

MID-TERM EVALUATION

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR THE COMUNITAT VALENCIANA ERDF AND ESF OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES 2014-2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

July 2020



This document summarizes the main results of the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Communication Strategy for the Comunitat Valenciana ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes 2014-2020, conducted by Grupo Considera, S.L. for the Directorate General for Treasury and Economic Model of the regional government (Generalitat Valenciana).

The content of this report meets all requirements established in the Terms of Reference for the technical assistance to develop evaluation actions for the Comunitat Valenciana European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund Operational Programmes (ERDF and ESF CVOP) and Communication Strategy for ERDF and ESF CVOP, co-financed at a 60% rate by ERDF and 40% by ESF.

CONSIDERA 

METHODOLOGY

The Mid-Term Evaluation of the Communication Strategy for the Comunitat Valenciana European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF) Operational Programmes 2014-2020 includes all information, communication and visibility (ICV) actions implemented between **1st January 2014 and 30th June 2019**.

The **scope and content** of this evaluation has been defined according to the *Methodological Guide for the Monitoring and Evaluation of the Communication Strategies for the EDRF and ESF Operational Programmes 2014-2020*. It follows as well the orientations of the Spanish Group of Information and Publicity Officers (GERIP).

The evaluation process has followed a **mixed and participatory approach**, based on methodological triangulation through the combination of quantitative and qualitative research techniques. All relevant stakeholders participating in the design and implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Communication Strategy have been involved in the evaluation.

Regarding the **methods and techniques** of investigation, they include desk research and field work. Desk research has been based on the analysis of all relevant documents, as well as available communication indicators. Field work was aimed at gathering information to confirm, deepen and complete analysis of secondary sources of information, in order to answer evaluation questions, and was based on the triangulation of research techniques, such as interviews, surveys and focus groups

The use of standard tools designed to be implemented in all regions, following the common methodology, leads to a certain loss of flexibility that hinders the adaptation of these tools to the specifics of each region and to the characteristics of each kind of agent involved (for instance, private beneficiaries). Complementary techniques have been used in order to solve this limitation.

ANALYSIS OF THE MONITORING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2007-2013 RECOMMENDATIONS

Almost all recommendations from the Final Evaluation of the Communication Plan for the Comunitat Valenciana ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes 2007-2013 have been taken into consideration. As a result, the Communication Strategy has improved its programming, management, implementation, monitoring and results.

ANALYSIS OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS

The articulation of the Communication Strategy for the Comunitat Valenciana ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes 2014-2020 consolidates the framework from the previous period (2007-2013). There is progress in the **relevance** of its cooperation approach, together with the **intervention approach** where all elements are logically related: objectives, target groups and communication measures.

Even if the information, communication and visibility measures included in the Communication Strategy address the three specific objectives, there is no explicit link between them, which makes the results' evaluation difficult.

The allocation of **human resources** by the ESF Managing Authority is reduced, considering the scope of their responsibilities for the development and monitoring of the Communication Strategy for the Comunitat Valenciana ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes. The ERDF Managing Authority, the Intermediate Body and the beneficiaries have allocated a proportionate and appropriate staff to fulfil their commitments.

Nevertheless, there are some weaknesses regarding human resources. On the one hand, there is a combination of highly specialized team members who have a strong background on European Funds management, together with temporarily hired and less skilled staff. And, on the other hand, their dedication to communication tasks is part-time, as they work in additional areas.

The allocation of **materials and technical resources** for the Communication Strategy implementation is considered to be appropriate. The main resources are the stakeholders' Websites and a shared online system set up by the Intermediate Body, where all relevant documents concerning communication are stored.

There are appropriate **financial resources** allocated in order to develop the Communication Strategy, considering the proportionality criterion. This allocation is coherent with the rate of communication funds vs. overall Operational Programme funds, as agreed in GERIP.

The **principle of equal opportunities** is properly integrated in the design phase, considering the requirements established in European regulation, but the integration of the gender perspective could be enhanced.

ANALYSIS OF THE INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY ACTIONS IMPLEMENTATION

34 out of 39 types of information, communication and visibility measures included in the Communication Strategy have been launched at 30th June 2019. They are coherent with the ERDF and ESF co-financed actions.

There is a medium **implementation progress**, considering the programmed indicator values and the different types of information, communication and visibility activities; the **results achievement** is low.

Both in ERDF and ESF there has been an important concentration in dissemination actions through press releases and publication of funding opportunities and tenders (calls for tenders, and contract awarding), with a limited impact on citizens.

The effectiveness and effects of the Communication Strategy are limited by the rates in the implementation and results' indicators. Despite the increasing trend of the communication measures' implementation and the perspectives of the beneficiaries, there is certain risk to reach the programmed goals in some types of activities.

On a general basis, some deficiencies in the indicators' information have been identified, such as double counting, or errors when registering data in the INFOCO2014 tool. There are also difficulties for the interpretation of the uploading criteria.

The measure 3.3. consisting of the publication of a **list of operations** has been implemented, according to the requirement established in the 115 article, section 1, and in the Annex XII, section 2.1. of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of Common Provisions, and considering the defined channel, frequency and data fields. There are some deficiencies in the ERDF list that should be solved: operation summary in English and the lack of a postcode, as well as improving the operations' descriptions.

The **financial implementation** is low, reaching a 24,28% of the estimated budget for all information, communication and visibility activities. Depending on the agent, there are different criteria applied when indicating the associated expenditure.

The integration of information regarding **information, communication and visibility in the annual implementation reports** of the Comunitat Valenciana ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes 2014-2020 is low but is improving along with the implementation of the

Operational Programmes. There are some areas of improvement, mainly in the Comunitat Valenciana ESF Operational Programme 2014-2020 reports.

