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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

EVALUATION

**Ex-post evaluation of the Technical Assistance provided by the Task Force for Greece
(TFGR) 2011-2015**

{SWD(2020) 38 final}

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Glossary

<i>Term or acronym</i>	<i>Meaning or definition</i>
AROP	Administrative Reform Operational Programme
CF	Cohesion Fund
DG ECFIN	Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs
DG EMPL	Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
DG TAXUD	Directorate General for Taxation and Customs Union
EC	European Commission
ECA	European Court of Auditors
ECB	European Central Bank
EOPYY	National Organization for Healthcare Provision
EQ	Evaluation Question
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
HCA	Hellenic Court of Audit
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITC	Information Technology and Communications
JC	Judgment Criteria
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MS	Member State
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OAED	Hellenic Manpower Employment Organization
SF	Structural Funds
SRSS	Structural Reform Support Service

TA	Technical Assistance
TFGR	Task Force for Greece
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
WB	World Bank

1. INTRODUCTION

This Staff Working Document (SWD) presents the results of the ex-post evaluation of the actions carried out by the Task Force Greece (TFGR) during the 2011-2015 period.

It follows a recommendation from the European Court of Auditors (ECA) issued in the context of the Special Report no 19/2015¹: “More attention to results needed to improve the delivery of Technical Assistance (TA) to Greece”. The ECA report raised two main questions:

1. *To what extent was the EU technical assistance provided to Greece under the coordination of the TFGR managed effectively?*
2. *To what extent has the EU technical assistance provided to Greece under the coordination of the TFGR contributed positively to the process of reforms in Greece?*²

This SWD provides a reply to these questions. It is based on the evidence gathered through two external evaluations:

- i) the “*Preliminary evaluation of the Technical Assistance provided to Greece in 2011-2013 in the areas of Tax Administration and Central Administration Reform*”³; and
- ii) the external study on “*Evaluation of the Technical Assistance provided by the Task Force for Greece 2011-2015*”⁴.

The three economic adjustment programmes⁵ for Greece are out of the scope of this evaluation.

¹ European Court of Auditors (ECA), Special Report No 19/2015: “More attention to results needed to improve the delivery of technical assistance to Greece”, https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR15_19/SR_TFGR_EN.pdf

² European Parliament, Special Reports of the European Court of Auditors, 2017: “A Rolling Check-List of recent findings” [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/598604/EPRS_STU\(2017\)598604_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/598604/EPRS_STU(2017)598604_EN.pdf)

³ Adam Smith International, 2014, “*Preliminary Evaluation of the Technical Assistance provided to Greece in 2011-2013 in the areas of Tax administration and Central Administration Reform*” <http://dl.icdst.org/pdfs/files/77a9ed8c6671649c617cbdbf41a54213.pdf>

⁴ Ernst&Young, 2019, “*Evaluation of the technical assistance provided by the Task Force for Greece (TFGR) 2011-2015*”, Final report – January 2019 - <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/45625812-2056-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

⁵ The first programme, the Greek loan facility (GLF) of 2010, the second programme, the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) of 2012 and the third programme, the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) of 2015, are going to be subject of a specific evaluation

2. BACKGROUND TO THE INTERVENTION

2.1 Rationale for setting up the TFGR

In spring 2010, facing severe financial crisis, Greece requested financial assistance from the international partners. The Eurogroup agreed to provide bilateral loans pooled by the European Commission (Greek Loan Facility – GLF) which was part of a joint package with the IMF’s Stand-By Arrangement (SBA)⁶.

Following the request from the Greek authorities, in the summer of 2011, the Commission established the *ad hoc* TFGR in order to coordinate and provide the requested technical assistance.

Acting upon request of the Greek authorities, the mandate of the TFGR was twofold:

- 1) To provide technical assistance to the Greek authorities to support the delivery of commitments undertaken under the economic adjustment programme; and
- 2) To provide technical assistance to the Greek authorities for the acceleration in the absorption of EU funds.

The TFGR regularly reported on its activities through quarterly reports⁷. It concluded its mandate at the end of June 2015.

3. OBJECTIVES AND INTERVENTION LOGIC

The specific mandate of the TFGR was structured around four specific objectives⁸:

- 1) To identify, coordinate and agree on the details of the technical assistance needed, upon request and in close coordination with the Greek authorities;

⁶European Commission, Directorate- General for economic and financial affairs, 2010 “*European Economy*”
http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/occasional_paper/2010/op61_en.htm
https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-financial-assistance/which-eu-countries-have-received-assistance/financial-assistance-greece_en#taskforceforgreece

⁷Task Force for Greece, 2010-2014, “*Quarterly reports*”:
http://ec.europa.eu/archives/commission_2010-2014/president/news/documents/2011/11/index_en.htm
http://ec.europa.eu/commission_20102014/president/news/documents/2011/11/20111117_documents_1_en.htm
http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/president/news/speeches-statements/pdf/20111117_1_en.pdf
http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/president/news/speeches-statements/pdf/qr_march2012_en.pdf
http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/president/pdf/qr4_en.pdf
http://ec.europa.eu/archives/commission_2010-2014/president/pdf/qr5_en.pdf
http://ec.europa.eu/archives/commission_2010-2014/president/pdf/qr6_en.pdf
http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/president/pdf/qr7_en.pdf

⁸[http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release MEMO-11-599_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-11-599_en.htm)

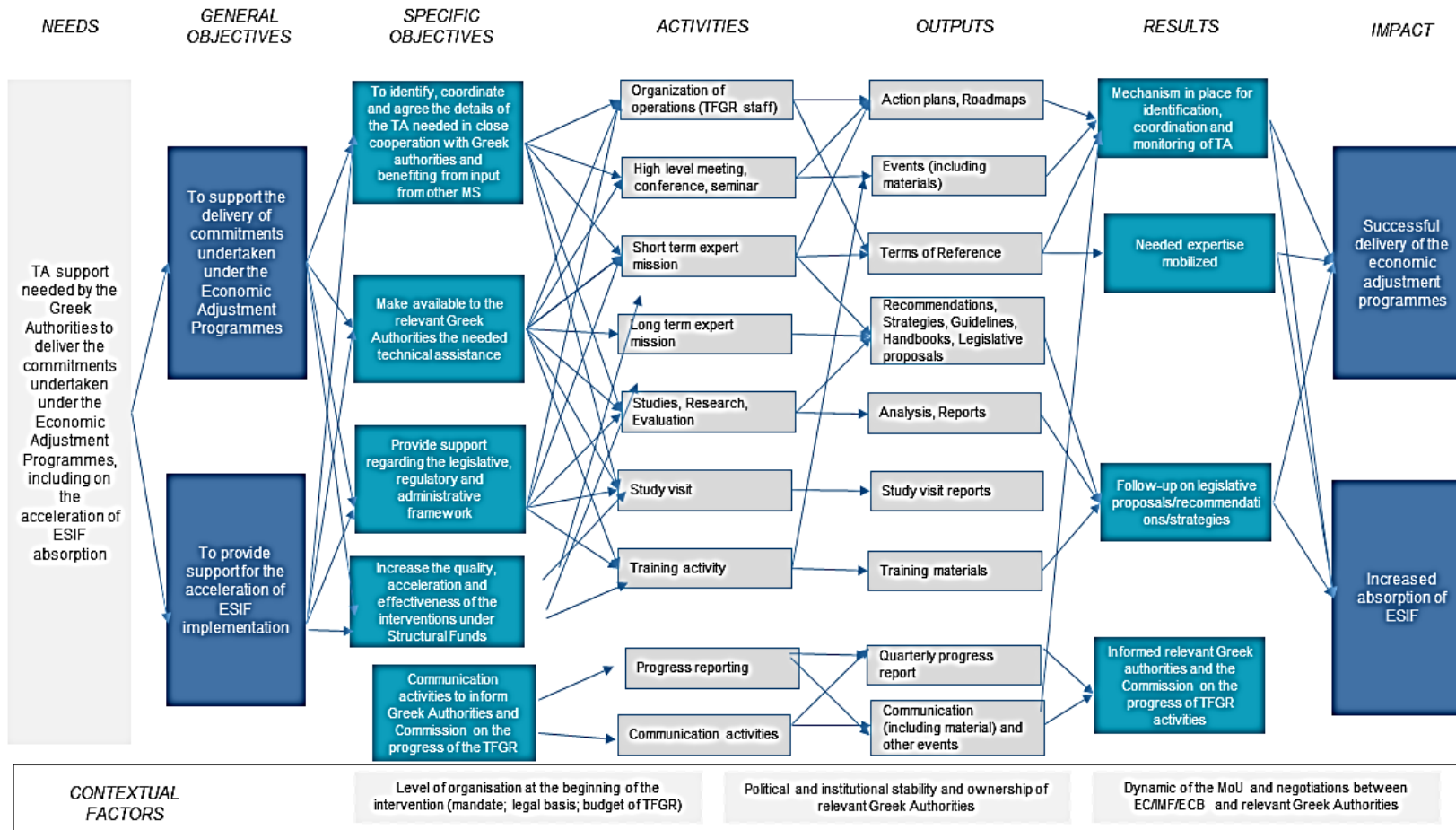
- 2) To provide support regarding the legislative, regulatory and administrative framework;
- 3) To make available to the relevant Greek authorities the needed technical assistance; and
- 4) To increase the stakeholders' awareness of the progress of TFGR activities.

The intervention logic of the TFGR was based on the expectation that the technical assistance activities and outputs would be defined and agreed in detail with the Greek authorities, based on their requests, in order to respond to the identified needs.

