

**Study on the EU and its  
Member States mobilizing  
Public Sector Expertise for  
Development**

**Phase II – analysis paper**

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## Acronyms

AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
COD	Ordinary legislative procedure
COPOLAD	Cooperation Programme Between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union Drug Policies
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
DG DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
EFSD+	European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus
EL PACCTO	Europe Latin America Technical Assistance Programme against Transnational Organised Crime ( <i>Programa de Asistencia Ccntra el Crimen Transnacional Organizado</i> )
EU	European Union
Euroclima+	EU Programme on environmental sustainability and climate change with the Latin American region
EUROSociAL+	EU Programme for social cohesion in Latin America
FIIAPP	Fundación Internacional y para Iberoamérica de Administración y Políticas Públicas
GDSI	Galway Development Services International Limited
GGLD	Good Governance for Local Development
IDEAS	Irish Development Experience Sharing Programme
ImpAcT	Implementation of EU Association for Trade
INDEP	India-Denmark Energy Partnership
MADC	More advanced developing country
MEDA	Euro-Mediterranean Partnership programme
MIC	Middle-income country

MIEUX+	Migration EU eXpertise
MIP	Multi-Annual Indicative Programme
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PHARE	Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies programme
PPRD	Prevention, Preparedness and Response to Natural and Man-made Disasters programme
PSE	Public-sector expertise
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIGMA	Support for Improvement in Governance and Management
SOCleuX+	EU expertise on social protection, labour and employment
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument

## Executive Summary

### **PSE is an important but underutilised tool that adds value to the EU's approach to international cooperation**

Although there is no generally accepted European definition of 'public-sector expertise' (PSE), EU member states use the term to indicate the exchange of knowledge, expertise and advice between civil servants or other public-sector experts in EU member states and third countries in order to solve shared policy and institutional problems. The added value of these exchanges lies in the fact that PSE is demand-driven, adaptable to different contexts and can build mutual trust. It fosters policy dialogue and reform through peer-to-peer exchanges more effectively than traditional technical assistance and it is well suited for building valuable networks of experts and policy-makers in a cost-effective way. PSE can help to shape new forms of cooperation based on mutually beneficial and more equal (peer-to-peer) partnerships and is a recognised form of engagement for the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). However, to date PSE still remains underused compared to other development cooperation tools and modalities in EU development cooperation.

This paper complements the Mapping of the *"Study on EU and its Member States mobilising Public Sector Expertise for Development"* (Schneider and Illan 2020, henceforth referred to as the Phase I). This paper - Phase II Analysis Paper - looks at the added value of PSE, the factors that motivate EU institutions and its member states to deliver PSE activities, and the strategic potential of PSE for cooperation with partner countries under the new Global Europe - Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).

### **The use of PSE is driven by a number of institutional, thematic and internal motivations**

PSE contribution to foreign policy and other strategic objectives of EU member states, for which the SDGs are not always a prominent incentive for action, is a major factor for mobilising PSE. PSE can be valuable in promoting the EU and its member states' standards, norms and values abroad. Domestic governments and senior civil servants may be attracted to PSE, for example, to position themselves as potential leaders of an international body, for intelligence gathering, for cooperation on global or cross-border threats, or as a means of internationalising public administration or accessing funds to underpin bilateral institutional agreements. Some countries base PSE activities on specialised expertise (for example, in digitisation, anti-corruption measures, customs and border controls, port management and post-war transition) or a desire to expand their international reach, including on the economic front.

### **The EU has a crucial role to play in catalysing the use of PSE**

The EU acts as a catalyst in mobilising European PSE. This is because EU member states are interested in accessing EU funds to finance implementation of their bilateral political priorities. EU programmes also lend a scale to international cooperation that most individual member states would struggle to achieve on their own and facilitate collaboration among them which otherwise would not take place. Europe also means identity, values and history: certain member states are motivated by a desire to share their experiences of transition and accession to the EU and their positive national policy experiences, some of which they gained as part of the European project.

For the EU institutions, the added value of PSE lies in its capacity for operationalising international partnerships. PSE adds value promoting EU policies, values, and interests abroad and supporting policy dialogue and policy

reforms. Approximation to EU standards and regulations remains an EU interest, although its attractiveness to third countries varies according to the sector and beneficiary country context.

### **NDICI programming offers a unique opportunity to scale-up the strategic use of PSE**

Although ambitions for the scale of PSE vary, EU member states share an interest in making PSE more visible in EU external action and in using it more strategically under the NDICI. In the short term, ambitions will need to be calibrated, taking into account the operational constraints of EU member states presented in the Phase I study. The opportunity to use PSE more strategically under the NDICI should not be missed in order to further EU strategic priorities and to achieve the SDGs. PSE should be factored into NDICI programming at an early stage, so that it can be presented to partner countries early on. The involvement of implementing agencies (i.e. member states organisations) in the programming dialogue could facilitate this process, thanks to the role they can play as brokers among the parties involved in PSE and also to their specialist international expertise. Mentioning PSE, even if briefly, when formulating Multi-Annual Indicative Programmes (MIPs), or in more detail in Annual Action Programmes and individual Action Documents for 2021-2027, would facilitate the use of PSE in practice.

The EU's Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) is experienced in supporting partner countries to build and strengthen their public institutions and administrations, including to achieve the SDGs. Over the past decade, the former DG DEVCO (now DG INTPA) engaged in a process aimed at transforming EU technical cooperation at both conceptual and practical level. Part of this process included the recognition that learning from peers is an effective way of transmitting and sharing knowledge. As demand increased from public sector counterparts in partner countries to learn from the experience of the public sector in Europe, so did the interest of DG DEVCO in mobilising PSE, notably as part of DEVCO's twinning strategy in 2016-2018.

In 2019, the DG DEVCO's range of PSE instruments expanded to Twinning and the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument (TAIEX), based on DG NEAR's long-standing experience in using these peer-to-peer exchange tools and mobilizing PSE in enlargement and neighbourhood countries. Under the NDICI, DG INTPA could continue to fine-tune the use of PSE by testing and piloting or responding to *ad-hoc* demands.

The NDICI regulation explicitly refers to PSE and administrative forms of cooperation between the Union and its partners. This represents an opportunity to use PSE more strategically in the implementation of EU external actions and in development cooperation. In particular, PSE mobilisation could be used in complement to many implementation modalities, such as budget support and the technical support pillar of the European Investment Plan and under the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+).

The preference for joint programming under the NDICI and the Team Europe approach create more policy space for the Working Better Together and inclusiveness agendas, including for a strategic mobilisation of PSE. While working together may not be feasible in all situations, EU-wide cooperation that involves the EU institutions and member-states offers unparalleled advantages in terms of scale, geographical reach, range of expertise, technical competencies, languages and experience. Collaboration can take different forms, such as consortia or other joint implementation arrangements. EU delegations can further facilitate cooperation at country level by including in future initiatives member states who indicate an interest but who may not be resident in the country.

**Although there is not a set formula to raise political support for PSE, ideas for promoting PSE have already been put forward**

PSE mobilisation has been limited so far, primarily due to operational constraints and the difficulty of mustering strong political backing in some EU member states (Schneider and Illan 2020). These challenges would need to be addressed if the ambition is to scale-up the use of PSE in EU external action. Decision-makers and administrators with an internal mandate in the EU member states are crucial stakeholders in any future PSE constituency. This means that they are the primary targets of any initiative for raising awareness of PSE's added value and strategic importance and that they should take part in policy discussions.

While there is no set formula for raising political support, some ideas have been mooted:

- showcase concrete examples of how PSE contributes to EU member states' objectives (whether as the direct results of projects or as the more indirect outcomes of engagement);
- showcase the contribution of PSE to development objectives, notably the SDGs, especially in the member states' priority areas;
- present success stories of other European countries or public administrations that have engaged in PSE to create a 'demonstration effect';
- raise awareness of the added value of PSE that support EU agendas (such as Working Better Together as Team Europe, inclusiveness, cooperation with middle-income countries and policy first principle) and as a way of operationalising the partnership approach;
- raise the visibility and added value of PSE for improving collaboration among EU member states and jointly with the EU institutions, including through the use of Twinning and TAIEX in development cooperation.

Some of the above areas would benefit from more research. In particular, more research is needed on the contribution of PSE to development objectives and the priorities of EU member states, based on a sound methodology adequate for PSE actions. Concrete initiatives could include a comprehensive, publicly available mapping of the use of PSE in EU institutions and in cooperation with Member States. In the case of Twinning, evaluations already provide some evidence of its effectiveness (see GDSI 2019 and Ecorys 2011). Yet, there is no such evaluation of the impact of PSE in partner countries, which would prove necessary to promote learning and accountability in relation to the use of PSE and to improve its effectiveness.

**The EU and the member-states should clarify their ambitions for PSE – while celebrating and better utilising the diversity of their approaches rather than seeking to harmonise them**

The Phase I study signalled a shared interest among EU member states to learn from each other and establish a more structured dialogue on PSE. It also recommended working towards a common definition of PSE and its modalities. A better definition of European PSE would help clarify the European PSE offer to partner countries. At the same time, the idea of harmonising PSE approaches is politically unappealing and risks jeopardising Europe's real added value, namely its diversity and ability to respond to different demands from partner countries. Any shared guidance on European PSE would need to be enshrined in some form of guidance document and have the support of major players in order to have any standing. The feasibility of arriving at such a document varies, depending on its status and the parties involved. The main forum for discussing PSE at the moment is the Practitioners Network. Some member states have raised the point that any forum for PSE discussions should be inclusive and representative.



**In order to get the best out of PSE, the EU institutions and member states need to do their homework – both alone and together**

The following recommendations are intended to help move the process forward:

**For EU institutions:**

- approach PSE as a source of expertise that helps to achieve the SDGs, facilitates international partnerships and can support the objectives of EU external action;
- take into account the differing ambitions and capacities of EU member states when defining a more strategic European approach to cooperation through mobilising PSE, including through Team Europe Initiatives;
- start considering and input PSE early in the programming process. Where appropriate, refer to mobilising PSE in MIPs or in Annual Action Programmes and individual Action Documents;
- continue testing the mobilisation of PSE and strengthen its use, alone or as part of wider programmes, for example under the EFSD+ , as part of Team Europe initiatives and linked to budget support;
- Consider the linkages with and broader contribution of PSE to policy and political dialogues and EU strategic policy objectives, in line with the policy first principle under the NDICI
- consider PSE as an important component of Team Europe initiatives to add value to European cooperation with partner countries and to operationalise the EU Working Better Together and joint implementation approaches;
- support the participation of all member states in EU programmes as part of the inclusiveness agenda, including through the role of EU delegations in ensuring that all member states with an interest and added value can contribute;
- consider undertaking a comprehensive, publicly available mapping of the use of PSE by EU institutions in collaboration with EU member states in the context of international cooperation in support of further discussions about European PSE.

**For member states:**

- raise awareness among key decision-makers in domestically-focused public administrations of EU member states on the added value of PSE and its strategic importance for national or organisational objectives and involve them in policy discussions about PSE;
- adopt the recommendations of the Phase I study for improving coordination, synergies and the exchange of learning about PSE;
- consider ways to improve incentives for mobilising public experts in PSE activities and compile best practices for dealing with administrative and legal problems, following the recommendations of the Phase I study;
- assess the need for establishing PSE coordination mechanisms and/or dedicated agencies in member states, including ways to better combine the technical expertise of member states' domestic public administrations and the development expertise of member states' development agencies (Member State Organizations, MSOs).

**For both EU institutions and member states:**

- facilitate the sharing of learning and the building of collective data on PSE;

- showcase the successes of PSE, either in the form of project results or as more indirect outcomes, and create a 'demonstration effect' presenting the successes of other EU countries or organisations;
- harness the potential of PSE for strengthening collaboration among EU member states and jointly with EU institutions;
- consider developing and codifying in an appropriate document a shared definition of European PSE that takes into account the variety of European experiences;
- assist further research on what the success of PSE activities looks like, how to appraise successes and learn about development results, how to document what drives PSE in specific cases and how to overcome operational challenges;
- commit to evaluating the impact of PSE in partner countries in order to promote both learning and accountability in the use of PSE and to improve its effectiveness;
- provide information on how PSE can be 'plugged into' the EU's and member states' (joint) programming and the Team Europe Initiatives.

# 1. Introduction

Peer-to-peer (P2P) exchanges among public administrations are considered to be a valuable means of knowledge-sharing and capacity-building, based on partner country demands, in order to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This applies particularly, though not exclusively, to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The latter encourages the use of public partnerships and recognises knowledge-sharing and capacity-building as a means of implementing Agenda 2030. Peer-to-peer exchanges are also capable of formulating shared responses to global threats and building more equal partnerships by mutual learning among public administrations and by triangular cooperation, thus helping to operationalise the EU approach to international partnerships.

