absolute numbers of the total planned) for the reporting period. It should be noted that the assessment “Partially implemented” cannot be used for statistical purposes, as it is misleading. If such an assessment is used, the question should be answered “No”.</i>
1.3.	Does the executive summary illustrate progress achieved in implementation of planning document using relevant outcome level performance indicators?	Yes / No	<i>The executive summary should provide concise information on implementation of set policy objectives through the use of the performance indicators identified in the planning document. Ideally, baseline, current and target values (whichever available) should be provided for the reader to be able to see the progress achieved. Performance indicators provide for statistical evaluation of the implementation of the set policy objectives.</i>

³ When applying this checklist for assessing a particular monitoring report, this column can be used for inserting remarks related to the answer provided in the previous column, i.e. to explain why the question has been answered positively or negatively.

1.4.	Does the executive summary provide information on implementation progress achieved by each institution involved in the reform?	Yes / No	<i>The executive summary should provide brief information on how each of the involved institutions performed the actions foreseen for them in the planning document as part of the implementation progress.</i>
1.5.	Does it provide basic information on financing the implementation of the relevant planning document?	Yes / No	<i>The executive summary should provide aggregate data on financial information related to reform implementation, i.e. the planned cost for the reporting period in the planning document and the actual cost. National and international funding should be provided separately for all of the above-mentioned financial amounts. If new sources of funding have appeared, these should be identified.</i>
1.6.	Does the executive summary describe the progress achieved by referring to a selection of key reforms (“success stories”) implemented during the reporting period?	Yes / No	<i>The executive summary, in its description on achievements in relation to policy objectives, should refer to the key reforms (the most important, not all) successfully implemented during the reporting period. Ideally, these reforms are already mentioned when describing progress under each objective, however, they can also be presented with the performance indicators or separately. Ideally, a reference to the page number where more information can be found is also included.</i>
1.7.	Does it use graphs, tables and pictures to illustrate achievements?	Yes / No	<i>The executive summary, which is generally no longer than two pages, should present key information as visually as possible. This provides an opportunity for readers and key decision makers to easily understand the key figures related to implementation of the reform and use (interpret or present) this information when needed (e.g. during meetings as a one-page printout).</i>
Questions related to the AGGREGATE OVERVIEW of the monitoring report			
2.1.	Does the monitoring report have a chapter that provides information on overall progress achieved with regard to the reform implementation?	Yes / No	<i>The aggregate overview of reform implementation is crucially important to discuss the reform as a whole and not as separate parts.</i>

2.2.	Does the aggregate overview chapter provide information on progress in achieving the vision (“bigger picture”) of the reform?	Yes / No	<i>The aggregate overview should begin by providing a general overview of whether progress has been achieved in reaching the general objective of the reform. Usually this should be done in no longer than two to three paragraphs of text, referring to the general vision statement and impact-level indicators as set out in the planning document.</i>
2.3.	Does the aggregate overview chapter provide information on implementation progress achieved for each policy objective?	Yes / No	<i>The aggregate overview should provide a short text (not more than two sentences) on achievement status of each policy objective. It is important for the reader to understand whether its achievement is on track as planned or not. Ideally, reference to the page number where more information on each particular objective can be found is also included.</i>
2.4.	Does the aggregate overview chapter include information on the preparation process of the report?	Yes / No	<i>The preparation process should be briefly described to ensure that all relevant bodies were involved and had an opportunity to report on the progress achieved.</i>
2.5.	Does the aggregate overview chapter include information on how participation and involvement of civil society representatives was handled during the preparation of the report?	Yes / No	<i>The aggregate overview chapter should provide short information on the elaboration process of the monitoring report, focusing on whether and how representatives of civil society (including business organisations) were involved and what feedback was received. It should also provide information on whether this and previous monitoring reports are published on-line (including footnote reference to the internet address) and are available to the public.</i>
2.6.	Does the aggregate overview chapter include information on key reforms that were successfully implemented (“success stories”) as part of the overall reform efforts undertaken during the monitoring period?	Yes / No	<i>Review of the overall progress achieved in implementation of the reform is not possible without pointing out the major success stories achieved. These should be presented against the set policy objectives with an explanation of how they are contributing to the achievement of the set policy objectives.</i>
2.7.	Does the aggregate overview chapter include information on areas needing improved implementation, as well as key challenges that led to worse-than-expected results?	Yes / No	<i>Equally important to the discussion on major success, is also a discussion that points out key challenges faced during implementation of the reform actions. Those should be</i>