The TFGR identified the needs of the Greek Authorities through study visits and expert missions. Following the assessment of the needs, the TFGR planned and organised the appropriate technical assistance with the view to formulate recommendations, guidelines, roadmaps and other guiding documents for implementing specific milestones of the economic adjustment programme, upon request of the Greek Authorities.

Figure 1 below shows the intervention logic of TFGR.

Figure 1: The TFGR intervention logic



Source: Ernst&Young, Analysis 2018

4. IMPLEMENTATION

This section includes a description of selected elements of the TFGR operations.

4.1 Setting up and organisation of the TFGR

The President of the European Commission established the TFGR in July 2011, as an organisational entity initially embedded in the Commission's Director-General of Human Resources and Security. The Head of the Task Force, appointed at a level equivalent to the rank of Director-General⁹, reported directly to the President of the European Commission under the guidance of the Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs (**Figure 2**). The TFGR was placed within the Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs (DG ECFIN) as of 1st May 2012 in order to "*ensure the highest possible levels of synergies, coordination and coherence of the Commission's work to support the economic adjustment programme of Greece*".¹⁰ The TFGR operated from offices in Brussels and Athens and, as of February 2015, employed 65 staff¹¹.

A dedicated financial team in the geographical unit of the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) provided support to the TFGR.

Finally, the TFGR coordinated a High-Level Steering Group - composed by representatives of Greece, other EU Member States, Commission services and, where relevant, representatives of the international organisations – which had an advisory role on the support provided to the Greek Authorities.

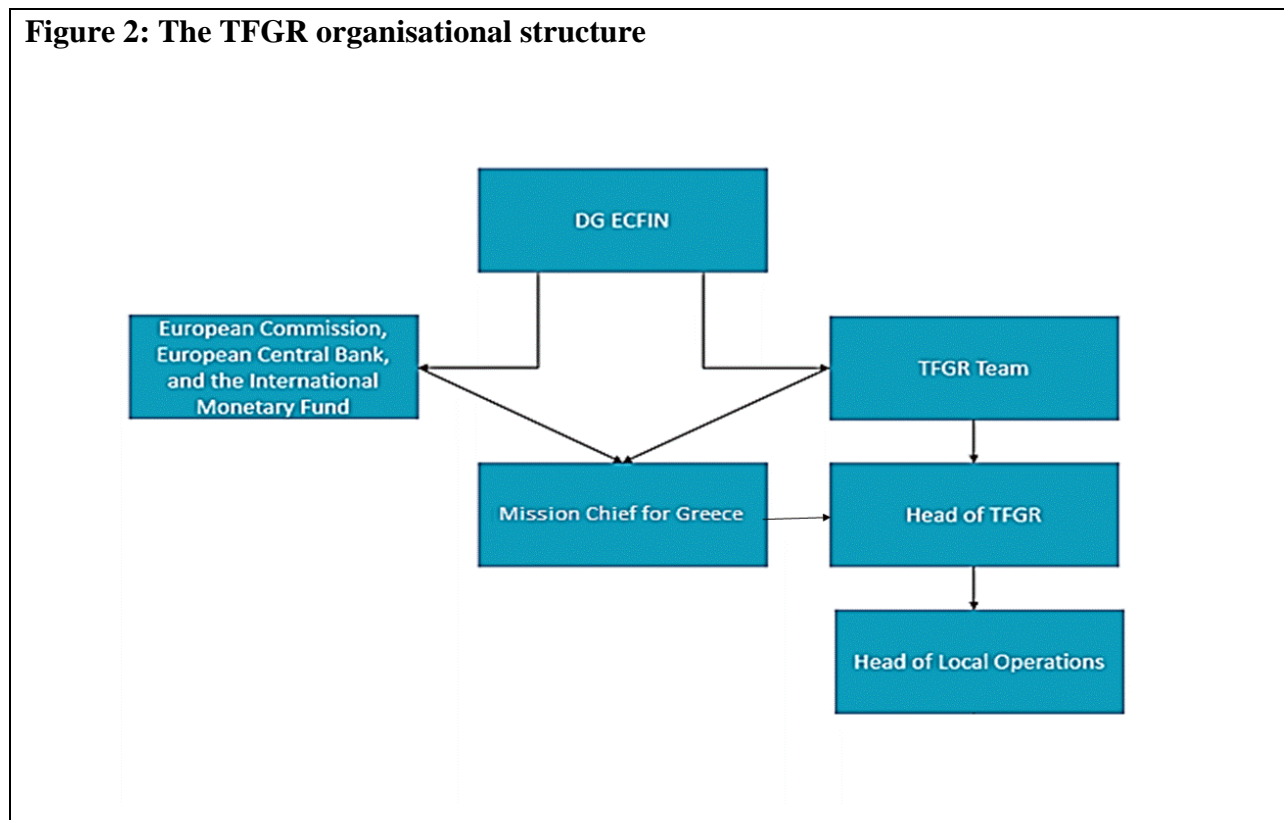
⁹ European Commission, 2011, PERS doc (2011) 111/2 of 19.07.2011. *Information Point*.

¹⁰ Commission decision, 2012, C(2012)2688 final of 18 April 2012,

<http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/10061/2012/EN/PV-2012-1998-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>

¹¹ ECA Special Report no 19/2015 : https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR15_19/SR_TFGR_EN.pdf

Figure 2: The TFGR organisational structure



Source: Ernst&Young, Analysis 2018

4.2 Resources allocation and distribution

The European Commission had to quickly empower the TFGR, provide resources and set up local operations¹².

The total budget spent by the TFGR for the technical assistance to Greece during 2011- 2015 was EUR 12.85 million.

The areas of intervention covered the Public Administration and different economic sectors, in particular:

- 1) Administrative reform at central level, e-Government;

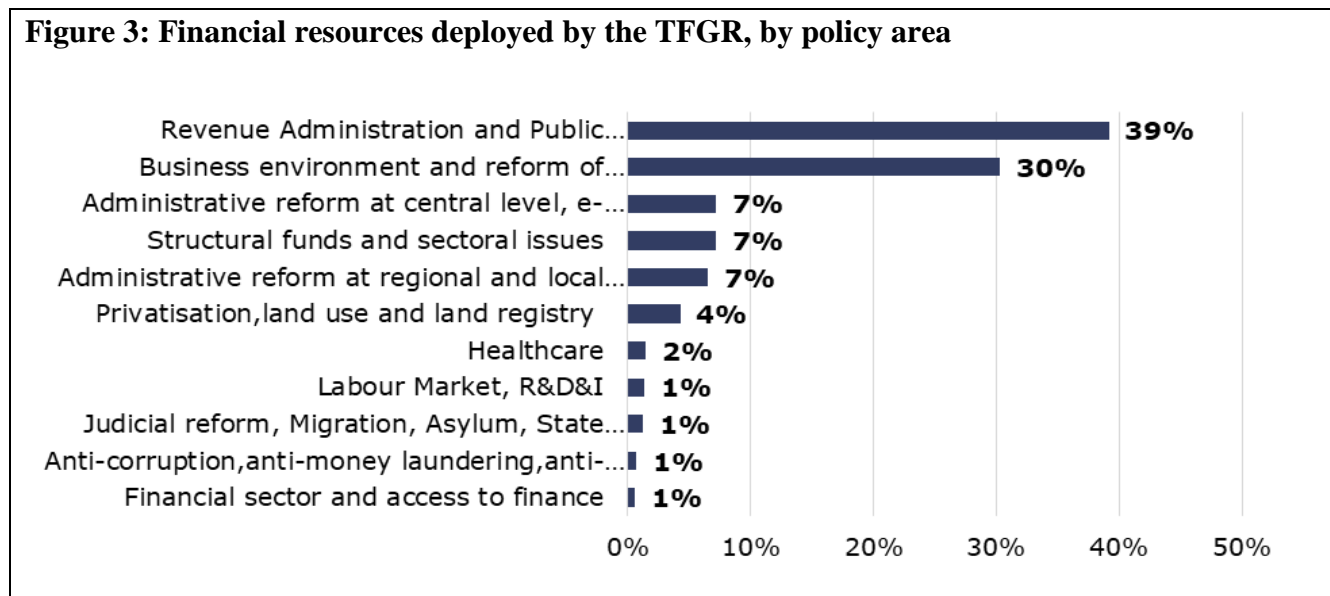
¹² Concomitantly with the establishment of the TFGR, the EC issued an internal decision on 20 July 2011 (PV(2011)1969 final), according to which the Head of the Task Force was appointed and basic administrative measures were decided on. The latter concerned modalities of employing staff, the collaboration of the TFGR with other DGs and EC services, logistical issues, as well as basic financial arrangements.

- 2) Administrative reform at regional and local level;
- 3) Anti-corruption, anti-money laundering, anti-fraud;
- 4) Business environment and reform of product and service markets, public procurement, better regulation;
- 5) Financial sector and access to finance;
- 6) Healthcare;
- 7) Judicial reform, migration, asylum, state aid, infringements;
- 8) Labour Market, social security, innovation & education (R&D&I);
- 9) Privatisation, land use and land registry;
- 10) Revenue administration and public financial management;
- 11) Structural Funds and sectoral issues.

Figure 3 below presents the distribution of this amount per policy area in descending order.

The 39% of the resources have been devoted to interventions in the field of “Revenue Administration and Public Financial Management”

Figure 3: Financial resources deployed by the TFGR, by policy area



Source: Ernst&Young, Analysis 2018 based on technical assistance data of the TFGR, from the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (art. 45 Regulation 1083/2006) and the FISCALIS programme¹³.