The practice of sharing the expertise of public administrations among countries at different stages of development has come to be seen as a valuable and distinct addition to the European international cooperation tool box. On the one hand, there has been a growing demand among partner countries for European expertise in policy-making and implementation. In addition, PSE is a practical means of achieving the EU's ambition of promoting its values and defending its interests by supporting institutional and policy processes in third countries. The EU's desire for more equal and innovative forms of collaboration with partner countries, together with the more conducive environment for PSE offered by the NDICI, have sparked a desire to deploy PSE more strategically in international cooperation. In addition, European public administrations hold a 'vast wealth of knowledge and experience', for example in regional integration and transition, which could also be useful in their cooperation with third countries (Schneider and Illan 2020: 12).

On the other hand, to date only a small share of the EU institutions' resources for international cooperation has been spent on PSE. The EU's Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA, formerly known as DEVCO) allocated €275 million in 2017-2020 to supporting peer-to-peer exchanges, a small amount when set against the overall scale of EU aid. The recent mapping exercise estimated that the EU member states invested €3 billion per annum in 2017 and 2018 to technical assistance, yet, it is difficult to estimate the share of that amount that has been allocated to PSE specifically (Schneider and Illan 2020).<sup>1</sup>

In fact, a number of operational and political constraints hamper its wider deployment. Also, ambitions for its use in European development cooperation differ among member states and between them and the EU institutions. Furthermore, the lack of a structured debate and piecemeal evidence has led to many knowledge gaps about the features, added value and limitations of PSE. Further evidence is also needed on how PSE can complement other forms of engagement or help with the adoption of new approaches. A clear narrative around how to measure the success of PSE interventions is still in its early stages. There is also no consensus on what European PSE is that could engender a more informed discussion and raise the visibility of PSE.

An informed debate is paramount in order to mobilise political capital in support of PSE and to overcome some of the constraints on its deployment. This paper aims to nurture such a debate by examining the features, added value, potential and constraints of PSE in the context of European development cooperation, including as part of the NDICI programming and in support of the Team Europe and Working Better Together approaches and the inclusiveness agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> As per OECD CRS Data on "Experts and Technical Assistance". The paper will refer to DG INTPA also for actions that were undertaken when the organisation was still called DG DEVCO (prior to 2020). The absence of a generally accepted definition of PSE makes it hard to estimate the amount of resources spent on PSE. Moreover, PSE activities are often reported as part of larger projects and therefore not fully accounted for in official aid reporting practices under the OECD DAC classification. Finally, the financial value of PSE activities is only a partial indicator of its scale, considering its relatively low cost compared with other modalities of cooperation.

This study has been carried out in two phases, from which this analysis paper is the second one. The Phase I (*Study on EU and its Member States mobilising Public-sector expertise for Development*, Schneider and Illan 2020) usefully mapped some of the administrative, legal and operational arrangements for PSE in 20 EU member states and highlighted the challenges for giving it a more strategic role under the NDICI. It showed that EU member states have gained a great deal of experience in the use of PSE in development cooperation, and concluded that sharing good practices and solutions to common challenges for PSE would be beneficial. This could be done, it claimed, by building on the EU member states' appetite for learning about PSE practices.

This paper builds on the findings and recommendations of the Phase I of this study, complementing them with a more policy-focused analysis of PSE at a European level. Together, these two phases could help steer forward the debate on the strategic potential of PSE as an innovative source of expertise for cooperation with partner countries and lead to a more inclusive and effective use of PSE by EU institutions and member states.

Timing is of the essence in the PSE discussion. The programming guidelines for the NDICI were issued in early November 2020, thus launching the formal programming exercise. The year 2021 will be a pivotal year for strategic decisions in country, regional, multi-country and global thematic programmes and for the development of Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs) and Team Europe initiatives. This discussion also happens as debates about how the collective weight of Europe can be more keenly felt internationally through a Team Europe approach develop. The regulation of the NDICI - Global Europe in the future Multi-Annual Financial Framework for 2021-2027 indicates that joint programming is the preferred approach for geographic cooperation. For this reason, the EU, its member states (including their implementing agencies and financial institutions), the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development will need to take strategic and operational decisions, including on how to leverage European expertise abroad. All this opens a window of opportunity to move from words to deeds, and make more effective use of PSE for the achievement of the SDGs and the external action objectives of the EU and its member states.

## 2. European experiences with PSE to date

Broadly speaking, European PSE is all about the exchange of knowledge, expertise and advice between civil servants or other public-sector experts in order to solve shared policy and institutional problems. It involves 'public institutions (line ministries, public agencies) both at central and decentralised level, civil servants and experts employed by public agencies' (Schneider and Illan 2020: 8).<sup>2</sup>

### EU programmes adapted to different objectives over time

The EU institutions have played an important role in popularising the use of PSE through their own programmes and, by doing so, they contributed directly or more indirectly to raise the capacity of member states to offer PSE as part of their bilateral cooperation (see section below). Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the EU institutions established different programmes for peer-to-peer exchange between administrations, especially in the context of enlargement and, later on, EU Neighbourhood Policy, such as those on [Twinning](#), [TAIEX](#) (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange) and [SIGMA](#) (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management, in collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The focus lies on leveraging PSE as opposed to the use of private-sector consultants. Some practices involve private-sector experts, however.

<sup>3</sup> Twinning is a long-term instrument for capacity-building and institutional cooperation between the public administrations of EU member states and third countries with a shared commitment to mandatory results. The TAIEX instrument helps third countries to align themselves with EU regulations and standards. Differently from Twinning, TAIEX offers short-term, sometimes one-off, exchange opportunities. SIGMA is an EU-OECD programme with a focus on public governance.

Under the enlargement policy, programmes such as PHARE, which covered Central and Eastern European countries, aimed at institution-building and the adoption of the body of EU law (known as the *'acquis communautaire'*). For EU neighbours with no prospects of accession, the objectives are voluntary approximation to EU regulations and standards, supporting reforms and the capacity-building of partner countries (Ecorys 2011; Bouscharai and Moreau 2012; GDSI 2019). Programmes of a similar nature have included TACIS (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States) and the MEDA programme, the main financial instrument of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

Since 2014, TAIEX has been used in partner countries in the Americas, the Middle East, Asia and Pacific regions and, to a lesser degree, in Africa under the EU's Partnership Instrument. TAIEX also seeks to build sector-specific administrative capacities of the member states themselves.<sup>4</sup> In 2019, the EU added TAIEX and Twinning to the DG INTPA toolbox to support public administration capacity building and the achievement of the SDGs in partner countries. Thanks to the Service Level Agreement with the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), DG INTPA began using TAIEX and has started preparations for eight pilot Twinning projects in 2020. DG INTPA has also experimented with Twinning-like activities, for example under the [Partnerships and Policy Dialogue Facility](#) in Asia (see Annex 3 on policy dialogue).

### The European PSE offer varies widely among EU member states

The degree of maturity in the use of PSE varies greatly among EU member states. Bilateral cooperation and decentralised cooperation with public institutions are the main modes chosen for deploying PSE. These involve both contributions to EU programmes and project-type interventions (Schneider and Ilian 2020).

The Phase I study showed that the offer of PSE varied widely among member states in terms of legislation, procedures, institutions, modalities and tools. For example, countries like France and Hungary have dedicated laws on technical assistance while, at the other end of the spectrum, there are no such laws in Austria and the Netherlands. Many countries – such as Croatia, France, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia – have approved new legislation that impacts the mobilisation of PSE. Although the mapping study suggests that public sector experts are often deployed on a short-term basis, some countries (such as Croatia, Denmark, Ireland and Spain) take a longer-term, institutional approach. Differences also exist among EU member states in culture, languages, staffing, the availability of funding and the ability to transfer knowledge.

The EU member states use a variety of modalities and tools to mobilise PSE. The Phase I study defined modalities and tools as follows:

- **Modalities:** project-type interventions and the secondment of experts.
- **Tools:** policy advice, workshops, training, seminars, study visits, internships, staff and student exchanges, consultancy, knowledge-sharing networks, and short-term and long-term missions.

Taking into account the diversity of EU member states' experiences and the degree of maturity in the use of PSE, the Phase I study identified some basic features of European PSE for development cooperation (Box 1).

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<sup>4</sup> For example in collaboration with the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy to facilitate the short-term exchange of know-how between cohesion policy experts and administrations involved in the management of the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund; in collaboration with the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support to implement the EU Structural Reform Support Service; and in collaboration with the Directorate-General for Environment in order to improve the implementation of environmental standards.

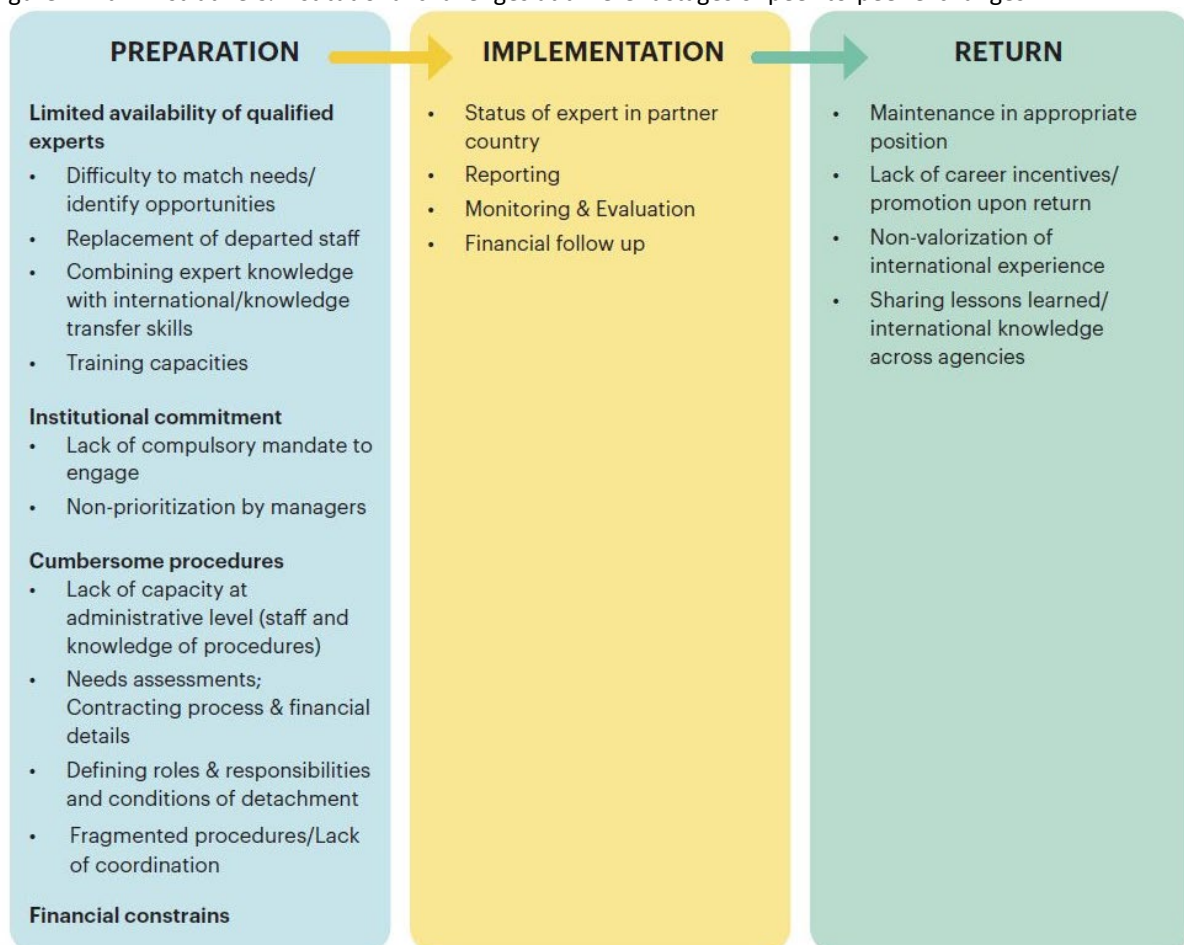
### Box 1: The basic features of European PSE

- **Content:** PSE is the provision of knowledge and the sharing of experience among peers in the public-sector at large. By 'pooling' expertise, one peer places its comparative advantage in a certain area at the service of another peer. This exchange is believed to reinforce trust and dialogue among them, thus contributing to the generation of long-term institutional partnerships.
- **Goals:** Improve the institutional capacities of the public-sector in partner countries to effectively implement reform programmes aimed at achieving development goals in an efficient and transparent way, thus contributing to Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.
- **Actors:** PSE involves public institutions (line ministries, public agencies) both at central and decentralized levels, civil servants thereof and experts employed by public agencies.

Source: reproduced from Schneider and Illian 2020

The Phase I study also showed that, despite Europe's long-standing experience with PSE activities, only a very small share of its member states' external action resources was spent on PSE activities (Schneider and Illian 2020). While this springs, in part, from the relatively low cost of mobilising PSE compared with other forms of cooperation, it also points to the untapped potential of this type of cooperation. The study suggested that, at one level, some of the most pressing challenges for mobilising administrative cooperation in Europe are operational in nature (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Administrative & institutional challenges at different stages of peer-to-peer exchanges



Source: reproduced from Schneider and Illian 2020

At another level, the political commitment of national administrations has been identified as a constraint. Strong political support from ministries and senior public administrators is key to the successful – and potentially greater – use of PSE. Low levels of political support, combined with the operational constraints summarised above, can lead to refusals by domestic agencies to provide experts for PSE activities: ‘a well-experienced coordinating body and excellent technical experts cannot make up for a managerial refusal if there are insufficient political guidelines for and awareness of the strategic importance of PSE’ (Schneider and Illan 2020: 16).