			<i>generalised, if important for all reform areas, at the same time pointing towards objectives that had been impeded the most.</i>
2.8.	Does the aggregate overview chapter discuss trends in relation to the dynamics of all the outcome-level performance indicators as indicated in the planning document to describe successes and failures?	Yes / No	<i>The progress achieved in implementing policy objectives should be explained through use of performance indicator trends. Those are the only reasonable way to explain whether envisaged change is happening in practice (at a systemic level) or implementation of reform actions are not contributing to change at outcome level.</i>
2.9.	Does the aggregate overview chapter include an explanation of overall budget execution during implementation of the reform, including under- or over-spending of financial resources?	Yes / No	<i>No reform can be implemented without adequate financing and therefore this chapter should discuss main aspects linked with reform financing, especially focusing on issues where progress has not been as good as expected, especially because of the lack of adequate investment.</i>
2.10.	Does the aggregate overview chapter include information on the functioning of the management and co-ordination structures during the reporting period?	Yes / No	<i>The management and co-ordination mechanism is crucial to managing successful reform, therefore it is important to briefly describe how it functioned during the reporting period, what key issues were discussed and what decisions were taken. It is important to also point out whether the decisions taken were implemented or not.</i>
2.11.	Does the aggregate overview include information on the implementation of recommendations from the previous monitoring report?	Yes / No	<i>Monitoring reports are not intended to be read, understood and forgotten. Instead, they are management tools that allow decision makers to improve overall reform performance. It is therefore important that the monitoring report also provides information on whether decisions made to improve reform implementation are actually implemented and whether those make any difference, or alternative ones should be considered to achieve the intended results.</i>
2.12.	Does the aggregate overview include a list of all outcome-level indicators with baseline, target and current values for the reporting period?	Yes / No	<i>Outcome-level indicators are essential for monitoring more systemic changes and they should be analysed intermittently. The aggregate overview should provide a list of all outcome-level indicators.</i>

2.13.	Does it use graphs, tables and pictures to illustrate the text?	Yes / No	<i>The use of visual materials is as important as providing textual information on the overall progress achieved.</i>
<i>Questions related to parts of the monitoring report dealing with IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY OBJECTIVES</i>			
3.1.	Does the monitoring report have separate chapter(s) that describes progress achieved under each of the identified policy objectives?	Yes / No	<i>It is important that as well as covering overall progress achieved in the implementation of reform, there is a separate commentary on each of the policy objectives. This allows the provision of an individual assessment, identifying success and challenges for each objective, including specifically mentioning the achievement of set targets in relation to the performance indicators.</i>
3.2.	Do these chapters set out a general aim behind each policy objective and explain its purpose?	Yes / No	<i>Providing a short background explanation of the purpose of the objective is important to retain the policy framework and the expected outcome once the objective has been achieved.</i>
3.3.	Do these chapters provide basic statistical information on the implementation of reform actions and measures under the specific policy objectives?	Yes / No	<i>The specific policy objective chapters should provide basic implementation statistics on the planned reform actions and results.</i>
3.4.	Do these chapters provide basic information on financing the implementation of reform actions and measures under the specific policy objectives?	Yes / No	<i>The policy objective chapters should provide basic information related to financing and describe the context for each policy objective.</i>
3.5.	Is an assessment of main achievements under each objective described using performance indicators, including showing relevant trends?	Yes / No	<i>Performance indicators and their status against the set targets should be the primary subject of analysis, to conclude whether the policy objective was achieved or not. These should be presented using graphs and charts showing past and present trends and illustrating their evolution in relation to the set targets.</i>
3.6.	Does the report include success stories illustrating the progress achieved under each objective?	Yes / No	<i>The most important success stories achieved during the reporting period should be highlighted and these should be used to illustrate the progress achieved under each policy objective and explain how the intended beneficiaries of the reform benefited from them.</i>