4.3 Identification of the needs

Following the identification of the general technical assistance needed by Greece¹⁴, the TFGR assisted the relevant Greek authorities in defining work programmes/roadmaps for technical assistance, containing priorities, concrete assistance activities to be undertaken and related timeframe¹⁵.

The work programmes were either prepared by the TFGR and/or technical assistance providers, in partnership with the relevant Greek authorities, or by the Greek government itself, with the input of the TFGR and/or technical assistance providers. Work programmes were, for example, defined in the field of Administrative Reform (both at central and local level), eGovernance, Anti-Money Laundering, Trade Facilitation, innovation or cadastre.

¹⁴ European Commission, Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs, 2010, “The economic adjustment programme for Greece”- May 2010 - <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/64c89a77-ddc4-46f4-9bb0-18d7e80f6f0c/language-en>

¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-financial-assistance/which-eu-countries-have-received-assistance/financial-assistance-greece_en#taskforceforgreece

4.4 Identification of technical assistance expertise

The identification of the relevant technical support expertise was done in one or two main waves, depending on the policy area:

1) For specific policy areas: selection of Domain Leaders

The responsibility of Domain Leader was undertaken by a national government with a strong track record in a policy field of particular complexity (reform of the public administration, for example). This role had varying characteristics depending on the phase of technical assistance. In the first phase, its role was to assist the Greek authorities in preparing the global architecture and the strategy to implement the necessary reforms. More specifically, the Domain Leader, in close relation with Greek authorities and the TFGR, prepared a draft roadmap, in coordination with TFGR, which would be submitted to the Greek authorities for final adoption. In the second phase, the Domain Leader consulted the Greek authorities for defining which actions and/or sub-actions Greece needed technical assistance and what kind of technical assistance should be provided.

2) For all policy areas: selection of providers

The TFGR selected technical assistance providers (Commission officials, Member States experts, international organisations, private experts) depending on the assistance to be delivered, in coordination with the Greek authorities (and, if relevant, with the Domain Leader).

Table 1: Mapping of Domain Leaders and Member States providing support during the TFGR intervention

Policy areas supported by TFGR	Domain Leader(s)	Member States providing support through public officials, private experts and public agencies
Acceleration of Cohesion Policy projects	No Domain Leader	Austria, Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, United Kingdom
Financial institutions / Access to finance	No Domain Leader	Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom

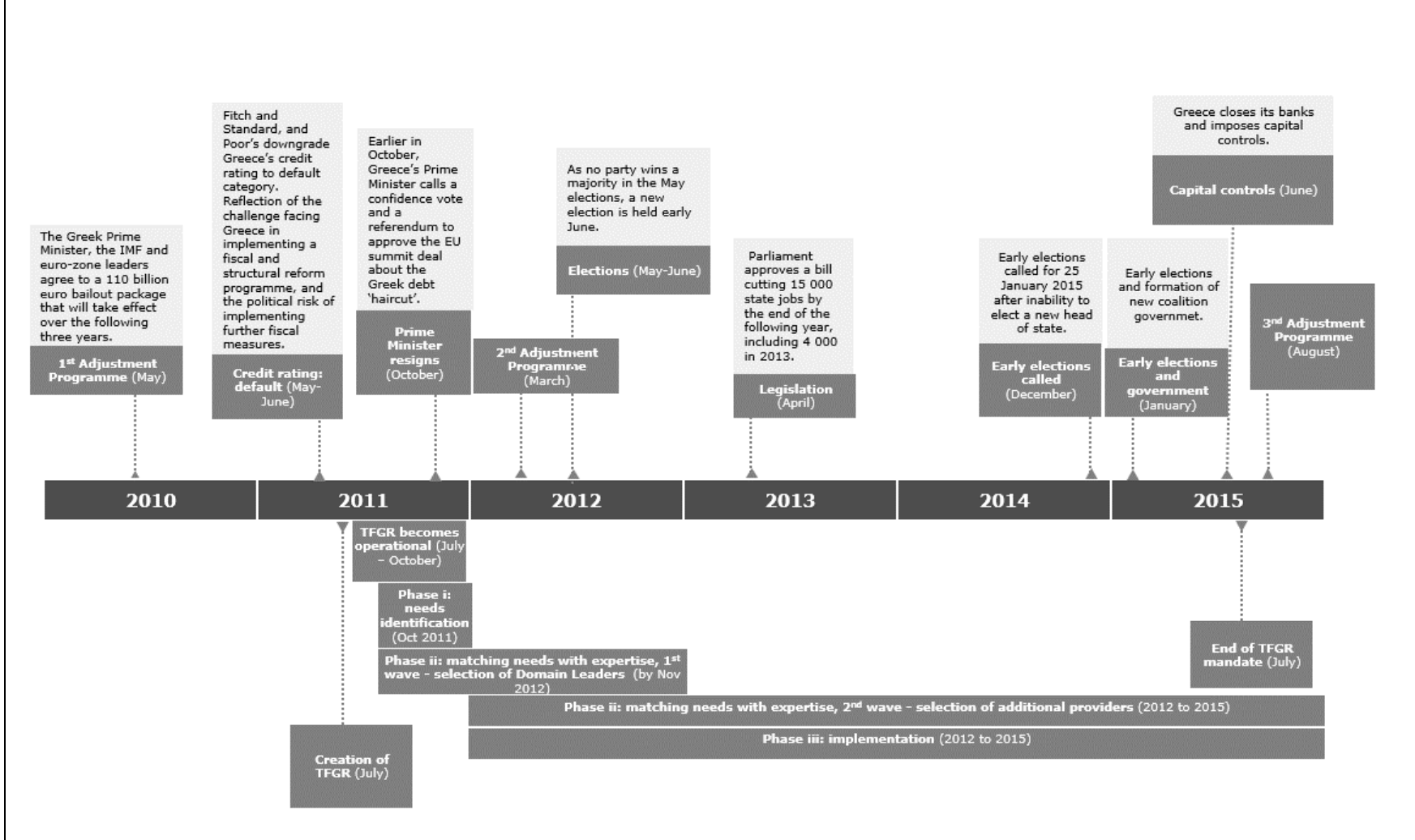
Policy areas supported by TFGR	Domain Leader(s)	Member States providing support through public officials, private experts and public agencies
Administrative reform	France on central administration; Germany on regional and local administration	Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom
Revenue administration and public financial management	Belgium on debt collection; France on high wealth individuals; Netherlands on dispute resolution and on the Hellenic Court of Audit (HCA)	Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom
Anti-money laundering and anti-corruption	Netherlands on anti-money laundering	Austria, Belgium, Germany, Norway
Business environment	Netherlands for export promotion	Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom
Healthcare reform	Germany	Belgium, Estonia, France, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom
Judicial reform	Austria	Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, United Kingdom
Judicial reform, central State Aid Unit and infringements, migration, asylum and borders	No Domain Leader	Austria, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, United Kingdom
Labour market, social security, innovation and education	No Domain Leader	Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom
Privatisation and land registry	Netherlands on land registry	Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom
Industry sectors and services	No Domain Leader	Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany and Italy

Source: Ernst&Young, Analysis 2018 - Assessment based on the TFGR quarterly progress reports (2011 to 2014, listed individually in the bibliography), minutes of the high-level meetings, European Commission, TFGR (2012-2014).¹⁶

The timeline of the TFGR operations is shown in more details in Figure 4.

¹⁶ Ernst&Young, 2019, “*Evaluation of the technical assistance provided by the Task Force for Greece (TFGR) 2011-2015*”, Final report – January 2019 - <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/45625812-2056-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

Figure 4: Milestones and the timeline of the TFGR



Source: Ernst & Young, Analysis 2018

5. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This Staff Working Document assesses the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and added value of the TA activities coordinated and provided by the TFGR. It is based on the data gathered by an external study carried out in 2018¹⁷.

Because of the extensive consultation carried out on targeted stakeholders by the external evaluator, no open public consultation took place.

5.1 The external evaluation carried out in 2018

The methodology applied in the above-mentioned evaluation for gathering data refers to three main sources of data:

- 1) **Desk research** of relevant documents: such as internal assessments of the Commission services, as well as external evaluation studies, including the results of the preliminary evaluation carried out in 2013¹⁸.
- 2) **A structured electronic survey;**
- 3) **In-depth semi-structured interviews**¹⁹.

The stakeholders were grouped into three main categories:

- 1) **Strategic and management** – institutions and individuals involved in the set-up, overall strategic steering and day to day management of TFGR interventions;
- 2) **Beneficiaries** – institutions benefiting from technical assistance interventions coordinated by TFGR;
- 3) **Providers** – international organisations, national agencies and individual experts providing technical assistance.

¹⁷ Ernst&Young, 2019, “*Evaluation of the technical assistance provided by the Task Force for Greece (TFGR) 2011-2015*”, Final report – January 2019 - <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/45625812-2056-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

¹⁸TFGR quarterly reports; Alvarez & Marsal Taxand and Adam Smith International” 2014 - Final report and ECA Special Report no 19/2015.