### 3. Features of PSE and challenges arising from its use

Understanding the features, added value and limitations of peer-to-peer exchanges between public administrations is paramount in order to garner political support for its deployment and overcome some of the operational challenges. It is also a precondition for using it in a more strategic manner. This chapter summarises the core elements of peer-to-peer exchanges and the challenges that arise from their use as presented in the international literature. The aim in doing so is to inform the European debate and link it to wider discussions. Chapter 4 complements this chapter with a list of reasons why EU member states engage in PSE.

#### PSE is demand-driven and helps to build mutual trust

One of the distinctive features of PSE is its perceived ability to respond to partner countries' demands in a flexible and cost-effective manner. PSE instruments are usually activated at the request of a partner countries' government or administration. While some PSE programmes require a formal commitment to shared objectives and results, others are learning processes in which partner countries are free to decide whether and how to use the knowledge and resources made available to them. Cooperation activities can be tailored to specific requests, contexts and rates of progress.

Practitioners, including those interviewed in the Phase I study, stress that peer-to-peer exchanges are different from other forms of technical assistance in that they consist of a structured, often long-term, partnership between public administrations. This is felt to be essential for building mutual trust between the administrations involved and also for working towards shared goals in the realm of public policy and governance, where change happens iteratively and sometimes slowly. Box 2 presents the experiences of Ireland and Spain.

## Box 2: Long-term partnerships: the examples of Ireland and Spain

The Irish Development Experience Sharing (IDEAS) programme is a partnership between Irish Aid and the Government of Vietnam to share expertise and skills from Ireland's experience in the areas of education, agriculture, agri-food and business/economic development. The programme, launched in 2009 after a series of prior exchanges, aims to address capacity deficits that hinder the attainment of long-term development goals in Vietnam through peer-to-peer institutional links and exchanges between officials from dedicated ministries and agencies. In addition, workshops, conferences, scholarships and entrepreneurship training allow to share best practices from Ireland's economic experiences.

The programme has created partnerships in different areas, for instance around banking regulation (Vietnam's National Financial Supervisory Commission – Ireland's Central Bank) and economic forecasting (Vietnam's National Centre for Socio-Economic Information and Forecasting – Ireland's Economic and Social Research Institute). A joint Ireland-Vietnam Steering Group meets twice a year to review progress and define common priorities for the upcoming work cycle. According to an evaluation of the 2011-2015 Vietnam country strategy, IDEAS has created strong partnerships, mutual understanding and policy dialogue at the highest level between the institutions and experts from both countries.

The Transfer, Exchange and Knowledge Management Plan for the Development of Spanish Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean (INTERCOONECTA) aims to generate knowledge partnerships for development through learning and collaboration between public-sector professionals in Latin America and the Caribbean. PSE is carried out through the Network of Spanish Cooperation Training Centers in the region. The Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, in collaboration with Spanish public institutions, provides specialized technical training and capacity-building for public servants through a specific call in which the institutions formulate training programs in the form of seminars, workshops, meetings, etc. The programmes are developed in the Training Centers either face-to-face or in a virtual classroom. INTERCOONECTA also offers: Knowledge for development projects for the effective application of knowledge in partner countries; communities of experts and institutional networks that support knowledge exchange on specific topics; and actions to support knowledge management to contribute to AECID's regional objectives in Latin America and the Caribbean. INTERCOONECTA has an initial budget of EUR 14 million for the period 2017-2021.

*Source: reproduced from Schneider and Illan 2020*

Peer learning has a potential advantage over other forms of technical cooperation in building up 'tacit knowledge about the softer dimensions of change' (Andrews and Manning 2016) in public institutions and policies, such as acting politically, building coalitions or inspiring change at individual, organisational, sectoral or country level. In addition, PSE may be the only available option for sharing specialist expertise in sectors such as security (for example, in relation to counter-terrorism, cybersecurity or maritime security), expertise that is often difficult to find in the private sector.

How demands are structured, and therefore how ownership is ensured, is not straightforward. Current conceptions of ownership go beyond governmental or state actors and encompass civil society and the private sector. Networks of experts are important actors that can feed into the process too (Schneider and Illan 2020). Another important aspect is the selection of non-partisan projects with long-term impact that go beyond the short-term interests of a specific government. This is needed in order to retain political support for reforms beyond a time frame dictated by electoral cycles and across constituencies. Identifying projects worth undertaking and actors worth involving requires a good, dynamic reading of the country's political and socio-economic context and how this influences the policy agenda. For external actors, a country presence and networks that provide 'ears on the ground' are important, along with collaboration between implementers and the political and diplomatic sections of national representations.

## Adapting PSE to different contexts

A clearly structured and politically-backed request for support from the partner country is core to the success of PSE. Linking policy dialogues to PSE cooperation is a good practice that can activate feedback loops between the political and technical levels and produce inclusive and meaningful development cooperation. At one level,



well-prepared policy dialogues can help shape demand and identify priorities. At another level, technical exchanges and the practical experience arising from peer-to-peer cooperation can provide strategic inputs for policy dialogue and ease decision-making. The involvement of the right experts and agencies from both partner countries and EU member states in sectoral policy dialogue, along with the ministries that are also involved in PSE, is another good practice (Schneider and Illan 2020). One example that was brought to our attention is the methodology *mesas país* (country tables), active under different EU regional programmes such as [EUROSociAL+](#), [Euroclima+](#) and [EL PacCTO](#) (see Box 4 and Annex 3).<sup>5</sup> Other examples include France's Technical assistance Facility to the African Union, which was established in 2020 building on a pre-existing strategic dialogues, and a country dialogue between Italy and Egypt on juvenile justice which fed into a future programme on the subject. (Expertise France 2020; see Schneider and Illan 2020).

Identifying demand, prioritising actions, managing collaboration, and working towards set objectives are all complex tasks that require a well-staffed, adequately equipped and skilled civil service that not all countries have. Capacity assessments have been used to appraise the feasibility of PSE actions and to ensure that programmes and ambitions fit the context. Middle-income countries (MICs) usually offer the most conducive environment for these forms of engagement (Schneider and Illan 2020). However, PSE has also been used in low-income countries, for example, along the security-development nexus for counter-terrorism projects, territorial control, and the dismantling of organised crime and smuggling networks. The EU Trust Fund for Africa has funded projects such as the [GAR-SI Sahel](#) Rapid Action Groups - Monitoring and Intervention in the Sahel) and [ECI Niger](#) (Joint Investigation Team) projects. For their part, administrations that offer PSE need to have not just good ideas, but also the ability to communicate them and work with partners. Soft skills such as cultural awareness and emotional intelligence are often underestimated, but they are of the essence in building trust in both individual experts and the organisations they represent.

### PSE helps to build networks and create access to policy-makers in a cost-effective manner

Peer-to-peer exchanges between public administrations can help participating countries to access, at a relatively low cost, knowledge, networks and policy-makers that would otherwise be either difficult or expensive to reach. In doing so, they are well-placed to foster mutual learning and/or influence policy-making. The trust built through long-term engagement can lead to requests for support in high-stakes processes. Administrative forms of cooperation can also help to build or nurture regional communities of practice, networks and policy convergence at a regional level either within regions or cross-regionally (FIIAPP/Cooperación Española 2020).

Examples of such forms of cooperation, some of which have been in place for decades now, have been created under programmes such as [EUROSociAL](#), [EuroMed Justice](#), EuroMed PPRD South (a programme for the prevention, preparedness and response to natural and man-made disasters), [MIEUX+](#) (Migration EU eXpertise) or [Euroclima+](#). Through the latter, for example, Mexico has helped Uruguay to draft new climate change legislation. Another example mentioned more than once in our interviews is the invitation extended by the Government of Chile to support the drafting of their new constitution through the EUROSociAL+ programme.

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<sup>5</sup> The European Commission is piloting a similar approach in Mesas COVID / Mesas Team Europe in Argentina, Costa Rica and Ecuador to coordinate the European support to the national response to the pandemic. EUROSociAL+ is a cooperation programme between Europe and Latin America on social cohesion. EL PACCTO is the Europe Latin America Technical Assistance Programme against Transnational Organised Crime. Euroclima+ is a cooperation programme between Europe and Latin America on combatting climate change and foster environmental sustainability.

## PSE sits well in an international cooperation agenda based on partnerships

In addition, peer-to-peer exchanges may be familiar to Southern partners, which encountered them as part of South-South cooperation efforts starting in the 1950s. These early experiences were rooted in a belief that the newly independent nations' best path to development was based on self-reliance and that Southern countries' solidarity and exchanges were a bedrock of such a political programme. Interestingly, one of our interviewees mentioned a somewhat similar experience in the case of EU accession countries (2004), which benefited from the EU's Twinning instrument. Beyond the practical support in adopting EU policies that they received from EU member states that had already adopted them, this experience was also perceived as an expression of solidarity from older EU member states with new members. It cemented relationships and forged a sense of unity as members of the European project.

Lastly, PSE ties in well with an international cooperation agenda that has begun to question the hierarchy of donor-recipient relations in favour of more equal partnerships between countries. The more relational, bottom-up and situational approach, potentially enshrined in peer-to-peer exchanges fits these aspirations better because the 'peer-to-peer partnership becomes a process, institution or community that establishes the conditions for a new type of cooperation' (Effective Institutions Platform and National School of Government International 2018). Peer-to-peer exchanges would also be a better fit in a world where partners recognise that better results come from political processes that build national ownership than from externally-set technical recipes.

## A big knowledge and evidence gap still needs to be filled to use PSE more strategically

While administrative forms of cooperation are becoming more popular, there is scant evidence of how mutual learning occurs and how it translates into sustainable reforms. Evidence is needed on the ability of these partnerships to contribute to sustainable change beyond the duration of projects or, more humbly, on when this has occurred and what lessons can be learned from such successful experiences. In addition, 'there is still limited evidence that initiatives claiming to facilitate peer learning successfully foster the transfer of deep, relevant tacit knowledge between peer individuals and ensure that this knowledge diffuses back to organisations to achieve impact at scale' (Andrews and Manning 2016). Defining measures of success for PSE and building up evidence of what does and does not work is an area in which further research is urgently needed.

## 4. Why do public administrations in the EU engage in PSE activities?

While PSE's characteristic features can be a factor motivating its use, decisions taken by European public administrations in favour of PSE also derive from PSE's contribution to the achievement of their foreign policy objectives. Various common drivers can be identified among member states, although motivations and benefits vary from one member state, agency, partner country and sector of intervention to another. This chapter looks at these drivers and outlines why EU countries and their public administrations engage in PSE.

### The SDGs are a motivating factor...

Member states' organisations with an international mandate and a specialist role in development cooperation regard the SDGs as a powerful motivation for engagement. While PSE is a vehicle for achieving all the SDGs, the Phase I study shows that EU member states regard PSE as particularly valuable for the governance objectives such as institution-building, administrative reforms and the development of sectoral public policies in partner countries, including on regional integration and the transition to a market economy. In line with the features of

PSE presented in chapter 3, an additional area of added value lies in the forging of international institutional partnerships and, more broadly, of trust among public administrations. Conversely, PSE is used to a limited extent for financial and economic cooperation.<sup>6</sup>

### ...but strategic interests matter more

EU member states' development agencies and organisations have to match international priorities with the interests of their own administrations and governments, for whom the SDGs are not always a prominent motivator. Domestic administrations and senior levels of government need additional incentives to engage in PSE, most notably their own priorities. These could involve, for example, positioning an organisation as the potential leader of an international body, intelligence gathering, cooperation on global or cross-border threats, or accessing funds to underpin bilateral institutional agreements. An interest in internationalising a public administration could also incentivise the use of PSE thanks to its ability to establish direct links with peers with similar interests, challenges and solutions.

National geo-strategic and economic interests are a strong motivating factor for PSE activities. While this applies to areas such as security, migration, counter-terrorism or climate change, the list could be extended to include space cooperation and communication technologies, to name just a few. A PSE project could contribute directly to a given objective or, more generally, national interest could be a motivating factor for engaging with a specific country or a specific area of its administration. Unpacking these drivers is difficult, as they are tied to the specific circumstances of every member state and vary in time and context. Nonetheless, they are very important for motivating senior members of government and public administration to engage in PSE activities.

### Specialist expertise, national economic interests and historical ties also matter

Some countries have developed highly specialised areas of expertise that can be very valuable for partner countries and complementary to other forms of expertise provided by other EU member states. For example, Estonia has specialist expertise in e-government and digitalization; Lithuania in police, anti-corruption, customs and border control; Belgium in port management; and Croatia in post-war transition. Performing PSE activities in these areas can help EU member states to expand their international reach, including on the economic front. However, some countries are hampered in showcasing their expertise and involvement in projects at the right stage, for example, due to a limited presence on the ground in partner countries. Language barriers can also play a role.