Instructions and guidelines for the communication stakeholders do exist. They are available and used by the agents in charge of the management and implementation of the communication activities, enabling information and transparency. The specific manual for beneficiaries (edited by the Intermediate Body) is the most outstanding tool.

There is an **IT tool**, INFOCO2014, available since the beginning of the current programming period as a continuation of the system that was used in the 2007-2013 period. This tool supports the monitoring of the Communication Strategy progress, based on the indicators system.

European, national and regional **networks of communication managers** have consolidated their role as a key instrument for coordination and standardization between the different levels of agents involved in the development of the Communication Strategy. Nevertheless, the assistance to meetings should be improved, as well as the implementation of the agreements.

The coordination between the **Intermediate Body and the Monitoring and the Evaluation Committees of ERDF and ESF** enables an appropriate monitoring of the Strategy by all stakeholders, as well as the consideration of common orientations in communication evaluation.

EVALUATION OF THE INCIDENTS IN VERIFICATION PROCESSES REGARDING INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

There have been no relevant **events** concerning compliance with information, communication and visibility requirements during the control and verification processes performed in the Comunitat Valenciana ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes 2014-2020.

The verification of compliance with information, communication and visibility requirements is integrated in the operations' control processes, administrative and in situ verifications.

There are no weaknesses regarding the verification of compliance with information, communication and visibility measures in the analyzed ERDF Operational Programme **verification reports**. There are weaknesses in the analyzed ESF in situ verification reports; almost a third part of them does not include any information about the performed checks nor the conclusions.

EVALUATION OF THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES PRINCIPLE INTEGRATION, BOTH IN INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY ACTIONS AND IN THEIR EFFECTS

The beneficiaries as well as the Intermediate Body state that the ICV activities meet the specific needs of women and men; they also say that they have appropriate tools to effectively integrate gender perspective.

Nevertheless, it remains difficult to implement the commitments included in the Communication Strategy; there is a lack of specific activities effectively enabling women and other disadvantaged groups to access information and the Operational Programmes, as well as a lack of actions that render more visible the ERDF and ESF contribution to equal opportunities between men and women.

Good Practices include one project that contributes to raise awareness on actions that reduce inequalities in society and that are co-financed by the Structural Funds. Moreover, the other two actions considered to be Good Practice justify the integration of this principle with concrete arguments demonstrating how it has been taken into consideration.

IMPACT ANALYSIS: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES OF THE INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY ACTIVITIES

The **impact** achieved among the **entities implementing the Comunitat Valenciana ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes** has been positive on a general basis. The indicators' values show that the expected rates for 2020 in terms of satisfaction and usefulness have already been achieved.

Nevertheless, the level of awareness concerning ICV requirements among beneficiaries takes a step back from the rate achieved at the end of the previous programming period.

The general **awareness level among citizens** about the role that the European Union plays on the economic and social development of the Comunitat Valenciana shows an increasing trend compared with the previous programming period. It also exceeds the 2020 target, despite being a conservative target considering the long tradition of European structural funds in the region.

The ESF consolidates its position as the best-known fund among population. Training and employment interventions, as well as infrastructure and equipment related interventions are the two types of activities reaching highest levels of awareness among regional population. The ERDF level of awareness drops significantly from the previous period, being also far from the targeted value for the end of this period. This could be influenced by the lower implementation of infrastructure operations in the current programming period, that are more visible for citizenship.

There still is a gender gap in terms of structural funds awareness among citizens, as concluded in the evaluations conducted in the previous programming period. Thus, there is still a challenge for information to reach equally to men and women.

The youngest segments of population (particularly people between 20 and 24 years of age) are still less aware of the projects and/or investments supported with European funding in the Comunitat Valenciana. This is a challenge that demands particular measures.

The message has mainly reached citizens through traditional **media** and has led to a broad "positive" or "very positive" qualification of the role that the ERDF and ESF funds play in the development of the Comunitat Valenciana.

GOOD PRACTICES

Even if the beneficiaries are aware of their requirements concerning the Good Practices, the **objectives** set in the Communication Strategy have not been achieved for the ERDF Operational Programme nor the ESF Operational Programme.

The three Good Practices presented so far are properly justified, and the graphic elements support and complement the information included in the reports; they have outstanding social impact and include environmental protection issues and fight against climate change.

These Good Practices are related to two **fields of intervention**: environment protection and preservation and efficiency resources promotion, on the one hand, and the use and quality improvement of the information and communication technologies as well access to them, on the other.

GENERAL ASSESMENT OF THE MAIN STAKEHOLDERS IN THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

There is a group of agents that includes those with a **better performance**, due to the coherence of their progress with the compliance with all the ICV requirements (ERDF Managing Authority and Intermediate Body).

A second group of agents get a **positive rating**, as they have good indicators' progress, their actions are coherent with their role and profile, they have presented or even validated Good

Practices, their Websites are available and include appropriate and updated contents, and they frequently participate in the regional network (GRECOM-GV) meetings (5 ERDF Operational Programme beneficiaries).

There is a third group of agents with a **medium rate**. Even though they show appropriate indicators' progress (and their actions are coherent with their role and profile) and their Websites are available and include appropriate and updated contents, they are not meeting the requirements in terms of Good Practices presentation (3 ERDF Operational Programme beneficiaries and 3 ESF Operational Programme beneficiaries).

Finally, there is a group of agents with **greater margin for improvement**, as they have relevant weaknesses in terms of indicators' registration, and they are not fulfilling their obligations concerning Good Practices. Some of them also have outstanding deficiencies in their Websites (ESF Managing Authority, 8 ERDF Operational Programme beneficiaries and 6 ESF Operational Programme beneficiaries).