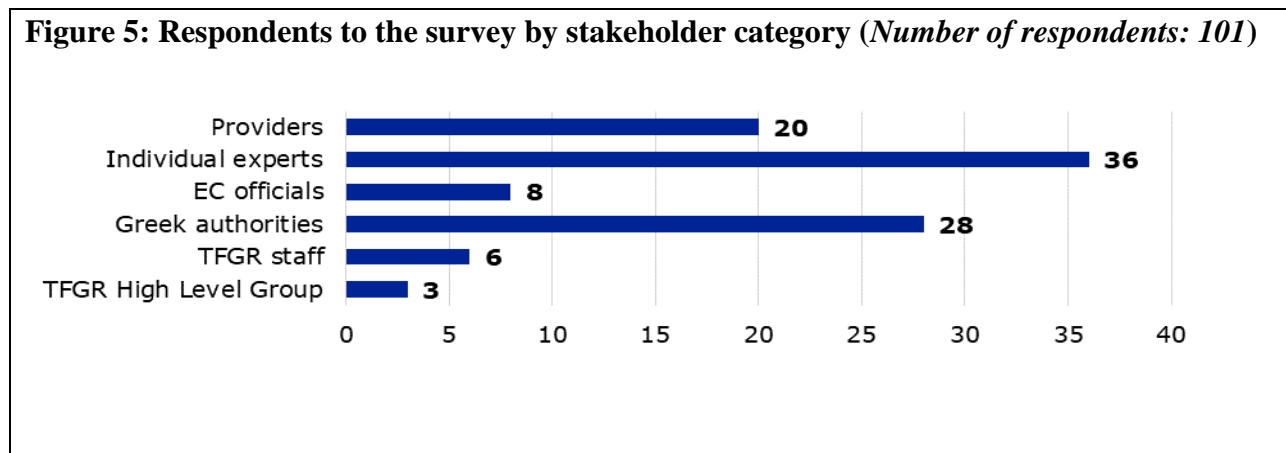
¹⁹A total number of 36 interviews were conducted.

The structured electronic survey targeted 278 stakeholders who were distributed among the three categories as follows:

- 1) Strategic and management: 4%
- 2) Beneficiaries: 33 %
- 3) Providers – including individual experts from the Domain leaders: 63%

Out of the 278 individuals consulted for the survey, 101 responded to the online questionnaire, representing a response rate of 36%.

The Figure 5 shows that there was a balanced distribution of replies among the different stakeholders' categories, with a predominant response from individual experts and from the Greek authorities, who represent the main actors involved in the activities and in the decision-making process for the follow-up of the technical assistance.²⁰



Source: Ernst & Young Questionnaire for targeted stakeholder consultation (2018)

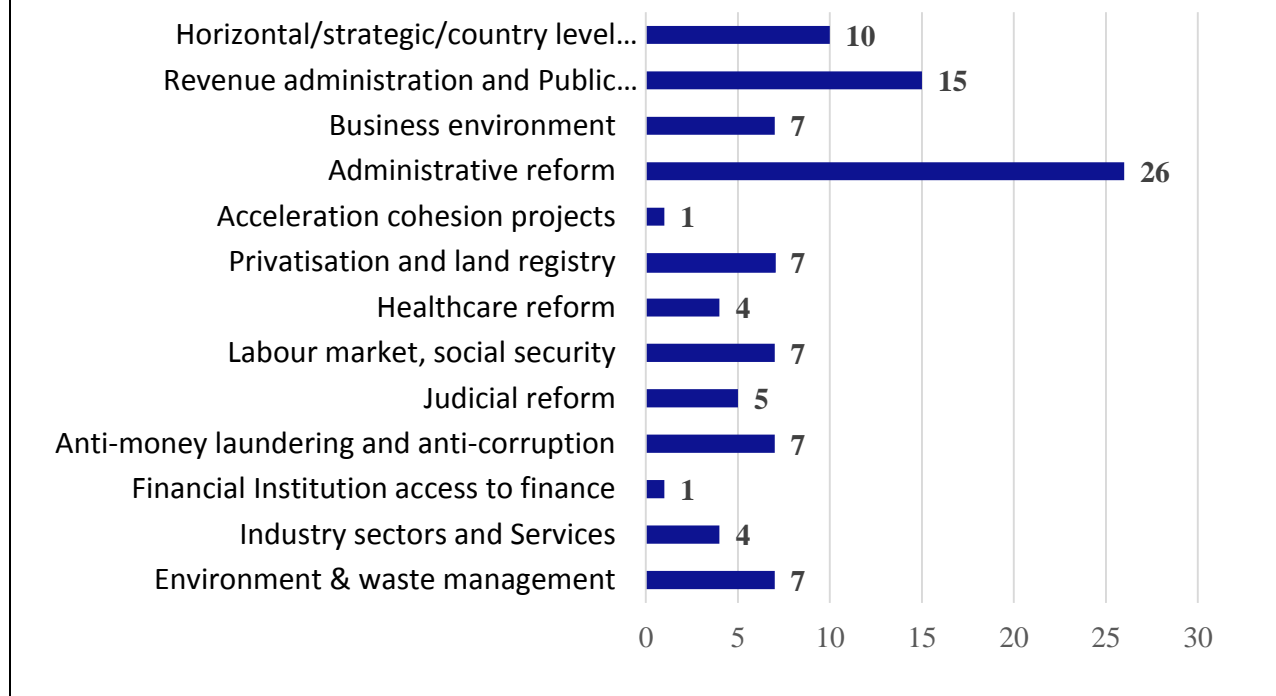
²⁰ Ernst&Young, 2019, "Evaluation of the TA provided by the Task Force for Greece (TFGR) 2011-2015" ISBN 978-92-79-98400-6"
<https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/45625812-2056-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

The survey targeted the following policy areas:

- 1) Horizontal intervention in all areas, as strategic/country level coordinator
- 2) Revenue administration and Public Financial Management
- 3) Business environment
- 4) Administrative reform
- 5) Acceleration of the cohesion projects
- 6) Privatisation and land registry
- 7) Healthcare reform
- 8) Labour market, social security
- 9) Judicial reform
- 10) Anti-money laundering and anti-corruption
- 11) Financial Institution access to finance
- 12) Industry sectors and Services
- 13) Environment & waste management

The replies received were balanced among the different policy areas as illustrated in the following **Figure 6**, with however more weight for those policy areas where the TFGR activities were mostly concentrated (i.e. for the administrative reform area for example).

Figure 6: Respondents to the survey by policy field (Number of respondents: 101)



Source: Ernst & Young Questionnaire for targeted stakeholder consultation (2018)

5.2 Limitations of the external evaluation

This evaluation focuses on the results of the technical assistance. It is conditioned by the fact that the follow-up of the technical assistance actions was to be implemented by the beneficiaries of the assistance. This was an external factor influencing the outcomes of the TFGR activities, which was not under the TFGR responsibility.

In addition, a certain delay generally occurs between the implementation of a reform and its social and economic impacts. Therefore, results and impacts of the TFGR technical assistance can only be observed in the longer term.²¹

²¹European Central Bank, Working Paper N° 2111 – November 2018, “Structural reform waves and economic growth” <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/pdf/scpwps/ecb.wp2111.en.pdf?64de93f52740a46db6434372435c84a>

6. ANALYSIS AND ANSWERS TO THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

6.1 Relevance

This criterion has replied to the following evaluation questions:

- 1) To what extent were the objectives of identifying, coordinating TA needs and assisting Greek authorities relevant for achieving the two specific objectives and namely:
 - a. Supporting the delivery of the commitments within the economic adjustment programme; and
 - b. Accelerating the absorption of the Structural Funds.
- 2) To what extent were the TFGR actions and target groups relevant for achieving its overall and specific objectives?

Based on the results of the desk analysis²², the TFGR supported a significant number of Greek authorities, upon their request. The TFGR focused on key, central institutions responsible for the reform planning and implementation, as defined in the conditionalities of the economic adjustment programmes.

To substantiate this finding, the external evaluation has addressed to the stakeholders an operational question:

“To what extent the TFGR assisted all the relevant institutions that needed support for the implementation of commitments undertaken as part of the economic adjustment programme?”

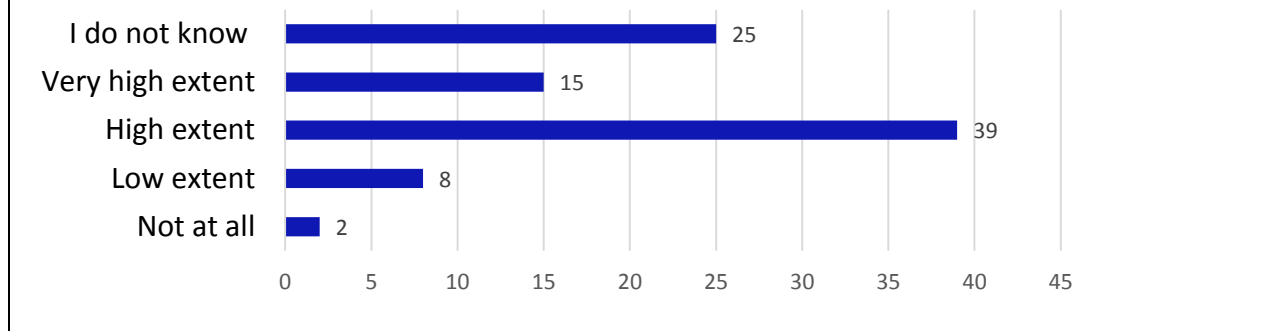
The majority of stakeholders (60%) stated that the TFGR assisted to a high extent or very high extent all institutions needing support for the implementation of commitments undertaken as part of the economic adjustment programme.

10% of respondents considered that the TFGR was of little or no assistance to institutions, some of them calling for more direct cooperation with local authorities.