EU delegations should help to ensure that all member states have equal access to information and a fair opportunity to present their knowledge and expertise to partner countries and also to support the amalgamation of European expertise in common projects, for example, as part of Team Europe (Jones forthcoming). DG INTPA and Estonia are jointly piloting a Team Europe portal for showcasing European expertise and helping partner countries to find tools that can help achieve the SDGs, eradicate poverty, address inequality and build inclusive and sustainable societies.

The historical relations and ties that bring together EU member states and partner countries, especially former colonial powers, are a bedrock of PSE cooperation. Similarity in institutions, administrative models and cultural affinities can facilitate the approximation of policy agendas and joint activities. Well-established ties can also produce a wide network of contacts that can be the first reference and entry point for administrators in partner countries looking for international support and provide an easier entry point for willing European administrators. A common language also smoothens the path of engagement such as in the case of the Spanish

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<sup>6</sup> Although the survey did not produce any findings on the use of PSE for developing public policies in support of a climate conducive to business, a number of interviewees mentioned this more narrow focus as an area of collaboration.

language for Ibero-American cooperation, French for African French-speaking countries or the cooperation between Portugal and the Lusophone world.

### Europe and the EU institutions are major drivers for EU member states

Member states' organisations can benefit from implementing EU programmes, either by gaining access to more funding or by sourcing finance for national foreign policy priorities. While the importance of this aspect tends to vary depending on the size of a country's international programmes and the role played by PSE in them, it remains an important driver for engagement.

As a further point, in the case of smaller countries or countries where PSE is marginal, the European dimension can lend a scale to PSE that bilateral engagement could not. This could help to make a stronger case for PSE vis-à-vis national leaders.

#### Box 3: PSE in Croatia (see also Annex 2)

Knowledge-sharing on EU accession and post-conflict transition is high on Croatia's political agenda as experience-sharing among candidate countries is considered to be a strategic foreign policy interest in Croatia's National Strategy for Development Cooperation 2017-2020 (Government of Croatia 2017). Croatia is also committed to developing an 'expert base' in reconciliation, demining, disarmament and tracing missing persons as well as EU accession. This has led to the creation of a large pool of public-sector experts available to assist partner countries' administrations.

The Knowledge Transfer Division is a good example of the political support for PSE in Croatia. It was set up in 2012 as an innovative mechanism for structuring Croatian expertise and managing the pool of experts who were in high demand in the neighbouring countries. It grew quickly in scope and in the number of activities performed. It was showcased as a successful initiative at the Global South-South Development Expo in 2014 and 2016 (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation 2018).

*Source: Schneider and Illan 2020; Government of Croatia 2017; United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation 2018*

Europe also means values, identity and history. For example, EU member states who have joined over the last 20 years are proud of having become members of the EU. They feel that their accession and transition experience can be of use to other countries, especially prospective EU member states in southeast Europe and in the framework of the EU's neighbourhood policy. Croatia has a well-articulated rationale for PSE and considers it to be an essential modality of its development cooperation, based on its desire to share its expertise with other countries and the strong political backing in this connection.

Lithuania started its experience of international cooperation at the time of accession, when it joined programmes like Twinning and TAIEX with neighbours. Since then, the country has enlarged its PSE proposal beyond its accession and transition experience to the EU to other areas. Lithuania accounted for 11% of all Twinning activities in 2017-2019, despite representing only 0.6% of the EU's population (Koeth et al. 2020). Its successful participation in EU programmes springs from strong political support and a legislative background defining goals, principles, responsibilities and financing.

While the accession and transition experience is certainly valuable, the extent to which it can be adapted to other regions of the world beyond the accession countries and the neighbourhood needs careful consideration. Regional developments are endogenous processes. While the European experience may well be selectively useful and of inspiration in some contexts, it is not easy to replicate elsewhere (FIIAPP 2010).

## 5. PSE in EU development cooperation: policy framework and added value

The EU's current policy framework is more conducive to PSE than it was in the past. Back in 2011, the European Commission's Agenda for Change opened up more space for administrative cooperation, placing good governance at the core of sustainable and inclusive growth (Council of the European Union 2012). The New European Consensus on Development (2017) states that 'stronger partnerships are at the heart of the EU's approach to SDG implementation' (European Council 2017: 21). It emphasises the responsibility of partner countries' governments for their development, aiming to empower them for greater development impact and overall better governance. The New Consensus states that one of the fundamental aims of the EU 'will be to *build the capacity* of developing countries to implement the 2030 Agenda at local, regional and national levels, to foster enabling policy environments, particularly for the most marginalised communities, and to support lesson learning and knowledge sharing' (European Council 2017: 42).

The 2016 [EU Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy](#) acknowledges the role that partnership, inclusiveness and joint action play in EU external action. The Joint Communication entitled *Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa* recalls that 'the EU and Africa should seek ways to intensify people-to-people contacts through exchange programmes, joint research activities or Twinning initiatives between academic and cultural institutions, private sector, businesses, agencies and utilities, parliaments, local authorities or cities and regions' (European Commission 2020a: 16). Similarly, the Joint Communication *European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean: Joining Forces for a Common Future* mentions the sharing of knowledge and expertise, including for institution-building, as one of the implementation modalities (European Commission 2019a). Where the [Eastern Partnership](#) is concerned, the EU's regional strategy acknowledges the role of public administration reform as a key driver of economic growth and greater public accountability, and looks to strengthen peer-to-peer learning to achieve these goals (European Commission 2020c).<sup>7</sup> All three regional strategies view PSE as a way to enhance the transparency and accountability of public administrations in partner countries and to improve service delivery to both citizens and businesses (European Commission 2019 ; European Commission 2020a; European Commission 2020c).<sup>8</sup>

The NDICI - Global Europe regulation mentions 'cooperation measures involving public sector experts' from member states among the potential modalities for the implementation of EU external policies (art. 26 c.7 of NDICI regulation no. 2018/0243 (COD))<sup>9</sup>. Twinning is also mentioned as one of the means of implementing the EU's international partnerships approach, along with innovative financing, budget support, projects and technical assistance. The emphasis on capacity development and partnerships between public-sector institutions signals an increased interest in mobilising PSE more strategically, either alone or in tandem with

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<sup>7</sup> The Eastern Partnership is a policy initiative which aims to strengthen and deepen ties among the EU, its member states and six partners in the Eastern Neighbourhood (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine).

<sup>8</sup> The language used in relation to PSE in the regional strategy for Africa mentions capacity-building in the public sector as an opportunity, particularly in the areas of digital transformation, trade and improving the business climate (European Commission 2020a). Similarly, where Eastern Partnership is concerned, the strategy sees an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning in managing corruption risks and promoting e-government solutions (European Commission 2020c). In Latin America and Caribbean, the EU is looking to engage in PSE activities for promoting mutual interests and common priorities, including 'public policy, institutional strengthening and regulatory environments' (European Commission 2019a:15).

<sup>9</sup> Article 26 of the NDICI agreement states that "Cooperation between the Union and its partners may take the form, inter alia, of: [...] administrative and technical cooperation measures, as well as building capacity, including to share transitional or reform implementation experiences of Member States, such as decentralised cooperation through partnerships or twinning, between public institutions, including local authorities, public law bodies or private law entities entrusted with public service tasks of a Member State and those of a partner country or region, as well as cooperation measures involving public sector experts dispatched from the Member States and their regional and local authorities;" (European Parliament 2021).

other forms of cooperation. But why is this now the case and what added value could PSE bring to EU external action?

### The EU narrative around international partnerships is a driver for the use of PSE

One major driver is the shift towards international engagement based on values and interests shared by the EU and its partner countries, and the framing of international cooperation in the language of partnerships and mutual benefits. In 2019 for the first time, the Von der Leyen Commission renamed the former Commissioner for International Development and Cooperation into a newly titled Commissioner for International Partnerships (Jutta Urpilainen). President Von der Leyen's mission letter entrusted Commissioner Urpilainen with the task of building sustainable partnerships for development, but also with that of helping to further the EU's political priorities (Von der Leyen 2019; Teevan and Sherriff 2019).

This is just one more signal of the desire to establish a partnership approach with all countries, including with African countries (European Commission 2020a) and MICs/more advanced developing countries (MADCs) (Di Ciommo and Sayós Monràs 2018). The New European Consensus on Development acknowledges the value of knowledge-sharing and exchanging good practices with MICs and MADCs: 'These new partnerships will promote the exchange of best practices, technical assistance and knowledge-sharing. In addition, the EU and its member states will work with these countries to promote South-South and triangular cooperation consistent with development effectiveness principles' (European Council 2017:47). The Phase I study suggests that MICs and MADCs are the most likely partners for PSE. For their part, countries graduating out of aid have a strong interest in maintaining open channels of cooperation with present and former development partners, especially in terms of knowledge-sharing, skills development and peer learning (Calleja & Prizzon 2019).

### PSE is a vehicle for sharing the EU's public policy experience

One accompanying rationale for expanding the use of PSE is the belief that 'the added value of EU cooperation over other donors is the work we can do on policy improvements' rather than on the size of the financial envelopes, as one of our interviewees put it. PSE is reckoned to be capable of facilitating the transition to policy-based cooperation and of assisting with the achievement of the SDGs. This is especially the case where PSE is combined with other tools, in particular political and policy dialogue. Peer-to-peer exchanges are seen as more effective than the employment of consultants, who do not have the same ability to inspire trust, share practical experiences and be embedded in public administrations. Moreover, PSE builds on the expertise of EU institutions and member states together, in line with the spirit of EU agendas such as Working Better Together, joint implementation and, more recently, the Team Europe approach.

#### Box 4: Linking PSE and policy dialogue in the experience of *mesas país* (see also Annex 3)

As mentioned above, linking policy dialogues to cooperation and technical dialogues can help shape political demand and identify common priorities. Experience rising from peer-to-peer cooperation can also provide strategic inputs to policy dialogues. EUROsociAL+ (the EU programme for social cohesion in Latin America) has played a key role in supporting policy dialogue about social cohesion. In EUROsociAL+, the dialogue is not accompanied by discussions related to EU financing, which frees up space to discuss more aspirational plans (Caputo et al. 2019; Schneider and Illan 2020; O’Riordan 2019). The evaluation of the EU’s regional cooperation in Latin America (Caputo et al. 2019) found that EUROsociAL+ supported policy dialogue through knowledge transfer and debate, but also by promoting common responses to challenges. Our own interviewees confirmed that structuring the actions around a sustained, structured and multi-level and multidimensional dialogue had helped the programme to have a bigger impact.

*Mesas país* (literally ‘country tables’) was brought up in interviews as an effective methodology and structure for enhancing sectoral policy dialogue among the EU institutions, member states and partner countries’ authorities. Created as part of EUROsocial, they have also been used in other EU-funded regional programmes in Latin America, such as Euroclima+ and EL PacCTO, all for which PSE makes a significant component. The European Commission is also piloting a similar approach to tackle the immediate socio-economic consequences of COVID-19 in Ecuador, Argentina and Costa Rica., under the Team Europe spirit

*Source: Schneider and Illan 2020; Caputo et al. 2019; O’Riordan 2019*

PSE is regarded as a channel for externalising more effectively the EU’s values and the European Commission’s priorities for 2019-2024, i.e. the Green Deal, digital and data, education, growth and jobs, plus migration, governance and multilateralism. In the words of one of our interviewees, ‘[our work] is always to advance policy priorities agreed with the country and to promote the EU as much as possible. The programming cycle follows policy priorities’.

PSE is also a way of ‘oiling the machinery of cooperation’ and promoting EU values on the rule of law, regional integration, human rights, social and territorial cohesion through public policies and enhancing synergies between the internal and external dimensions of EU action.

DG NEAR has sought regulatory approximation with neighbouring countries as a precondition for their access to the EU single market. The EU has made increasing use of the Partnership Instrument to promote a level playing-field in trade and to push its socio-economic model in other regions. Regulatory approximation has traditionally been an attractive proposition for accessing the vast EU internal market, but competition from other models and stubborn trade imbalances between Europe and its neighbours has meant that it has lost some of its sheen in recent times. In addition, certain parts of the world may regard EU regulations and standards as inadequate or feel that they require significant, costly adaptation.

Still, where a common interest exists, PSE-based instruments can share knowledge to support policy dialogue and build trust between the parties. TAIEX has been used under the Partnership Instrument to promote EU foreign policy objectives. While expectations of what short-term actions can achieve need to be realistically calibrated, TAIEX has been useful, for example, for unblocking trade negotiations or supporting dialogues on strategic issues such as migration and human mobility, security and climate change with countries ranging from India to Ecuador (Fotheringham et al. 2017). The best example of impact is the removal of a trade barrier with South Korea, following an expert mission on EU regulations and safety in relation to unpasteurised cheese (Fotheringham et al. 2017).

## 6. Potential areas of future cooperation on the SDGs

The SDG agenda is an area in which EU member states' agencies and the EU institutions, DG INTPA in particular, share a common interest. Because of their global nature, the SDGs also provide a common reference point for the EU's international partners. According to the survey undertaken as part of the Phase I study, EU member states use PSE especially in connection with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong institutions). This is followed by the SDGs concentrating on human development, i.e. SDGs 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10 (Good health and well-being; Quality education; Gender equality; Clean water and sanitation; and Reduced inequalities). SDGs 2, 7 and 13 (Zero hunger; Affordable and clean energy; and Climate action) and SDGs 9, 12 and 17 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure; Responsible consumption and production; and Partnerships for the goals) are less prominent (Schneider and Illan 2020).