3.7.	Does the report include failures in achieving the set targets under each objective?	Yes / No	<i>As well as success stories, the chapter should also discuss key challenges and failures. They should be specific to each particular objective and include information on the steps taken to overcome them.</i>
3.8.	Are key conclusions on challenges and recommendations for the next steps provided for each policy objective based on the analysis presented?	Yes / No	<i>It is important that the monitoring report not only discusses the past, but also looks at the future and provides clearly-defined recommendations that the management and co-ordination mechanism can discuss and decide upon. Therefore, the recommendations need to be formulated in a clear manner, setting out the institution responsible for implementation of the recommendation and also giving a clear deadline by which it has to be performed.</i>
3.9.	Does it use graphs, tables and pictures to illustrate the text?	Yes / No	<i>The use of visual materials is as important as providing textual information on the overall progress achieved.</i>
Questions related to the RISK MANAGEMENT part of the monitoring report (if applicable)			
4.1.	Does the monitoring report have a chapter dedicated to risk assessment?	Yes / No	<i>If risks associated with the implementation of reform had been identified in the relevant planning document, the monitoring report should have a dedicated chapter that discusses these issues as well.</i>
4.2.	Does the monitoring report provide an assessment of whether the risks have materialised or not?	Yes / No	<i>For each of the identified risks, an assessment of whether it has materialised during the reporting period should be provided.</i>
4.3.	Does the risk assessment section discuss mitigating steps taken during the monitoring period and the results achieved through their implementation?	Yes / No	<i>For each of the risks that materialised there should be an explanation of what steps were taken to mitigate the negative consequences associated with it.</i>
4.4.	Does the monitoring report identify steps that need to be taken in the future to mitigate risks?	Yes / No	<i>It is important that not only the steps taken to mitigate risks are identified, but also that the results of those steps are presented and recommendations for the future are laid out in order to make it easier for decision makers to know what should be done.</i>

<i>Questions related to the part of the monitoring report dealing with COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES</i>			
5.1.	Does the monitoring report have a dedicated chapter or sub-chapter that provides information on internal and external communication activities undertaken during the reporting period?	Yes / No	<i>Part of any change (reform) management is communication. It is therefore important that the monitoring report has a chapter or sub-chapter that provides information on whether and what type of communication activities were carried out with internal and external stakeholders involved in a particular reform.</i>
<i>Questions related to the part of the monitoring report dealing with MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION OF REFORM ACTIONS</i>			
6.1.	Does the monitoring report have a separate chapter or annex that presents information on implementation of each action of the action plan?	Yes / No	<i>It is important that monitoring report has a dedicated part in which the status of all planned actions is explained. This is a basis for providing some of the basic statistics.</i>
6.2.	Does the monitoring report provide information on all the actions in the action plan, even those where the implementation deadlines set were not reached?	Yes / No	<i>Complete overview of status of all actions is important for decision makers to inform themselves not only on the progress with implementation of those that have deadlines within particular monitoring period, but also those where deadlines are approaching at some point in future. This allows to identify actions which would require timely start of implementation in order to reach the set deadlines, instead of waiting to start implementation to the last moment.</i>
6.3.	Does the monitoring report avoid using the misleading implementation status of “Partially implemented”?	Yes / No	<i>“Partially implemented” status to assess implementation of actions is misleading as it gives the perception that they are still on track. In reality, “partially implemented” means “not implemented to the planned timeframe” and should be marked as such with corrective measures taken – either through setting a new deadline, cancelling implementation or agreeing on another solution. In practice, this status is used to avoid showing a low overall implementation rate of planning documents and indication of either unrealistic/over-ambitious planning or lack of effort invested in implementing reform.</i>