²² Ernst&Young, 2019, “Evaluation of the TA provided by the Task Force for Greece (TFGR) 2011-2015” ISBN 978-92-79-98400-6” – Pages 8, 9, 22, 24, 25 , mainly based on ECA Special Report no 19/2015; the TFGR quarterly progress reports; 2014 Preliminary Evaluation of the Technical Assistance provided to Greece; reports on the reviews of the economic adjustment programmes and ECA Special Report no. 17/2017

<https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/45625812-2056-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

Figure 7: The extent to which the TFGR assisted the relevant institutions in implementing the commitments taken under the economic adjustment programme
(Number of respondents: 89)



Source: Ernst & Young Questionnaire for targeted stakeholder consultation (2018)

6.2 Effectiveness

The following evaluation questions were addressed in order to assess the effectiveness of the activities of TFGR:

- 1) To what extent have the specific objectives of the TFGR – a) supporting the delivery of the commitments within the economic adjustment programme and b) accelerating the absorption of the SF - been achieved?
- 2) What have been the qualitative and quantitative effects of the technical assistance provided?
- 3) To what extent have the actions financed under the TFGR contributed to achieving its specific objectives?

According to the external evaluation, the SF absorption of the programming period 2007-2013 improved and in the current programming period 2014-2020, clearly the implementation was triggered by the TFGR involvement, but also by the continuous support of the relevant DGs in the EC, namely DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion and DG Regional and Urban Policy.

By the end of 2015 Greece had the highest absorption rate in the EU (99.5%) for Structural Funds allocated under the Cohesion Fund, European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund. This performance was driven particularly by the increase in the maximum EU co-

financing rates to 100% for the 2007-2013 programmes but also by the focused efforts of all stakeholders to use EU funds under the challenging circumstances determined by the financial crisis.²³

TFGR has been the main direct technical assistance provider for the Greek authorities at a central-coordination level as in Greece the resources available under the technical assistance Operational Programme 2007-2013 were spent on the reimbursement of employment costs and additional operational costs (84%). A very small proportion (approximately 1% or roughly €2 million) was spent on developing systems and tools and only 0.1% on capacity-building activities.

Based on the results of the desk research²⁴, the conclusions of the preliminary evaluation of 2014, and the external evaluation carried out in 2018, the main findings are the following:

- a) The TFGR focused on the identification of detailed needs, planning of reforms and the design of solutions;
- b) The detailed needs identification process was extensive and covered a large number of areas, sub-areas, and responsible institutions.

Therefore, **the TFGR was effective in fulfilling its mission** *“of integrating the TA in the adjustment programmes as an effective way to push wide-ranging changes through in a short space of time, but, as such is not conducive to achieving sustainable reform. By definition, this model of “independent intervention of TA” is not applicable outside of situations of extreme distress”*²⁵.

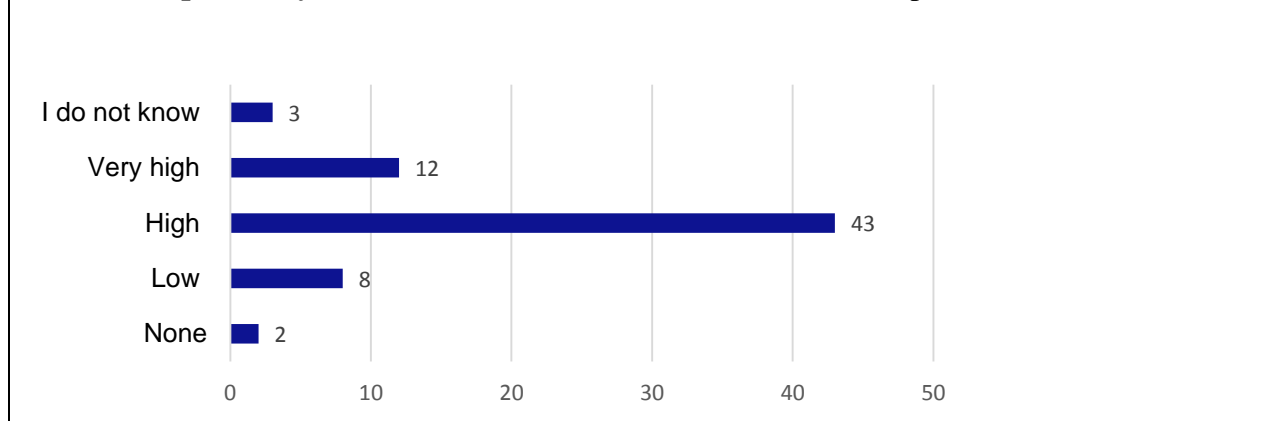
The results of the targeted stakeholder consultation are reported below:

²³ Ernst&Young, 2019, “Evaluation of the TA provided by the Task Force for Greece (TFGR) 2011-2015” ISBN 978-92-79-98400-6” – Page 33.
European Commission (2016). Delivery system. Final report. Work package 12. Ex post evaluation of Cohesion Policy programmes 2007-2013, focusing on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF).

²⁴ Alvarez & Marsal Taxand and Adam Smith International” 2014 – “*Preliminary Evaluation of the Technical Assistance provided to Greece in 2011-2013*”- Final report, Page 44.

²⁵ Alvarez & Marsal Taxand and Adam Smith International” 2014 – “*Preliminary Evaluation of the Technical Assistance provided to Greece in 2011-2013*”- Final report, Page 44.

Figure 8: The extent to which the Greek Authorities’ need of support was identified in detail, as reported by the stakeholder consultation (Number of respondents: 68)



Source: Ernst & Young Questionnaire for targeted stakeholder consultation (2018)

The large majority of respondents (80%) found that the needs of the Greek authorities were identified in detail to a high or very high extent. Those that disagreed considered that this was due to uncertainties in the political framework or to lack of administrative capacity from the Member State. These findings were corroborated by both Greek and international respondents.

As the initial technical assistance requests representing the needs identified by the Greek authorities were general in nature, the TFGR undertook great efforts to specify the necessary reform actions. The **key determinants** for the adequate specification of needs were the Greek authorities' capacity to perform such specification of needs, the availability of financial resources for swift expertise deployment and the involvement of the existing national network of experts.

In this context the contribution of Member States and of international organisations, coordinated by the TFGR, enabled a rapid and appropriate design of the support to be provided²⁶.

The TFGR provided adequate support in terms of improving legislative and regulatory frameworks where requested/needed. For example in the area of absorption of EU funds, the

²⁶ Ernst&Young, 2019, “Evaluation of the technical assistance provided by the Task Force for Greece (TFGR) 2011-2015”, Final report – January 2019 - <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/45625812-2056-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

Based on interviews with TFGR staff, EC officials, Greek authorities, providers and individual experts, desk research (ECA Special Report no 19/2015) and survey (incl. answers to open questions). 59% of the responding stakeholders (40 out of 68) answered ‘high extent’ and ‘very high extent’ to: *To what extent the Member States and European Commission inputs into this process were adequately coordinated by the TFGR?* Only 15% (10 out of 68) have a different view, answering ‘low extent’ and ‘not at all’. The ‘I don’t know’ answers (26%, namely 18 out of 68) are explained by the lack of information of providers and independent experts (66%, namely 12 out of 18) on this subject.

rules relating to the speeding up of procedures for environmental licensing, expropriations, bidding and contracting procedures were prepared with support from the TFGR.

The TFGR supported substantially the strategic preparation for 2014-2020 programming period for Greece including key simplification measures introduced in the relating implementing law.

The support for the restructuring of administrative frameworks was provided in most policy areas, e.g. the reorganisation and consolidation of tax and customs administrations.

Moreover, the TFGR extensively supported the efforts undertaken by different ministries to implement the recommendations of the Greek central administration. The role of several central institutions such as the Hellenic Court of Audit (HCA), the Single Public Procurement Authority, the General Secretariat for Public Revenue, the Labour Inspectorate and Hellenic Manpower Employment Organization (OAED) was strengthened by the TFGR technical assistance, achieving therefore the specific objective of “providing support on the legislative, regulatory and administrative framework”.

6.3 Efficiency

In order to assess the efficiency of the TFGR activities, the following questions have been raised:

- 1) To what extent did the available financial envelopes adequately cover the TA needs?
- 2) To what extent did the coordination, management and administrative structures in place ensure an economic and efficient use of resources in the achievement of TFGR outputs, results and impacts?
- 3) To what extent were the actions and outputs delivered at a reasonable cost?

Efficiency has been analysed by taking into account two variables: the timely delivery of the support and the budget spent for carrying out those different activities.

According to the data gathered by the evaluator, the TFGR adequately supported the technical assistance needs expressed by the Greek authorities by ensuring in a timely manner i) detailed needs identification; ii) matching with needed expertise; iii) implementation of the support measures.

The TFGR was set up less than two months after the request of the Greek authorities. The needs of the Greek authorities were identified within less than a month from the moment the Greek

government submitted its request for support, and high-level meetings were organised to further specify these needs²⁷. The needs identification process continued throughout the lifetime of TFGR as new policy areas, projects and work-streams were constantly added to the TFGR intervention.

The efficient use of resources for the achievement of TFGR outputs, results and impacts was ensured through a timely deployment of financial, human and ICT resources, as well as by a management mode that enabled decision-making focused on the timeliness principle and by the procurement of services at a reasonable cost. Coordination mechanisms were put in place to ensure operational consistency of TFGR actions, while the administrative structures and procedures induced a reasonable level of administrative burden to the extent that they depended on the TFGR.

Based on the stakeholders' answers, the administrative processes of TFGR were assessed as satisfactory. Providers and experts were less satisfied because of the administrative burden associated to the reimbursement of expenditures. This aspect was acknowledged to be the effect of the EU general spending rules to be applied also to the financial sources available to the TFGR.

Nevertheless, the overall perception of the stakeholders was that the administrative burden was reasonable and, consequently, that the TFGR administrative procedures could not have been further simplified.

Some contextual factors influenced – positively or negatively - the efficiency of the TFGR interventions.