Although a fully-fledged mapping of the use of PSE in EU institutions is not publicly available (but would be extremely valuable to bolster further discussions on the use of PSE), there is some evidence that it has been wide-ranging. The areas in which PSE could be used range from security – in which public agencies have hard-to-find expertise – to digitisation, one of the European Commission's priority areas and an area in which the EU wishes to shape the regulatory agenda beyond its borders. The sections below focus on human development and climate change. These two areas may offer some scope for further use of PSE, based on their relevance to the EU agenda, a sustainable post-COVID recovery and based on the findings of Phase I that EU member-states already have some experience of cooperation in these areas.

While human development and environment and climate change policies are two areas in which EU member states use PSE less frequently, they are candidates for closer collaboration with EU institutions in the future. PSE could act as a vehicle for helping partner countries to understand the European socio-economic model and for helping to shape environmental, social and socio-economic public policies based on shared values and goals. These could include, for example, policies on sustainable agriculture or energy production, education, gender, regional and social cohesion. Value-based external action remains one of the EU's tenets, along with a more powerful promotion of its interests.

Resolving the COVID-19 crisis is both a social and an economic imperative, since the struggle to contain the virus is having a massive impact on economies all over the world (Veron and Di Ciommo 2020). The crisis is also having [a big impact](#) on education, gender equality, poverty and political stability. While the EU's political leadership, from President Von der Leyen to the European Parliament and the European Council, have sent out powerful calls for better health policies and systems, it remains to be seen how this will play out either in EU policy implementation or in partner countries (Veron and Di Ciommo 2020).

Beyond health, the pandemic has also lent more strengths to the calls for human development to return to the development agenda, on the grounds that this is good, not only for people, but also for politics and business. Fundamentally, such a move would also need to come from partner countries, whose priorities have shifted towards economic objectives in the past decade. This applies especially to many African countries, particularly since many African economies have started to shrink during the pandemic. Some of the EU's best-known programmes that pivot on some form of PSE have a strong social component. These include:

- [SOCIEUX+](#), a technical assistance facility focusing on social protection, labour and employment policy with a multi-regional scope;
- [EUROSociAL+](#), an EU regional programme on social cohesion whose remit is peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchanges between European and Latin American public administrations on gender equality, social policy and democratic governance;



- [E-READI](#), a programme covering the southeast Asia region that includes human development aspects (such as gender equality, safe migration and mobility) as part of a wider programme that also touches upon human rights, economic and trade, environment and climate change.

The EU has renewed its ambitions to become a global leader on climate change. Under the [Green Deal](#), the EU aims to become carbon neutral by 2050, decouple growth from emissions and transition to a competitive and fair society in the process. This far-reaching plan has a strong international dimension that has been better articulated in recent Council Conclusions on the international dimension of delivering the Green Deal. The latter document signals a strong drive to fight climate change and invite the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to prepare a new strategy on international energy engagement by the end of 2021 (European Council 2021). What is particularly relevant for PSE is that all domestic policy areas under the Green Deal have an international dimension, including promoting EU energy standards and technologies at a global level, reducing pressure on biodiversity worldwide, and forging Green Deal Alliances as part of the EU [Farm to Fork Strategy](#).

Many details on how to operationalise the Green Deal's international dimensions still need to be ironed out. Indeed, the substance of the Green Deal is constantly changing, even domestically. A lot will depend on whether objectives and approaches can be adapted to different contexts during the programming and implementation stages. Past experience suggests that a mix of tools, including knowledge-sharing and expert exchanges, policy and political dialogue and some degree of collaboration within the European family, can yield results. This has been applied to European cooperation with China, where lessons on the establishment of a carbon market and other sustainable development solutions were tested and implemented on the back of multiple, sustained exchanges between European and Chinese experts, administrators and politicians and a common interest in tackling climate change (Di Ciommo et al. 2018).

Programmes that have included some form of administrative cooperation include [Euroclima+](#) and the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, in which the EU plays a leading role both in [Europe](#) and globally, and supports the sub-Saharan Africa chapter (European Commission 2020b).<sup>10</sup>

## 7. PSE as part of the NDICI programming

One of the main decisions that needs to be taken in the coming months will be to define 'what level of ambition PSE should have in the framework of [programming and implementation of] the NDICI' (Schneider and Illan 2020). The Phase I study found 'a consensus among the participating EU member states [in the study] on the notion that PSE could play a strategic role if used more systematically – as in the EU enlargement process' (Schneider and Illan 2020: 12).

Hopes for a scale-up and a more strategic use of PSE rest on the more favourable language offered by the NDICI. It foresees the use of administrative and technical cooperation measures, including cooperation measures involving public sector experts dispatched from the Member States and their regional and local authorities. PSE will be used in the implementation of EU programmes for all countries, along with the neighbourhood, including and beyond what are known as the 'Cooperation Facilities'.<sup>11</sup> Still, questions remain

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<sup>10</sup> [The Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans](#). The document states that 'policy cooperation and provision of viable alternatives to fossil fuels can prove pivotal in helping partner countries reconsider unsustainable infrastructure and energy investments. Technical and financial assistance will be needed to tap into the enormous potential of a new economic model based on sustainability and climate neutrality'.

<sup>11</sup> These are tools for achieving a broader, more comprehensive engagement with partner countries through, for example, policy dialogue, capacity development, strategic communication and joint programming.

as to the expected scale of PSE actions and its use under the NDICI, especially where the use of administrative forms of cooperation is less well established.

### The EU is already experimenting with a more strategic form of PSE

There is plenty of experience to draw on when thinking about current NDICI programming. PSE programmes have taken very different forms under DG INTPA, such as:

- [MIEUX+](#): a knowledge exchange facility on migration policies;
- [the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy in Sub-Saharan Africa](#): a regional network of committed public administrations part of a global initiative;
- the EU-South Africa Dialogue Facility: a country dialogue facility;
- [Regional programmes such as Euroclima+](#): a structured regional cooperation programme for
- TAIEX interventions for supporting, for example, digital signature in Cabo Verde or the census in Uzbekistan (European Commission 2019b).<sup>12</sup>

Twinning projects are currently being piloted in seven countries, viz. the Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, Namibia, Senegal and Zambia. These will involve good governance, justice, digitisation, energy, finance and internal markets, telecommunication and trade (DEVCO 2020).

Going forward, the approach favoured by DG INTPA involves supplying the EU delegations with a toolbox from which they can choose and combine the most suitable modalities of intervention. Rather than focusing on big investments in PSE, the intention is to ‘maximise [its use] for capacity-building and policy dialogue’ bearing in mind capacity constraints of EU member states.

PSE can be used as a complementary ‘tool in the technical cooperation toolbox’ in support of broader actions and programmes, as one interviewee said. This is in line with the capacity constraints of EU member states and their different ambitions for the use of PSE in international cooperation, with some member states prepared to welcome a stronger focus. For some MS and their agencies (for example Croatia, Lithuania or Spain), PSE is a core competence that they view as highly strategic to EU cooperation in selected areas such as climate change, security, and access to the single market. They would very much like to see the NDICI programming facilitate this more.

### It will be important to think early about how to use PSE under the NDICI

Some interviewees suggested that there was no clear link between the use of PSE and NDICI programming. Programming is primarily about setting priorities and allocating resources at a higher, strategic level. Joint programming is usually done at a higher level rather than at a technical level. The stage of actions design would seem to be more appropriate for discussing different forms of cooperation. While these are fair points, past assessments of EU programming suggest that the early involvement of member states is important in order to keep them on board at a later stage (Herrero et al. 2015). Indeed, with joint programming becoming the preferred approach for programming the NDICI and Team Europe Initiatives also being designed as part of this process, interviewees said that the engagement of member states was already crucial to the strategic and policy-led success of NDICI programming.

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<sup>12</sup> Although the use of PSE has increased across the board in the neighbourhood, the popularity of individual tools tends to vary. Some instruments have seen a decrease in use, with older EU member states showing less interest in Twinning, a trend coupled with a decline in the number of requests from partner countries (GDSI 2019). In some cases, alternatives such as service agreements and Pillar-Assessed Grant or Delegation Agreements (PAGoDAs) have been regarded as easier to use (GDSI 2019).

An early engagement, for example by member states' development cooperation agencies, could help to identify how different countries can support EU priorities, including those countries that have limited capacity and experience with EU programmes, but who do nonetheless have valuable expertise to share. Also, some technical solutions can be highly political and an early engagement on joint implementation and on 'how to do development' can support development effectiveness as well as EU agendas. Presenting PSE as part of the EU toolbox at an early stage could help to popularise this additional offer among partner countries and give them enough space to assess their own willingness and capacities to engage.

## Cooperation with middle-income and more advanced developing countries creates opportunities

There are some areas in which greater use could be made of PSE. In line with the policy recommendations made in the Phase I study (Schneider and Illan 2020), MICs and MADCs are candidates for a greater use of PSE thanks to their better resourced public administrations, the fact that they are facing similar challenges to the European countries, and a higher level of mutual understanding and trust. While some poorer MICs will receive relatively large envelopes of EU aid, envelopes for upper-middle-income countries will remain small, even with the reinstatement of bilateral assistance under the NDICI. Cooperation based on dialogue and policy support, rather than large programmes funded by grant aid, is regarded as a more effective and viable form of engagement. This type of cooperation includes nurturing bottom-up approaches to political dialogue at regional and national levels. PSE has already been used in several successful initiatives in MICs and MADCs in Latin America and Asia, including in order to facilitate regional and triangular cooperation.

The Phase I study suggests that PSE could be used to perform feasibility studies in key areas of intervention, for example linking them to the technical assistance pillar of the European Investment Plan (Schneider and Illan 2020). The pillar can support feasibility studies (identification of projects) and also help partner countries to adopt economic reform programmes aimed at improving the investment climate and business environment, including through policy dialogue. This use of PSE may be advantageous to the EU as it allows experts to be deployed fairly flexibly and may help to direct resources to actions that have more impact (Fotheringham et al. 2017). PSE also links well with the EU's agendas, such as the policy-first principle of the EU - a principle that aims to more strongly link external action to policy objectives shared between the EU and its developing countries partners - and can be a way of operationalising the partnership approach.

PSE could also be useful in scoping out opportunities for collaboration and piloting new approaches, before a decision is taken on whether or not to invest in a stand-alone project. The literature suggests that starting small is a good idea, because it allows action to be built in smaller blocks that, taken together, produce bigger changes (Effective Institutions Platform and National School of Government International 2018). TAIEX is particularly effective here (Fotheringham et al. 2017). Another way of using PSE on a smaller scale is to experiment and use it for staffing purposes, for example, for filling strategic posts such as project or programme leaders and key experts (Schneider and Illan 2020).

## 8. PSE as a vehicle for Working Better Together

### Team Europe initiatives could greatly benefit from administrative cooperation

While it is important for PSE to be acknowledged as a source of expertise with its own added value, some of the push for its use derives from its perceived potential for fostering EU approaches on joint programming, joint implementation, inclusiveness and Team Europe. Joint programming is the preferred approach under the NDICI. The updated guidance on Working Better Together as Team Europe through joint programming and implementation (European Commission 2021) includes an explicit reference to PSE in the context of regional

programmes and as a part of joint implementation. The guidance views PSE as a catalyst for building partnerships and strengthening institutions, as well as an opportunity for fostering policy dialogue. The guidance also clearly recognises the role played by PSE in promoting inclusiveness.

The Working Better Together as Team Europe approach, notably the Team Europe initiatives that are part of the NDICI programming process and which are designed to lend more visibility to the collective action of European actors, is another way of making more strategic use of PSE. This applies particularly to Team Europe initiatives as they aim to bring together all Team Europe participants - including the EU and its member states and their implementing and finance institutions, as well as the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development - towards the implementation of large-scale initiatives with a transformational impact. An important aspect of the TEIs is that they aim to make use of the wide range of implementation modalities (financial and non-financial) that Team Europe participants can contribute under the TEI. While some of these initiatives may emphasise cooperation based on co-financing and the use of development finance institutions, it will be important to be more creative and think how other forms of engagement, including PSE, can strengthen the impact of Team Europe.

Team Europe initiatives should focus on priorities where there is a match between the EU's interests and those of its partner countries. While governance may not be the focus of the Team Europe Initiative, most Team Europe Initiatives are likely to contain governance components where EU member states can make greater use of PSE. At the same time, policy reforms or European expertise may prove useful in facilitating Team Europe initiatives, for example to accompany public policies to improve the business environment, managing a transition to a green economy, or secure legislative backing for inclusive and democratic digital development. The move towards programming based on wider objectives rather than focal sectors can support this use of PSE in the design and implementation of Team Europe initiatives, which one of our interviewees described as 'a global package of actions helping Europe make a difference in specific areas, not necessarily sectors'. That is because PSE as a form of cooperation can often have a wider focus including more than one sector.

### **PSE, joint implementation and inclusive approaches to cooperation can reinforce each other**

The link between PSE, joint implementation and inclusiveness is relatively well-articulated. On the one hand, joint implementation can improve PSE action. The promotion of coherence and coordination between the EU institutions and the member states, and thus boosting development effectiveness, lies at the core of joint implementation (Schneider and Illan 2020; European Council 2017; European Commission 2020c). More specifically, joint implementation appears to produce benefits through the greater knowledge and skills that EU member states can collectively mobilise, for example for policy dialogue (Schneider and Illan 2020). Involving more member states can also expand the networks of experts and policy-makers that projects can reach in partner countries, for example in regional programmes and through triangular cooperation. The fact that different member states have different relationships and affiliations enables them to tap into country-level and regional organisations, notably through more or less formal networks of experts or communities of practice (O'Riordan 2019; Schneider and Illan 2020). For instance, in the case of EUROsociAL+, the programme benefited hugely from the networks of member states that had gradually been built over time (O'Riordan 2019, see also Annex 1).

On the other hand, joint implementation through PSE is also seen as an enabler of inclusiveness, i.e. securing the involvement of all EU member states in the implementation of EU external programmes. PSE is seen as a good opportunity because it can offer lighter ways of engaging, as compared with stand-alone technical assistance, that require less resources and are swifter to operationalise such as under TAIEX. A further reason is that PSE aligns with the international experience and political interest of certain member states – those such as

Spain with a long history of supplying PSE, or those such as Romania, Croatia and Lithuania, who have invested more in international cooperation fairly recently (Schneider and Illan 2020).<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, smaller EU member states and their bilateral agencies in particular struggle to ‘get their foot in the door of big projects’. This may be due to a lack of information and capacities or a lack of their representation in those countries in which EU joint programming or implementation takes place. In some cases, cumbersome administrative procedures are a bottleneck (Jones et al. 2019). Enhanced participation could come through greater flexibility, for example, by creating opportunities to engage in certain priority or thematic areas and/or larger EU projects where these member states’ expertise is of added value. A number of member states’ development cooperation agencies have a track record of joint implementation through consortia. These have been a practical way of working collaboratively. For some member states, they may currently be the only feasible option for participating in EU projects (Jones forthcoming).

### The EU institutions’ catalytic role in the use of PSE

Much of the collaboration among EU member states in international cooperation occurs as part of EU programmes. Yet, more can be done in terms of Team Europe/ Working Better Together. The EU’s role in bringing member states together should be considered complementary and mutually reinforcing in any future debate on how to use PSE and its role in producing more inclusive and impactful European external action.

The EU also has a role to play in ensuring that all member states have fair access to opportunities for cooperation based on their added value. For example, those member states who wish to work in regions or countries where they do not have a history of cooperation or have a limited field presence could benefit from the support of EU delegations. The latter could act as brokers between EU member states and partner countries as part of their country dialogues, or offer to host member states’ staff who can build their own knowledge and network on the ground (Jones forthcoming). There are also activities that could be adapted and/or expanded throughout the EU institutions, along the lines of the *Institutional Building Community*, for example. The latter is a group of representatives from EU member states that work in the accession countries and in the neighbourhood, as well as experts from TAIEX and Twinning and EU institutions’ staff, and is designed to facilitate the use of Twinning and TAIEX by the member states.

The Phase I study found that the joint implementation of PSE activities is still at an early stage. A large amount of collaboration between EU member states takes place in the framework of EU-funded programmes, while collaboration outside formal EU programmes is rarer (see Annex 3). The European Commission’s Directorates-General (INTPA, NEAR) can facilitate joint implementation by mapping and identifying relevant public policy practices across all the 27 EU member states that could be of interest or that might be a better fit in specific contexts outside Europe. There are numerous examples of EU-funded projects and programmes that bring together member states for joint implementation. For example, EUROsociAL is considered a model example of joint implementation (O’Riordan 2019). In the [Bridging the Gap](#) project five member states work together to increase the inclusion of persons with disabilities at both international and national levels; in the Partnership for Accountability and Transparency in Cambodia project, the EU joined forces with Sweden to strengthen Cambodia’s reforms in public finance management (see Annex 1), among many others.

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<sup>13</sup> Inclusiveness also aims to foster mutual knowledge and understanding, peer exchanges and cooperation among all EU member states, particularly the smaller and newer member states, or member states that do not yet have a long history of development cooperation (European Commission 2021).

## 9. A common language for European PSE?

The Phase I study found an absence of a common set of terms for conceptualising PSE in Europe. One of its key recommendations is to ‘ensure a common definition of PSE and its modalities as the form of Technical Cooperation that mobilises international institutional partnerships between peer administrations and experts from or through public institutions’ (Schneider and Illan 2020: 35). In addition to proposing a common approach to the modalities and tools used for delivering PSE, the Phase I study adds that any future definition could be based on three elements, namely:

- the specific expertise of EU member states;
- institutional partnerships between public entities;
- and flexibility to select between a civil servant or another expert to perform the action’ (idem).

Our study detected further elements for potential discussion.

### Potential areas for future debate could include the role of coordinating mechanisms...

While coordination is not a prerequisite for PSE and a number of practices already exist in Europe, our study detected a deep interest in better understanding the coordination mechanisms for PSE and the role played by member state organisations. The Phase I study tested the assumption that some form of coordination or a mandated body would make PSE activities more effective. The evidence shows that ‘the use of public expertise hinges upon the existence of effective institutionalised mechanisms of coordination’ (Schneider and Illan 2020: 23), whether this is a specialist agency or an inter-institutional coordinating mechanism.

Most of the member states that took part in the Phase I study have a ‘coordinating body’. The Phase I study concluded that specialist agencies have an edge in facilitating PSE procedures, as ‘it appears that EU member states with a coordinating or mandated body for PSE have a better perception of the fluidity of procedures’ (Schneider and Illan 2020: 18). Depending on the mandate, staffing and culture, a foreign ministry may prefer to focus on diplomacy and international relations and therefore wish to establish a mandated body or a sister agency for management and implementation. Lithuania has already gone in this direction, with the establishment of its Central Project Management Agency. Slovenia, Estonia and Latvia will do the same in the future, setting up agencies with a mandate that includes PSE. Expertise France is the French agency for international technical cooperation. FIIAPP in Spain focuses exclusively on PSE. Albeit beyond the scope of this study, a future study could investigate whether the existence of mandated agencies or coordination mechanisms in EU member states also helps partner countries to access and make use of PSE in a more structured manner.

Beyond offering practical managerial and administrative support, these organisations can play a major role in ensuring that the technical knowledge of public administrations contributes to development results. Public agencies that work at the interface between international cooperation and domestic institutions can facilitate the engagement of domestic administrations, introducing them to the specific modes of working and thinking of international cooperation. Depending on how they are organised, member states’ organisations can help to match partner countries’ demands with EU member states’ public administrations, guide changes in partner countries’ organisations, read the local context and stay engaged in the longer-term, usefully complementing the technical expertise of sectoral agencies in PSE activities.

### ...the role of institutional versus individual PSE activities...

One additional point raised during the research is whether PSE is an institutional or individual activity and how partner countries' administrations can access it. There is a recognition that institutional engagement is core to realising the benefits of PSE in a more sustainable way and, in particular, building trust and support for change in partner countries' administrations in the longer term. Individual action can be useful to kick-start reform processes, support wider change processes or to achieve highly specific objectives.

A related point is the time frame of action: peer-to-peer exchanges between administrations are generally understood as medium- to long- term activities. At the same time, most of the activities of EU member states mapped in the Phase I study are short-term activities. Related elements for discussion concern, for example, the role of private actors such as experts from the private sector or consultants embedded into public administrations and retired officials in providing PSE and their added value vis-à-vis active civil or employed public servants.

### ...how to ensure that PSE is demand-driven and how to assess its impact

Another point that needs closer attention is how to ensure that PSE remains demand-driven. According to the EU member states (Schneider and Illan 2020), PSE is demand-driven in the sense that it responds to requests and is based on partner countries' needs and priorities. However, it is ultimately provided by one or more European public administrations that are able to match these demands. While member states have procedures for handling and responding to partner countries' demands, more clarity is required as to how to safeguard the demand-driven nature of PSE, how it meets the needs and priorities of partner countries, and to what extent their own organisations are involved.

Finally, the development impact of PSE, the sustainability of interventions and the means of measuring success (for example, in terms of objectives, impact or results) emerged from the interviews as areas in which further exchanges of good practices and research would be beneficial. This is a tricky set of issues because, as one interviewee put it, 'the problem is esoteric'. The logic of peer-to-peer exchanges does not easily lend itself to the customary definitions or measures of impact – how people learn (including tacit knowledge), how people use their knowledge to foster change, how to assess trust, and so forth – and the focus often lies on 'soft' elements of change (such as behaviours, cultural norms and institutional culture) rather than just on drafting and approving legislation or formal restructuring of institutions. These questions transcend the scope of this study, which can only highlight the importance of deepening knowledge in this connection to start building evidence of the achievements of PSE interventions.

### A shared vision of European PSE should endorse its diversity

Finding a common definition of PSE and its modalities is likely to be a complex balancing act. Any exercise in this regard should recognise both the commonalities of European PSE and the richness of European experiences. The latter is paramount for two reasons: one of the attractions of European expertise is indeed its variety of languages, political and institutional cultures, public management systems, territorial organisation of public institutions, policy and political frameworks, as well as the range of solutions devised to solve common societal problems and the lessons that come from these experiences. Secondly, recognising the different offers of EU member states is a precondition for gauging political support for the development of a shared concept. Member states are not particularly keen to harmonise national frameworks or practices. After all, PSE frameworks have developed from different histories of civil service and international cooperation, and are rooted in different interests in and views about a country's international reputation. Capacities also differ hugely. In addition, member states are keenly aware of their own visibility and will most likely resist initiatives

that they fear could cast a shadow on their brand: member states' flags and the European identity will need to go hand in hand. While the new Team Europe provides some opportunities here, success will depend on how it is managed (Jones and Teevan 2021).

At the same time, there are certain incentives for trying to come up with a better definition of European PSE. A shared concept is important, for example, so as to make the European offer more intelligible to partner countries, so that they can choose an approach and a partnership that better suit their needs. A shared understanding would also help EU institutions to better communicate this offer to counterparts in partner countries, for example, through the EU delegations or as part of joint programming and implementation discussions. While most member states have built PSE capabilities and expertise, countries that are in the process of developing their international cooperation outreach and need support to present their offer could greatly benefit from this.

A common understanding is also useful for guaranteeing a level playing- field among the member states themselves, both in order to have fair competition and to help them find the right partners for consortia or activities, for example. An additional benefit could be a more effective reporting of PSE activities and hence greater visibility of PSE as part of the portfolio of EU institutions' and member states' international engagements.

### The catalytic role of the EU and member states' interest in mutual learning can help future discussions

Discussions could start and be rooted in the widespread desire of EU member states to share their experiences and learn from each other. They should involve the EU institutions, thus benefiting from their experience and their catalytic role. An exchange of ideas about practices, approaches, advantages and challenges could help to build a common language and understanding around PSE and allow the participants to share learnings more easily. Ultimately, such a process could lead to a more robust policy on the role of and space for PSE in European cooperation and, potentially, agreed guidelines on European PSE as suggested by the Phase I study. However, guidelines could be more effective as voluntary, gradually evolving guidance for member states to own rather than as a set of complex rules that they are obliged to follow.

To be truly successful, discussions should also defy the contours of the development arena and involve a wide range of actors, especially representatives of ministries, public administrations and agencies, as well as experts employed by the public agencies that are supposed to provide the PSE. Such a broader discussion would also be in the spirit of Agenda 2030, which frames the SDGs as a collective, multi-actor endeavour, not least due to their complexity and interconnectedness.

## 10. Conclusions

This paper sketches the landscape for the exchange of PSE between the EU's public administrations, its member states and their international partners across the globe as a contribution to the nascent debate on how to better leverage PSE in EU external action and development cooperation.

### Although ambitions vary, there is a common interest in using PSE more strategically

Ambitions vary for using PSE in EU external action. Some member states aspire to significantly scale-up PSE or see it as a cornerstone of international cooperation. Others take a less ambitious view, believing that, while PSE is definitely useful, there will not be any big scaling- up in the coming years. On the one hand, these ambitions will need to be calibrated, certainly in the short term, taking account of member states' constraints



and desires, and the need to refine the EU institutions' own approach. On the other hand, it is important not to miss the opportunity to use PSE more strategically under the NDICI to pursue wider EU strategic priorities and achieve the SDGs. In sum, the EU institutions and member states share an interest in leveraging PSE more strategically as an innovative form of cooperation with partner countries.

### The EU plays a key role in PSE and now it is the time to leverage it

The EU institutions should not shy away from harnessing the potential of PSE. Our research has shown that the EU plays a key role in mobilising PSE and motivating EU member states' administrations. In part, this is about the financial resources that the EU institutions put on the table, but it is also about the desire of public administrators to share their domestic success stories, many of which are the result of the European project. EU programmes also come with a scale that most individual member states, especially the smaller ones, would struggle to achieve, and are a channel for collaboration among member states in external action that would otherwise probably not take place.