According to the evidence collected by the evaluator²⁸, the **factors positively influencing the efficiency** of the interventions were the following:

- a) the solidarity of other Member States;

²⁷ Specifically, the Greek authorities communicated an overview of their needs for support to the TFGR on 4 October 2011 and the first high-level meeting took place the same month.

²⁸ Ernst&Young, 2019, "Evaluation of the TA provided by the Task Force for Greece (TFGR) 2011-2015" , page 40 ISBN 978-92-79-98400-6" - <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/45625812-2056-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

- b) the ownership of the Greek authorities; and
- c) the dedication and ongoing involvement of the TFGR staff.

Factors limiting the efficiency of intervention were, according to the stakeholders' opinion:

- a) the political instability;
- b) the existing administrative capacity; and
- c) the exiting budgetary options/constraints.

The overall conclusion, based on the data analysis,²⁹ is that the **TFGR intervention was efficient**. It supported the technical assistance needs expressed by the Greek authorities in a timely manner and within the budgetary constraints. It did so despite the initial period of funding uncertainty and the lack of a dedicated budget³⁰.

6.4 Coherence

In order to assess the coherence of the TFGR, the following questions were raised:

- 1) By design, were the TFGR actions coherent with the policies of the Greek government?
- 2) Was an internal coordination mechanism put in place in order to avoid overlaps with Structural Funds interventions implemented in Greece?
- 3) Were complementarities with Structural Funds under shared management fully exploited?

According to the data gathered through the desk research and the targeted stakeholder consultation carried out by the external evaluator, **the TFGR activities were in line with the commitments undertaken by the Greek Government under the economic adjustment programmes**³¹, therefore coherent with the policies.

²⁹ Ernst&Young, 2019, "Evaluation of the TA provided by the Task Force for Greece (TFGR) 2011-2015" , page 46, <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/45625812-2056-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

³⁰ 94% of the responding Greek authorities (16 out of 17) answered 'highly adequate' and 'adequate' to the following question: How do you assess the time lag between the moment when your request for support was submitted to TFGR and the moment when your needs were comprehensively identified, together with TFGR?

³¹ Ernst&Young, 2019, "Evaluation of the technical assistance provided by the Task Force for Greece (TFGR) 2011-2015", Final report – January 2019 – page 52 - <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/45625812-2056-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

As for the internal mechanism coordination, it was successfully put in place to avoid funding overlaps with Structural Funds interventions implemented in Greece.

The avoidance of overlaps between the TFGR actions and Structural Funds interventions implemented in Greece was conducted through an internal procedure applied in the case of contracts financed by the centrally managed technical assistance budgets of ESF/ ERDF³².

The stakeholders responding to the survey likewise confirmed the coherence between the TFGR interventions with the Greek policies.

An internal coordination mechanism was put in place within the Commission to avoid overlaps of EU funds implemented in Greece. In particular, the analysis of potential overlaps between the TFGR actions and Structural Funds interventions implemented in Greece (ESF/ERDF) was conducted through an internal procedure applied by the dedicated financial and operational teams in the DG for Employment, Inclusion and Social Affairs.

6.5 EU added value

The EU added value has been assessed against the following sub-criteria:

- 1) The contribution of the TFGR activities to the development and implementation of solutions that address national challenges which have an impact on cross-border or Union-wide challenges;
- 2) The contribution of the TFGR activities to EU values, including solidarity;
- 3) The contribution of the TFGR activities to a consistent and coherent implementation of EU laws and policies.

According to the data gathered by the external evaluator, through desk research and targeted stakeholder consultation, the TFGR was the catalyst for the mobilisation of tools and resources and its involvement served to trigger or accelerate reforms in Greece³³.

³² Ernst&Young, 2019, “*Evaluation of the TA provided by the Task Force for Greece (TFGR) 2011-2015*” , page 53 - <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/45625812-2056-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

³³ In addition to the sources mentioned in specific case, the reconstruction of the TFGR intervention based on desk research also supported the findings: TFGR quarterly progress reports (2011 to 2014, listed individually in the bibliography), ECA Special Report no 19/2015, Alvarez & Marsal Taxand and Adam Smith International *Final report: VC/2014/002*, minutes of the high-level meetings.

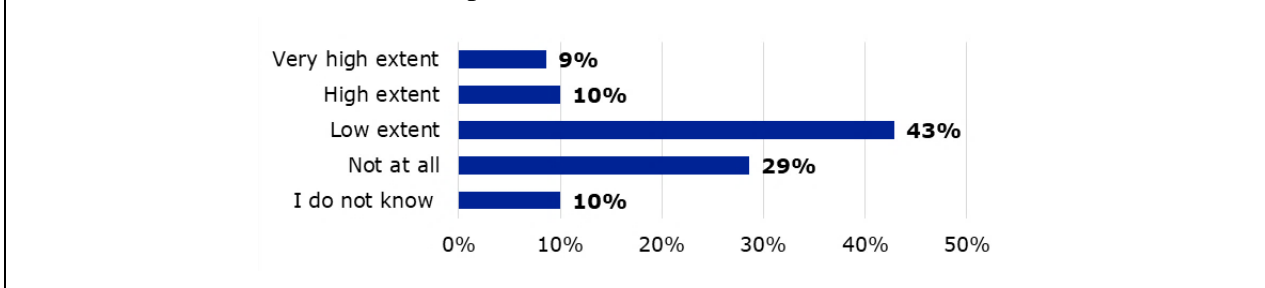
The solidarity of Member States was essential for a timely identification and mobilization of expertise. This happened not only in the initial phase of needs identification, when certain Member States promptly offered to become Domain Leaders, but also in the subsequent phases.³⁴

The creation of the TFGR is considered as an “ad-hoc” instrument – built under strict deadlines – for supporting structural reforms. It mobilised at the same time at the European Commission, Member States’ and international organisations’ levels, in order to address the national challenges with Union-wide effects.

According to 29% of the stakeholders’ opinion, **a similar national action for the provision of technical assistance would not have been possible without the EU and the TFGR**. Almost half (43%) of those who responded to the question were of the view that a similar national action for the provision of technical assistance had a low probability to be implemented. This has been highlighted in particular by considering the scale of the needed reforms, the particular tight deadlines and the budgetary constraints, i.e. lacking of a specific budget line dedicated to this type of intervention. On the other end, approximately 19% of stakeholders were of the view that the technical assistance activities were likely or very likely to be implemented without the TFGR.

³⁴ Ernst&Young, 2019, “*Evaluation of the TA provided by the Task Force for Greece (TFGR) 2011-2015*” , page 40 - <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/45625812-2056-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

Figure 9: The extent to which the TA activities implemented could have been carried out without the TFGR (Number of respondents: 70)



Source: Ernst & Young Questionnaire for targeted stakeholder consultation (2018)

7. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the evaluation of activities carried out by the TFGR was to reply to the two main questions raised by the Court of Auditors,

- 1) To what extent was the EU TA provided to Greece under the coordination of the TFGR managed effectively?
- 2) To what extent has the EU TA provided to Greece under the coordination of the TFGR contributed positively to the process of reforms in Greece?

Based on the external study findings and by the data gathered in the context of the evaluation process, the following conclusions were drawn³⁵:

- 1) The TFGR intervention **was overall relevant** in satisfying the needs, given the particular situation in Greece where immediate and wide-ranging of actions were necessary to redress the financial and socio-economic situation. The TFGR intervened swiftly, mobilised support from the Member States and the European Commission and adequately coordinated the requests from the Greek authorities for assistance with available expertise.

³⁵ Ernst&Young, 2019, “Evaluation of the TA provided by the Task Force for Greece (TFGR) 2011-2015” , page 61 - <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/45625812-2056-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

- 2) . The **specific objectives of the TFGR were largely achieved**. The TFGR succeeded to a high extent to detail the needs of the Greek authorities and to define concrete actions for reform implementation. The high-level meetings played an important role in elaborating and matching Greek authorities' needs with the technical assistance. The TFGR involved an extensive network of international organisations, European Commission representatives and experts for this purpose in order to be able to offer to Greek authorities the needed support.
- 3) The detailed technical assistance **needs of the Greek authorities were timely identified**, given the swift operationalisation of the TFGR. Furthermore, identification and mobilisation of expertise was done in a very short period thanks to the direct support provided by the TFGR and by the European Commission staff, as well as thanks to the solidarity demonstrated by the Member States. The TFGR human resources and organisational set-up were efficiently deployed, making use of flexibility within the existing European Commission rules, specifically in order to enhance time efficiencies. The pace of implementation of the support for structural reforms in Greece was adequate, even if marked by contextual and institutional factors such as the political instability.
- 4) The size of **TFGR's budget was appropriate and proportional** to the type of intervention it was set out to achieve – integrating several funding sources to finance the actions of the TFGR. **Administrative burden was reasonable**.
- 5) Based on its mandate, the **TFGR intervention was in line with the commitments undertaken by the Greek Government under the economic adjustment programmes**. The coordination mechanism put in place at the level of European Commission services and in particular between the TFGR and DG EMPL (in the latter, through a dedicated financial team and the geographical unit in charge of Greece) focused primarily on avoiding potential funding overlaps. The TFGR actions contributed then to a coherent implementation of EU law and policies.
- 6) The **TFGR provided significant EU added value** by achieving better results than what could have been achieved solely by the actions of the supported Member State, by

leveraging on the high-level and senior expertise of various DGs of the European Commission and of the involved Member States.