### The NDICI programming and Team Europe approach create opportunities for a more strategic use of PSE

PSE should certainly be used more strategically under the NDICI, in line with the "policy first" principle that should guide EU external action. This implies using PSE in combination with policy and political dialogue, for example. PSE should also be considered more regularly in relation to budget support and the technical assistance pillar of the European Investment Plan in combination with EFSD+. PSE could be used on a smaller scale, to test what does and does not work, pilot new initiatives or respond to *ad-hoc* demands of partner countries – all as part of the effort to attain broader goals and as part of wider programmes. It should be considered and presented to partner countries early on in the programming stage. Mentioning PSE, even if briefly, in MIPs or in more detail in Annual Action Programmes and individual Action Documents for 2021-2027 would be useful. Although the rationale for using PSE instruments appears stronger in MADCs and MICs with adequate public-sector capacities, it could be used in any relevant context under the NDICI.

The design of Team Europe initiatives involving the EU institutions and the member states as well as the EIB and EBRD presents opportunities for more coherent actions, including a more strategic use of PSE. While working together may not be feasible in all situations, EU-wide cooperation offers unparalleled advantages in terms of scale, geographical reach, range of expertise, technical competencies, languages and experience, whether in the form of consortia or other joint implementation arrangements. The EU plays a fundamental role in this area through its programmes.

Member states with a limited international portfolio and/or country presence could benefit greatly from closer cooperation, in terms of their ability to work in new regions or complement the actions of other EU member states. Certain member states without a long tradition of development assistance view PSE as a core attribute of their international cooperation. The EU as whole and the EU institutions should recognise and respond to their desire to showcase and use their expertise in response to partner countries' needs. The current debate on simplifying PSE procedures or enhancing participation in EU programmes as part of the inclusiveness agenda is most welcome in this respect.

### Taking the PSE agenda forward will require homework

While EU incentives are a driver for the use of PSE, a lot of the political work will have a national dimension. In fact, decision-makers and administrators with a domestic mandate are crucial stakeholders in any future PSE

constituency. This means that they are the primary targets of any initiative for raising awareness of PSE's added value and strategic importance and that they should be involved in policy discussions.

Our analysis of the motives for engagement in PSE suggests that they may be easier to mobilise around national or organisational strategic objectives rather than in response to a general appeal to work on the SDGs. Nonetheless, there is a strong rationale for international engagement based on climate change, human development, security, the rule of law, migration, digitisation, social cohesion and other areas, given the interdependence of nations, as has recently been exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The use of PSE has been limited to date, due to political and operational constraints. This paper focuses on the former and examines some of the motives for PSE engagement among EU member states and EU institutions. If the ambition is to scale- up the use of PSE in EU external action, there will be a need to raise political support and boost the visibility of PSE. While there is no single recipe for this, some ideas have been mooted:

- showcase concrete examples of how PSE contributes to EU member states' objectives (whether as the direct results of projects or as the more indirect outcomes of engagement);
- showcase the contribution of PSE to development objectives, notably the SDGs, especially in the member states' priority areas;
- present success stories of other European countries or public administrations that have engaged in PSE to create a 'demonstration effect';
- raise awareness of the added value of PSE that support EU agendas (such as Working Better Together as Team Europe, inclusiveness, cooperation with middle-income countries and policy first principle) and as a way of operationalising the partnership approach;
- raise the visibility and added value of PSE for improving collaboration among EU member states and jointly with the EU institutions, including through the use of Twinning and TAIEX in development cooperation.

Some of the areas above would benefit from more research. Methodologically sound research findings and examples of the way in which PSE contributes to development outcomes and the EU member states' strategic objectives could help make a stronger case for PSE. A public, comprehensive mapping of the use of PSE in EU institutions and an evaluation of the impact of PSE in partner countries could help learning processes, increase accountability and counter criticism of its effectiveness.

### Operational constraints need to be addressed

The Phase I study highlighted the diversity of the European experience with PSE, as well as some of the operational constraints. The present study summarised them, but did not go into details or suggest potential solutions. At the same time, they remain vital chokepoints hampering the wider use of PSE. We wish to recall the recommendations for 'improving coordination, synergies and learning exchange between EU member states to enhance full awareness of PSEs added value' and improving the incentives for the participation of public experts in international assignments and promoting the compilation of best practices to address administrative and legal challenges (Schneider and Illan 2020: 37). Coupled with garnering stronger political support, easing the operational constraints will be key to making a more decisive and more strategic use of PSE.

### Dialogue and guidance on PSE needed

We contend that a better definition of European PSE would be a good investment that could pay off by clarifying the European offer and more impactful action. However, this should not be at the expense of the variety of the European experiences that the member states can offer. The idea of harmonising approaches is

politically unappealing and risks jeopardising Europe's real added value, namely its diversity and adaptability to different demands from partner countries. While it might be tempting to set some rules and parameters, the discussion should focus on key aspects of member states' policies and interventions and on supporting the more political work. Areas for reflection could include how to ensure that PSE is strategy-driven and demand-driven, the role of institutional partnerships, the time frame for action, and how to define the success of PSE interventions.

Any shared guidance on European PSE would need to be enshrined in some form of official document and have the support of major players to have some standing. The feasibility of arriving at such a document varies, depending on its status and the parties involved. A communication on PSE from the Commission, potentially jointly with the European External Action Service, followed by Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions is a highly ambitious target, both politically and institutionally, despite its desirability (given that it could set out both a clear definition and a level of ambition). PSE would probably be more likely to find itself part of a wider Communication and the resultant Council Conclusions on the EU's ambition for international cooperation or a particular aspect of this, for example as part of the ongoing reflection on Twinning. The initiative would have to be taken by the Commission (for the Communication) and then the Presidency of the Council of the EU (for the Council Conclusions). The benefit of this approach is that it would be brought into and endorsed by both the Commission (Communication) and the member states (Council Conclusions).

An alternative could be a European Commission Staff Working Document exploring the issue. This has a lower level of inter-service consultation and sign-off than a Communication. A Staff Working Document cannot issue recommendations, which is the prerogative of a Communication.

A further alternative would be technical guidance such as the 'Tools & Method' series developed by DG INTPA, DG NEAR and DG ECHO, which contain a wealth of more practical details on the 'how'. However, their status in the EU document hierarchy is considerably lower: they are advisory in nature and do not require a sign-off or a response from the member states.<sup>14</sup>

The member states could choose to put forward their own ideas and definitions in collaboration and dialogue with the EU institutions, as was recently the case with the issue of peace mediation.<sup>15</sup> Yet this is a rather unusual approach that would require quite a strong constituency. In relation to the issue of PSE, it is unclear whether the EU institutions would welcome such an approach by the member states and Council, and whether the necessary political and institutional constituency could be mobilised. Past experience shows that an agreement on documents does not necessarily lead to actual policy implementation. Some thought would have to be given to the most appropriate format, its feasibility and follow-up.

## 11. Recommendations

In conclusion, the desire to mobilise European PSE more decisively is well-rooted as an area in which EU external action has value to add, in the shape of the good practices that European public administrations can offer in solving shared social problems. Nonetheless, there is a long list of 'things to do' before the full potential of European PSE can be exploited, requiring the involvement of many actors at different levels. Such a collective endeavour would be laborious, but necessary. While the programming of EU international resources for the NDICI is a key moment for taking bold steps in making better use of PSE, the policy debate, the sharing of learnings and the fine-tuning of action is likely to take much more time. This is certainly not an excuse for

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<sup>14</sup> For a full list of technical guidance developed by DG DEVCO/INTPA alone or jointly, see <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/t-and-m-series/wiki/list-available-publications>

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Council of the European Union. RELEX.1.C, 2020. Concept on EU Peace Mediation, Brussels, 13951/20, 11 December 2020. <<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13951-2020-INIT/en/pdf>>

idling or letting the moment pass, and we hope that this report offers some ideas to build on in moving forward.

The following recommendations are intended to help move the process forward:

**For EU institutions:**

- approach PSE as a source of expertise that helps to achieve the SDGs, facilitates international partnerships and can support the objectives of EU external action;
- take into account the differing ambitions and capacities of EU member states when defining a more strategic European approach to cooperation through mobilising PSE, including through Team Europe Initiatives;
- start considering and input PSE early in the programming process. Where appropriate, refer to mobilising PSE in MIPs or in Annual Action Programmes and individual Action Documents;
- continue testing the mobilisation of PSE and strengthen its use, alone or as part of wider programmes, for example under the EFSD+ , as part of Team Europe initiatives and linked to budget support;
- Consider the linkages with and broader contribution of PSE to policy and political dialogues and EU strategic policy objectives, in line with the policy first principle under the NDICI
- consider PSE as an important component of Team Europe initiatives to add value to European cooperation with partner countries and to operationalise the EU Working Better Together and joint implementation approaches;
- support the participation of all member states in EU programmes as part of the inclusiveness agenda, including through the role of EU delegations in ensuring that all member states with an interest and added value can contribute;
- consider undertaking a comprehensive, publicly available mapping of the use of PSE by EU institutions in collaboration with EU member states in the context of international cooperation in support of further discussions about European PSE.

**For member states:**

- raise awareness among key decision-makers in domestically-focused public administrations of EU member states on the added value of PSE and its strategic importance for national or organisational objectives and involve them in policy discussions about PSE;
- adopt the recommendations of the Phase I study for improving coordination, synergies and the exchange of learning about PSE;
- consider ways to improve incentives for mobilising public experts in PSE activities and compile best practices for dealing with administrative and legal problems, following the recommendations of the Phase I study;
- assess the need for establishing PSE coordination mechanisms and/or dedicated agencies in member states, including ways to better combine the technical expertise of member states' domestic public administrations and the development expertise of member states' development agencies (Member State Organizations, MSOs).

**For both EU institutions and member states:**

- facilitate the sharing of learning and the building of collective data on PSE;
- showcase the successes of PSE, either in the form of project results or as more indirect outcomes, and create a 'demonstration effect' presenting the successes of other EU countries or organisations;
- harness the potential of PSE for strengthening collaboration among EU member states and jointly with EU institutions;
- consider developing and codifying in an appropriate document a shared definition of European PSE that takes into account the variety of European experiences;
- assist further research on what the success of PSE activities looks like, how to appraise successes and learn about development results, how to document what drives PSE in specific cases and how to overcome operational challenges;
- commit to evaluating the impact of PSE in partner countries in order to promote both learning and accountability in the use of PSE and to improve its effectiveness;
- provide information on how PSE can be 'plugged into' the EU's and member states' (joint) programming and the Team Europe Initiatives.

## Annex 1: Longer-term partnerships

Short-term, *ad-hoc* interventions may not be sufficient for building sustainable partnerships among the institutions (Effective Institutions Platform and National School of Government International 2018). Long-term engagement helps to build mutual trust among administrations, which is an important component for peer-to-peer learning (Schneider and Illan 2020; Effective Institutions Platform and National School of Government International 2018; National School of Government International 2018). Although short-term interventions may be useful in building individuals' capacities, it is recognised that organisational impact is likely to be enhanced by a sustained engagement that allows trust to develop over time and new capacities to be fully absorbed and put to practice (FCG Sweden, 2017). While the Phase I mapping study signals that a large proportion of European PSE initiatives are short-term, focusing for instance on study visits and workshops, the study also identified longer-term activities and projects carried out by Spain, Denmark, Sweden, France and Ireland, for instance.

The Phase I mapping study brought up several more long-term PSE projects and programmes from Spain. For instance, ACERCA, created in 2005, is a training programme for development in the cultural sector. It aims to promote national capacities of partner countries in areas relevant to culture. It provides training of cultural actors and managers both in public and private institutions, and facilitates the meeting between experts and professionals to establish cooperation mechanisms, regional strategies and to enhance networking. Another example provided by the Phase I from Spain is [INTERCOONECTA](#), The Transfer, Exchange and Knowledge Management Plan for the Development of Spanish Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, which was launched in 2016. It seeks to respond to the needs of a Latin America and the Caribbean with profound transformations, moving from traditional training models to prioritise learning environments, where knowledge management is essential to strengthen the institutional capacities of partner countries. INTERCOONECTA works on several fields, including consolidation of democracy, climate action, water and sanitation and Innovation. The project is organised by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) in collaboration with Spanish public institutions.

In the case of Denmark, the India-Denmark Energy Partnership (INDEP) 2020-2025 is one example of a long-standing PSE engagement, based as it is on a five-year Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2020 between the relevant Indian and Danish Ministries (ET EnergyWorld 2020). The aim of the INDEP partnership is to support India in mitigating climate change and transitioning to green energy. It builds on energy sector cooperation between Denmark and India that started in 2018 and focuses on sharing Denmark's energy expertise and technology. There are four areas in the partnership: energy planning and scenario modelling; renewable energy; power system flexibility; and electricity markets. Knowledge-sharing activities are also in the core of the programme (Schneider and Illan 2020; INDEP 2019). The INDEP has obtained a high level of political support in both countries, as is illustrated by a [joint statement](#) released in September 2020 and signed by the prime ministers of both countries.