- 7) The **TFGR contributed to the development and implementation of solutions that addressed national challenges that have an impact on cross-border or Union-wide challenges**. In addition, the TFGR supported the promotion of **EU values**, in particular **solidarity within the European Union**. Both the European Commission and EU Member States provided expertise and financed the cost of such expertise. Good practices were exchanged extensively in almost all policy areas both to support the planning of needed reforms, as well as to develop and/or pilot specific solutions for reforms. Out of the solutions implemented in Greece, several could be identified as **transferable good practices** (e.g. trade facilitation roadmap in business environment, the realisation of job descriptions with respect to administrative reform at central level). Finally, most of the stakeholders recognized the EU added value of the TFGR intervention, either by its direct or coordinated technical contribution or by its contribution to triggering some organisational and functional changes at the level of Greek authorities.

7.1 Lessons learned

- 1) Future **similar interventions should be clearly framed from the start**. An in-depth problem analysis, the key elements of the intervention and the identification of the objectives to be achieved, the definition of the expected results with the respective indicators constitute the necessary programming phase to be performed before any action. Although, in case of economic and financial crisis - when the quick deployment of assistance is required – this is hard to be implemented.
- 2) An **adequate monitoring system** would also need to be put in place from the outset of the intervention.
- 3) The **coherence with other EU/national interventions** implemented by the Member State requesting the support should be set as a pre-condition for the award of support. It would benefit the recipient country both in terms of impacts as well as sustainability of reform actions.

- 4) The creation of a **dedicated budget** upon the set-up of similar instruments could lead to more predictability in the planning of the support for all relevant stakeholders and enable a swift delivery of support on the ground.
- 5) The request of support received in the framework of similar interventions need to be substantiated by a **comprehensive needs identification** based on which the objectives of the needed support can be drawn, as well as the nature, volume, length and sequence of activities can be determined.
- 6) Attention should be paid to the **project management and technical capacity** available at the level of the entity requesting the support.
- 7) The **partnership between the beneficiary institution and providers** of technical support should be strengthened, to ensure ownership and endorsement/adoption of outputs and to facilitate the reform implementation process.
- 8) The technical assistance should focus on **operational activities related to the implementation of reforms** and building, as needed, the capacity of the requesting institutions to implement such reforms.
- 9) A **structured database of technical assistance providers** should be developed to facilitate rapid identification of required expertise.
- 10) The **role of the institution managing the intervention** should be clearly defined in alignment with the tasks and responsibilities of other stakeholders involved. The extent to which the beneficiary institution applies/uses the outputs of the technical support should be monitored.
- 11) A mechanism should be put in place to clarify the **obligations of supported beneficiaries** with a view to ensuring that expected results are obtained.
- 12) A **communication strategy** should be developed and implemented.

Annex 1: Procedural information

1. LEAD DG, DeCIDE PLANNING/CWP REFERENCES

Secretariat General/Structural Reform Support Service - Decide planning reference: PLAN/2017/652

2. ORGANISATION AND TIMING

The evaluation was launched in the last quarter of 2017 and was concluded in May 2019.

3. EXCEPTIONS TO THE BETTER REGULATION GUIDELINES

A public consultation has not been carried out, because of limited extra value, considering the comprehensive targeted consultation of all involved stakeholders.

4. CONSULTATION OF THE RSB (IF APPLICABLE) : NA

5. EVIDENCE, SOURCES AND QUALITY

The evaluation is based on the conclusions of the external evaluation as well as on the including the results of the preliminary evaluation carried out in 2013.

The external evaluation study conducted in 2018 gathered qualitative and quantitative data using a variety of methods that include: desk research of relevant documents; structured electronic survey tailored to each stakeholder category; in-depth semi-structured interviews with stakeholders.

Limitations of the current evaluation:

- 1) The data collected through the electronic survey were not based on a pre-identified statistically representative sample of respondents as the overall population of stakeholders was not known prior to the launch of the survey. However, all stakeholders for whom contact data were made available to the evaluator by the various Commission services were invited to participate in the survey in order to allow the widest possible coverage. Furthermore, all stakeholder categories provided inputs into the electronic

survey and additional in-depth interviews were conducted to balance the representation of stakeholder category by the main policy areas; and

- 2) The partial availability of information from secondary sources (i.e. detailed data regarding the outputs and results of the actions) was compensated by the use of in-depth interviews conducted with stakeholders at the level of the main policy areas and other information available.

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, the evaluation findings are based on evidence as triangulated by the data collected through desk research, by the targeted survey and by the in-depth interviews with all relevant stakeholder categories, with an “*a posteriori*” balanced representation at the level of the main policy areas targeted by the TFGR and, therefore, they can be considered conclusive.

Annex 2 (Stakeholder consultation activities) - Synopsis Report

1. OUTLINE OF THE CONSULTATION

The synopsis report presents the results of all stakeholder consultation activities conducted in the framework of the Evaluation of the TA provided by the TFGR by the external contractor. Thus, it presents the opinions of the stakeholders, as reflected through the two data collection tools, the interviews and the online survey. The triangulation of the information hereby collected with the evidence extracted through desk research, and the corresponding objective conclusions taken on this basis are the subject of the final evaluation report itself.

The targeted consultation included the following categories of stakeholders with enhanced interest and influence over TFGR activities:

- 1) **strategic and management** – institutions and individuals involved in the set-up, overall strategic steering and day-to-day management of TFGR interventions (i.e. EC officials, members of the High-Level Group (HLG), TFGR members of staff);
- 2) **beneficiaries** – institutions benefiting from TA actions coordinated / delivered by TFGR; and
- 3) **providers** – international organizations, national development agencies, and individual experts providing TA support.

The following data collection tools were used in order to reach out to the relevant audience and to collect the appropriate information:

- 1) **targeted consultation** through an electronic survey based on questionnaires customised by stakeholder category; and
- 2) **in-depth, semi-structured interviews** based on interview guidelines customised by stakeholder category.

The electronic survey was launched in English and Greek on 2 May 2018 and sent out to 397 stakeholders, after having asked for the consent for using contact details (i.e. email addresses). Out of the 278 individuals reached by the survey, 101 individuals responded, representing a

response rate of 36%. It can also be pointed out that, at times, respondents answered “I don’t know” to the survey questions, which can be attributed on a case-by-case basis to issues like a limited involvement in scope or in duration during the TFGR intervention.

Following the completion of the electronic survey, a total of 36 in-depth, semi structured interviews (i.e. with some predefined questions and guidelines to follow) have been conducted, beyond the 30 interviews planned in the inception phase of the evaluation. The aim of the interviews was three-fold:

- 1) investigating specific issues raised through the survey that merit being explored in detail;
- 2) understanding issues that received contradictory and inconsistent feedback by different respondents to the survey; and
- 3) collecting information to fill any gap from the survey.

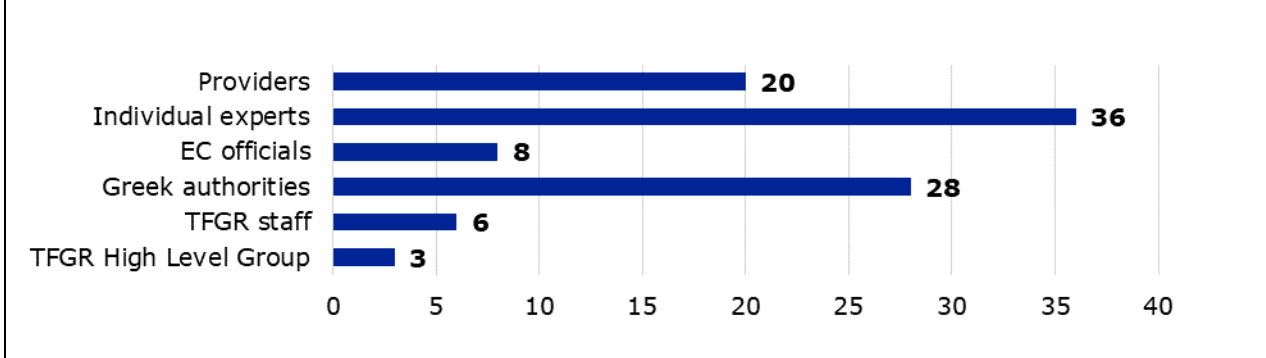
The approach to the stakeholder consultation, both through the survey and the interviews, ensured that all minimum standards of the Commission regarding stakeholder consultation were respected.

2. CONSULTED STAKEHOLDERS’ PROFILES

The analysis reveals that the joint use of the electronic survey and the in-depth interviews ensured an overall balanced representation of stakeholders participating in the targeted consultation, both from the perspective of representation of stakeholder categories, and from the perspective of representation at policy level.

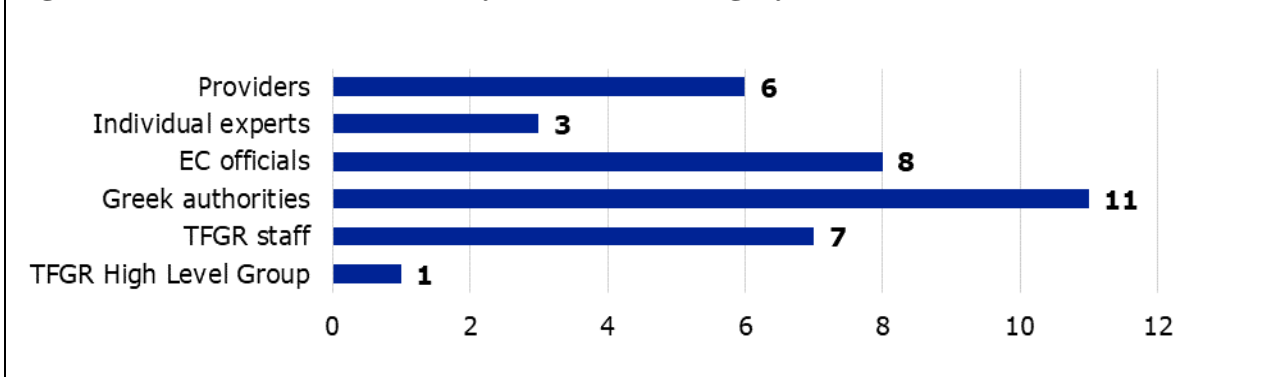
The following figures present the stakeholder categories consulted during the electronic survey and respectively, in-depth interviews.