Sweden has carried out international training programmes on several topics since the 1980s. Over the years, there has been a shift in the programmes' time frames, which now span several years and allow the same participants to attend multiple training rounds, thus improving follow-up and organisational learning (FCG Sweden 2017). For instance, the international training programme on social protection, which was included in the Phase I study, covers 2019-2023 (including several training rounds) and focuses on sub-Saharan Africa. The programme includes training in several areas, such as the design and implementation of social protection systems, social protection and gender equality, and the financing of social protection reforms (Schneider and Illan 2020; Sida 2020). Its overall objective is to improve the effectiveness of social protection systems and hence alleviate poverty.

The third example in the mapping study involves Ireland. Irish Aid has had a long-standing partnership with the government of Vietnam under the Irish Development Experience Sharing Programme (IDEAS). The programme seeks to share expertise and skills in the areas of education, agriculture, agri-food and business and economic development. IDEAS builds capacities for achieving Vietnam's long-term development objectives. It supports peer-to-peer institutional links, provides scholarships and supports cooperation between universities and research institutions in Ireland and Vietnam (Irish Aid 2017; State of Green 2020).

Launched in 2009, the programme has created partnerships in areas such as banking regulation and economic forecasting. The common priorities for the programme are set by the Ireland-Vietnam Steering Group, which meets twice a year (Schneider and Illan 2020). The IDEAS programme has successfully established institutional links between Ireland and Vietnam, strengthened the capacity of Vietnamese institutions, fostered policy dialogue and facilitated high-level access for Ireland to the government of Vietnam. IDEAS has also facilitated trade between Ireland and Vietnam. It should be pointed out, though, that the impact of the scholarships was not yet clear at the time of the evaluation (Irish Aid 2012 and 2016; Department of Foreign Affairs (Ireland) 2016).

## Annex 2: Political support for PSE in the member states

As the Phase I study pointed out, political support for PSE is fundamental to its mobilisation and effective use. The high level of political interest and institutional involvement are crucial for mobilising PSE. Even experienced organising bodies or experts cannot make up for a lack of managerial engagement (Schneider and Illan 2020).

Croatia is an interesting example of high-level political support for PSE. Knowledge-sharing among peers in the domain of EU accession and post-conflict transition is high on the political agenda and figures prominently in Croatia's National Strategy for Development Cooperation 2017-2020. The strategy explicitly states that 'since it is a strategic foreign policy interest of the Republic of Croatia, we will continue to share our experience of the EU accession [...] among the candidate countries and potential candidates' and 'we will share knowledge and lessons learned in dealing with the war and post-war challenges with countries facing similar experiences' (Government of Croatia 2017: 12, 23).

Political will has been translated into practice. The strategy commits Croatia to developing an 'expert base', for instance in the fields of reconciliation, demining, disarmament and tracing missing persons as well as EU accession. This has led to the formation of a pool of public-sector experts who are available to assist partner countries' administrations. Over 300 Croatian experts are taking part in various multi-country projects in south and east Europe, assisting countries in their efforts to develop their institutions and align their legislation with the EU's legal framework. Also, Croatian provinces are involved in cross-border cooperation with neighbouring provinces, e.g. building the capacities of local authorities (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation 2018).

The Knowledge Transfer Division, which was formerly named the Centre of Excellence for Transitional Processes, is a good example of the political support for PSE in Croatia. Operating under the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, the Division transfers Croatian knowledge and experience with transition gained through the process of integration and accession to the EU (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation 2018; United Nations Development Programme 2017). It was set up in 2012 as an innovative mechanism for structuring Croatian expertise and managing the pool of experts who were in high demand in the neighbouring countries, and quickly grew in scope and number of activities. It was showcased as a successful initiative at the Global South-South Development Expo in 2014 and 2016 (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation 2018).

Croatia has also set up an Interministerial Working Group on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance. This is a forum for regular communication with the institutions involved, helping not only to coordinate PSE activities, but also in tying shorter actions together so that they form part of a more structured partnership thus boosting the potential impact of the interventions (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation 2018; Schneider and Illan 2020).

Similarly, PSE has received a high level of political support in Lithuania, where it is a key component of the country's development cooperation. There is a broad political recognition of the importance of Lithuania's experience of EU integration and of the benefits of sharing that experience. Sharing Lithuania's expertise and experience with partner countries is also one of the priorities of Lithuanian foreign policy. The [2019-2021 Inter-institutional Action plan on Development Cooperation](#) lists a number of areas in which Lithuania shares its experience, including energy, social affairs, youth and the fight against corruption (Government of the Republic of Lithuania 2019).

Lithuania is actively participating in Twinning and TAIEX, and it also uses PSE in bilateral projects. Most of the experts working on Lithuania's development cooperation projects are from the public sector. Lithuania has

established a 'national development cooperation committee' to incentivise institutions to take part in PSE activities. The committee consists of actors from central government, local authorities and NGOs, who thus have an opportunity to propose and participate in development cooperation projects. Interviewees also referred to the work of the Central Project Management Agency (CPMA) as having yielded good results. In 2017, the CPMA became the lead agency responsible for project administration.



## Annex 3: PSE in policy dialogue

The Phase I study pointed to the benefits of using PSE to support policy dialogue (Schneider and Illan 2020). PSE can be used strategically to put reform processes high on the political agenda. It can also support policy dialogue through different dialogue mechanisms such as working groups and bilateral networks and dialogues.

One particularly interesting approach for linking policy dialogue with PSE is *mesas país*, which is used in EU regional programmes such as EUROsociAL+, [Euroclima+](#) and [EL PacCTO](#). *Mesas país* are inter-institutional dialogues that bring together the partner countries' authorities, the EU and the member states involved in the EU programme. *Mesas país* are high-level, inter-institutional dialogues among senior policy-makers from the partner country and their European counterparts from the EU and the member states involved in the EU programme concerned, led by the EU Delegation and the partner country's focal point. The focal point could be, for instance, the national development agency or a ministry. Its role is to map country demands and coordinate other institutions. Each *mesa país* is carefully prepared beforehand, with several meetings and questionnaires for analysing the partner country's needs, identifying cross-cutting issues and proposing priorities. This enables the high-level dialogue to focus on a limited number of priorities and agree on the main goals that the country wants to achieve in collaboration with its international partners.

*Mesas país* were created in the context of [EUROsociAL](#) to facilitate multi-dimensional and multi-level, intersectoral approaches and support policy dialogue through knowledge transfer, policy debate, and promoting the formation of common responses to challenges (Caputo et al. 2019; Interview 2020). The added value of *mesas país* lies in the fact that they offer a structured methodology for identifying partner countries' priorities. The *mesas país* have been instrumental in making regional programmes work at a national level, by allowing regional programmes to be tailored to the specific needs of the partner country in question.

Based on the successful experience gained with EUROsociAL, the use of *mesas país* has been expanded to other EU-funded regional programmes in Latin America, such as [Euroclima+](#) and [EL PacCTO](#). Under Euroclima+, a 'country table' was held with [Cuba](#), for instance, for addressing national challenges in implementing the Paris agreement. The dialogue enabled actions to be identified that needed support from development partners, and served as a basis for the support provided by Euroclima+.

The European Commission is piloting a similar approach for coordinating European support for national responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in Argentina, Costa Rica and Ecuador. *Mesas COVID /Mesas Equipo Europa* aims to identify and prioritise the needs emerging from the crisis, as well as to provide a systematic, coordinated response to these needs with a Team Europe approach. It will operate in coordination with other EU-funded projects, as well as with bilateral projects undertaken by EU member states. *Mesas COVID* are intended to enable the measures required to combat the pandemic and mitigate its immediate socio-economic consequences. However, they are not intended to replace other policy dialogue mechanisms (rather establish synergies with them) and will not attract any new funding.

## Annex 4: Collaboration on PSE between EU member states and the EU institutions

The joint implementation of PSE has largely been carried out through collaboration between EU member states and the EU institutions. Joint implementation offers various benefits, including the pooling of resources, as well as higher visibility and credibility in partner countries when projects are implemented together with the EU. Programmes like EUROsociAL+, Euroclima+, Copolad and Bridging the Gap are good examples of member states working together with the EU institutions.

The Working Better Together as Team Europe Guidance (European Commission 2020c), the Joint Programming Guidance 2018 (O’Riordan 2019) and the Evaluation of EU Development Cooperation in Latin America (Caputo et al. 2019) identify a number of good practices that have emerged in jointly implemented projects and programmes:

- **Governance structures and coordination efforts:** programmes are implemented by a consortium of member states and like-minded partners, who are committed to common goals and have made an effort to coordinate their activities.
- **Result-oriented and demand-driven:** clear objectives, coupled with adequate capacity and commitments to achieve the results, are essential. A high level of trust and the prioritisation of partner countries’ needs, as well as a common understanding among practitioners, partner institutions and other stakeholders, are essential for defining the results the programme is intended to achieve. This has been demonstrated by the success of the EUROsociAL programme, for instance.
- **Multi-dimensional and multi-level policy dialogue based on PSE:** regional programmes actively build policy dialogue at a regional level (among partner countries), at a national level (among key actors in one partner country) and at a bi-regional level. They bring together institutions from different countries, exchange best practices and strengthen partnerships among the actors involved.
- **Learning:** the EUROsociAL programme, for instance, has demonstrated a process of positive learning. A number of important changes were made between the first and second phases of EUROsociAL that were instrumental in improving efficiency, effectiveness and impact, in programme organisation. Further improvements were made between EUROsociAL II and EUROsociAL+, for instance, in gender prioritisation (Caputo et al. 2019).
- **Mobilising multiple networks:** According to O’Riordan (2019), the EU member states may be able to mobilise different, broader networks than the EU would be able to do alone, thus improving policy dialogue with partner countries.

Several interviewees cited EUROsociAL+ as an example of a successful initiative in which the EU and the member states have joined forces. The programme is being implemented by a consortium consisting of FIIAPP, Expertise France, the International Italo-Latin American Organisation, the European Union and the Central American Integration System, as well as the Secretariat of Central American Social Integration. A case study of EUROsociAL from a joint implementation perspective, found that two factors that have been crucial to the programme’s success are access to networks of multiple member states and trust among European and Latin American officials (O’Riordan 2019). Joint implementation has resulted in better policy dialogues spurred on by richer knowledge resources and experiences, and has reduced the risk of aid fragmentation (O’Riordan 2019). Essentially, EUROsociAL is built on mutual interests, trust and values. The high level of trust is also evinced by the request made by the Chilean government through EUROsociAL for support from EU member states for its process of constitution renewal.

Another example is the [Partnership for Accountability and Transparency in Cambodia](#), in which the EU joined forces with Sweden to strengthen Cambodia's reforms in public finance management. By working together, both the EU and Sweden were able to do things that would have been impossible had they worked alone: the partnership enabled joint activities such as visits by Cambodian authorities to the Swedish Audit Office and the EU's Parliamentary Research Service. Sweden was able to provide peer-to-peer cooperation, while the EU was in a better position to provide financial means, visibility and influence in policy dialogues, all of which are difficult for a single member state to do on its own (O'Riordan 2019).

## Annex 5: Collaboration between EU member states

Collaboration between EU member states in the form of joint implementation can improve coordination, enable resources to be pooled for better impact, and create access to networks of experts from different member states (Schneider and Illan 2020). Collaboration between member states may also be a way for member states with fewer resources available for development cooperation to participate in relatively large-scale development cooperation projects. The involvement of a number of member states also means that partner countries gain access to knowledge on different public policy models and approaches, although a variety of approaches increases the need for coordination.

Most collaboration between member states is in the context of EU-funded projects, which highlights the key role played by the EU as a catalyst of collaboration (Schneider and Illan 2020). At the same time, the Phase I study gives an example of Germany and Croatia collaborating on PSE as part of a project called ImpACT - Implementation of EU Association for Trade. This includes eight internship programmes for civil servants in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. There have also been a number of small-scale, short-term joint activities involving Croatia and Germany, such as study visits and workshops (Schneider and Illan 2020).

However, there are far more examples of collaboration in EU-funded projects and programmes. For example, Bridging the Gap, [Socieux](#), and [MIEUX](#) are all jointly implemented with the member states.<sup>16</sup> [Bridging the Gap-II](#) is implemented by a consortium led by the FIIAPP and composed of the Spanish Agency for Development Cooperation, the Austrian Development Agency, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, the European Disability Forum and the International Disability and Development Consortium. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs are also included in the initiative. Bridging the Gap is intended to make development cooperation more accessible to and inclusive of people with disabilities, as the EU and the EU member states are obliged to do as parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (European Commission 2020c).

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<sup>16</sup> Socieux+ is a technical assistance facility for supporting inclusive social and employment policies in partner countries. Collaboration is based on peer-to-peer assistance provided mainly by experts from EU member states' public administrations. Socieux+ is co-funded by the EU and the governments of France, Spain and Belgium. MIEUX is a joint initiative funded by the EU and implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development. It is designed to support local, national and regional governmental and civil society organisations in improving the governance of migration and mobility. Technical assistance is provided on a peer-to-peer basis, mostly by experts from EU member states.

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