Figure 10: Respondents to the survey by stakeholder category (Number of respondents: 101)



Source: Ernst & Young, Analysis 2018

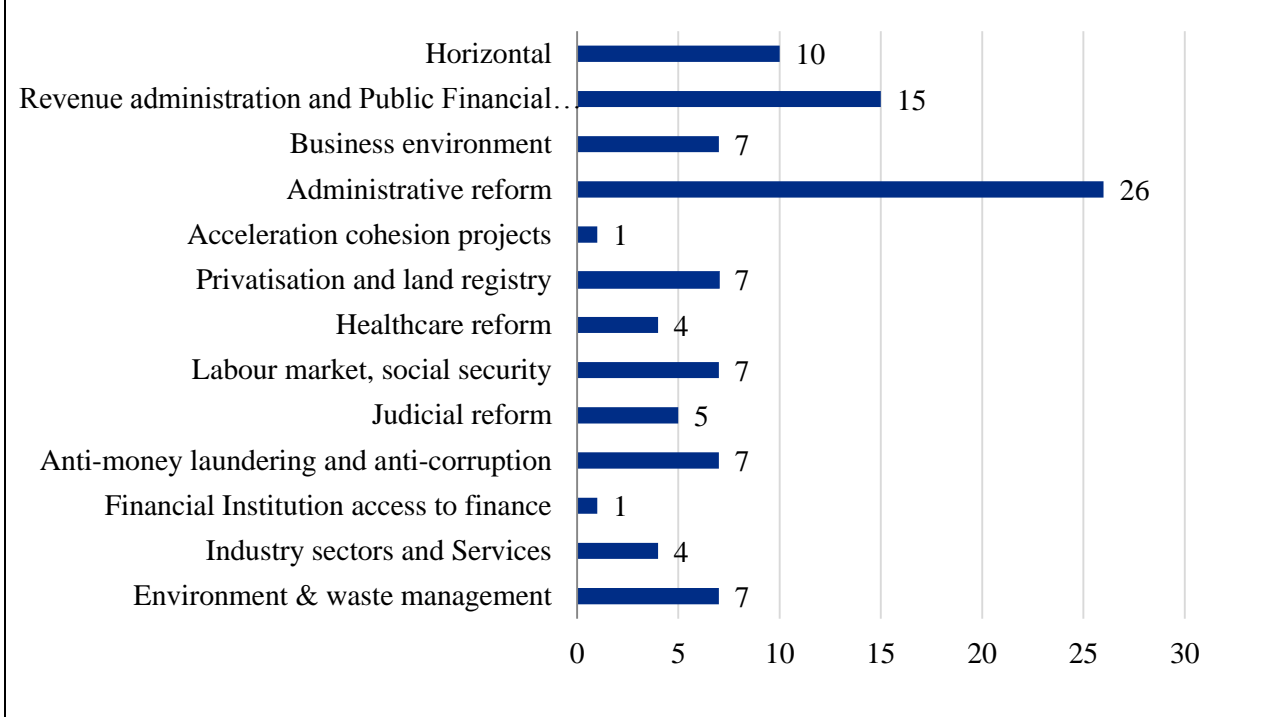
Figure 11: Number of interviews by stakeholder category (Number of interviewees: 36)



Source: Ernst & Young, Analysis 2018

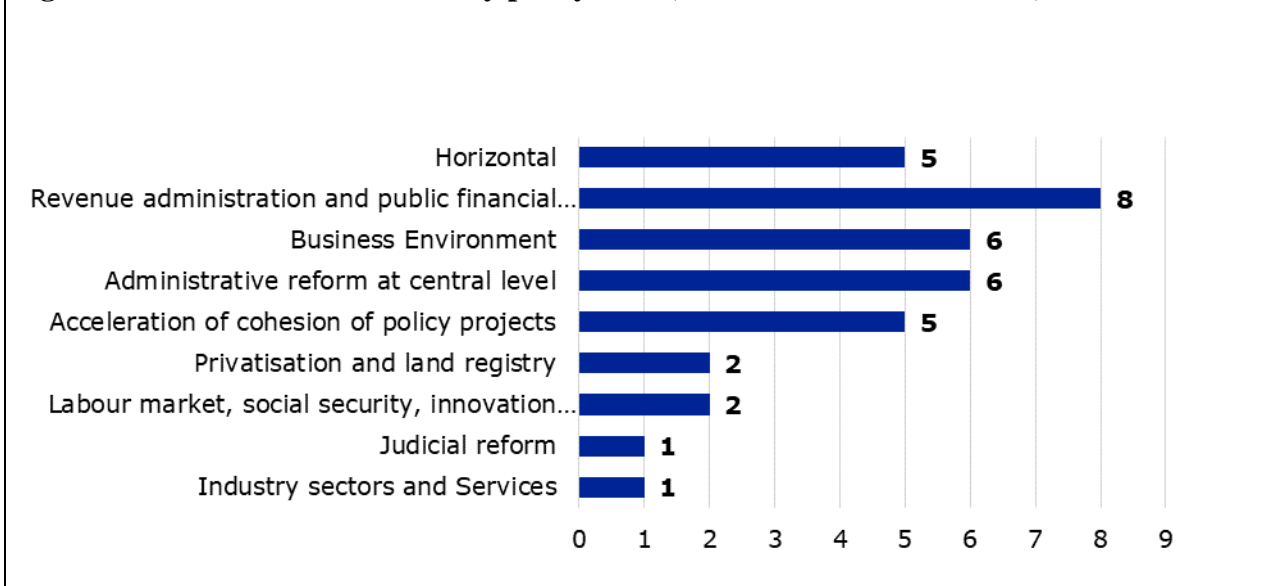
At the same time, there was a balanced representation among policy areas, with more emphasis on those having the largest share in the budget. When a policy area was not well represented in the survey, they were complemented by interviews.

Figure 12: Respondents to the survey by policy field (Number of respondents: 101)



Source: Ernst & Young, Analysis 2018

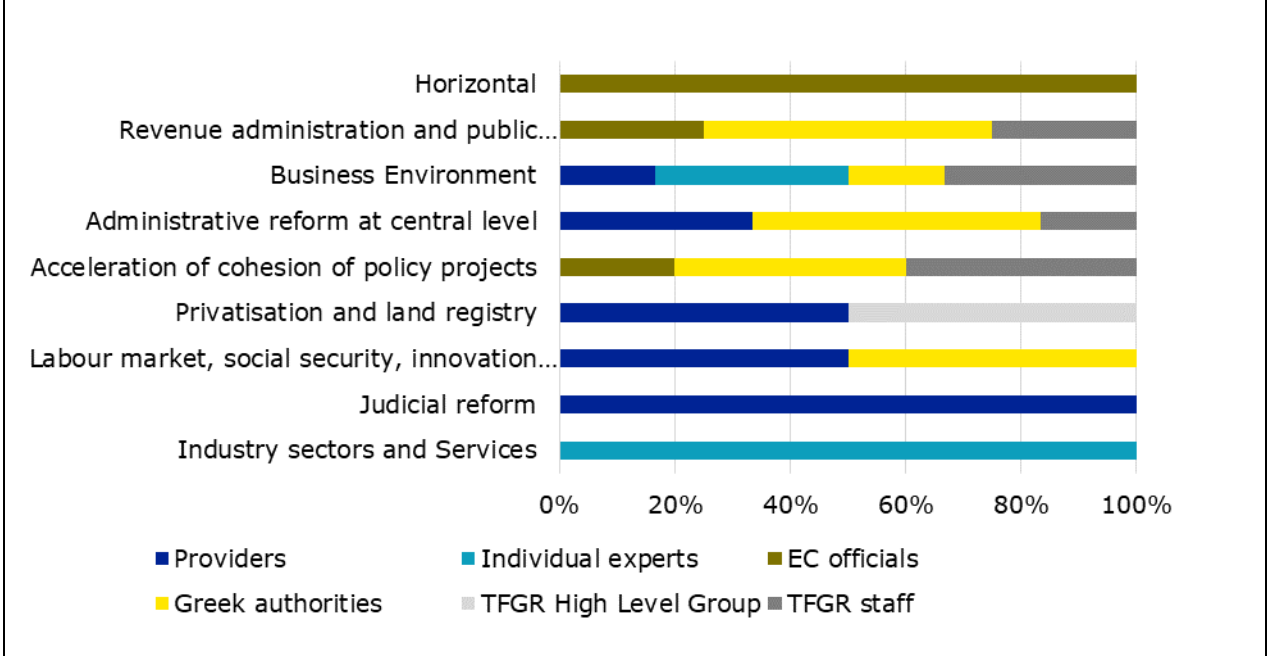
Figure 13: Number of interviews by policy field (Number of interviewees: 36)



Source: EY Questionnaire for targeted stakeholder consultation, 2018

Finally, the following figure presents the distribution of stakeholders participating in in-depth interviews by categories at the level of each policy area.

Figure 14: Distribution of interviews by policy field and stakeholder category (Number of interviewees: 36)



Source: Ernst & Young, Analysis 2018