



ISMERI EUROPA

# Evaluation service of the programs co-financed with European Union funds in the 2014-2020 programming period

## III Thematic report Administrative capacity - Executive summary

Version 1.3

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## **Objectives and methodology**

This is the Third Thematic Evaluation report dedicated to the administrative capacity. The first object of the assessment is the multi-level governance of the National Strategy for Internal Areas (SNAI) and the Urban Agenda. The report provides a reflection on to the delays occurred until now, to suggest a number of corrective measures for the next programming period. The second objective is to understand the first effects of Priority Axis 4 of the ESF Regional Operational Programme (ROP) on training and social policies systems. The aim is to understand to what extent ESF meets training needs of operators, as well as how much it can affect the functioning of the regional policy in that fields. As far as SNAI and the Urban Agenda are concerned, the implementation analysis intends to identify the weaknesses of the governance and the “bottlenecks” that may have delayed the implementation process. In addition to the desk analysis and interviews to regional and national policy makers, a field research was conducted in the beneficiary inland areas. As for ESF interventions, a survey was carried out among recipients concerning the following themes: training needs, satisfaction, skills learned and self-reported effectiveness.

## **Regional strategy for inland areas**

The SNAI bases on lessons learned from the previous local development models. Its design requires institutional innovation and adaptation of administrative capacity, at all levels of government involved. The national strategy consists of: identification of the target areas according to socio-demographic criteria and gap in delivering essential services, making the inland municipalities associated to deal with the local strategies, defining local strategies within a multi-level governance framework and, co-designing interventions for enhancing essential services and local development initiatives. Alta Carnia (pilot area), the Friulian Dolomites and Canal del ferro-Val Canale are the inland areas selected by Friuli Venezia Giulia Region (FVG).

The following stakeholders are engaged: central administrations in charge of boosting essential services, Regions in charge of financing local interventions with ESI funds and, municipalities of the internal areas. These subjects are supported by technical structures such as the Internal Areas Technical Committee (CTAI) established at national level. The Programme Framework Agreement (APQ) is the policy instrument to plan the different financing sources in an integrated way (national budget, ROPs ERDF and ESF, and the RDP). The functioning of the governance has proved to be the cause of considerable delays, in particular in moving from the draft to the final strategy and in preparing the APQ. Even if to a lesser extent, the same delays experienced in the pilot area occurred in the other two areas.

The definition of the strategy involved a large number of actors in all areas. The partnerships were coordinated by the Mountain Policies Service (Regional office) which provides inland areas with technical assistance and guidance for the ESI funds implementation.

First of all, drafting the strategy and agreeing the APQ were very time-consuming phases. The evaluation shows this delay occurred as consequence of the complexity of the governance. A second limitation concerns the relationship between co-design and preparation of the APQ:

they were carried out separately instead of in an integrated way. The APQ should reflect local needs, putting national funds and European programme into a comprehensive programming framework. These problems were solved with an intense support of the Region to the territories. Due to the delays, FVG anticipated the timeline for the implementation of the European funds in these areas, but specific actions could not be identified as APQ negotiation was still open. We found weaknesses in the APQs, for instance an unclear link between the strategy and the project sheets, as well as the lack of useful indications for implementing actions. Moreover, given the problems occurred during the previous phases, it is likely that scheduling and targets of the APQ will be not respected. In summary, a huge administrative effort was put in place if compared to the programming of a little amount of resources.

A fundamental role in the implementation of the SNAI is played by the EAFRD. As the timing of the LEADER approach and of the SNAI are similar, Local Action Groups (LAGs) could integrate better their action with the SNAI process. Measure 19 is considered the RDP measure most suitable for supporting the inland areas process and LAGs areas and SNAI areas are almost the same. Therefore, the evaluation recommends a major exploitation of the LAGs in the SNAI. However, the progress of ERDF interventions is slow, even if in line with the timing of the other financing sources.

To support SNAI, the European programmes financed a Territorial Integrated Intervention (ITI) which envisages specific governance instruments. But it seems that the Regional office played a central role because the ITI governance was weak. Regional office supported the co-design helping the local stakeholders to discuss needs and proposals in the context of the SNAI. It would be useful to define more clearly the instruments of the ITI. The evaluation provides specific indications in this regard.

At the territorial level, the difficulties encountered in Alta Carnia concerned: the large number of municipalities involved, the frequent institutional change experienced by the Union of municipalities, the municipal elections and the lack of human resources and skills. The action of local actors was limited by these difficulties and, as a consequence, the Regional office and the CTAI had to fulfil strategic tasks on behalf of the municipalities. In the Friulian Dolomites, on the other hand, the UTI was more active and was provided by the LAG with assistance and support. The result was the empowerment of local capacities and skills. In Canal del Ferro-Val Canale the UTI worked better and brought together the territories of the project area as well as those of the strategic area (i.e. reference area for the development strategy). A major concern is the sustainability of the process since the future of the municipalities' unions is uncertain.

In summary, the implementation of the SNAI was too long. Delays common to all regions were clearly due to the complexity of the governance. The rise of coordination costs might discourage local actors. In the governance, too many steps were envisaged and too many subjects involved, moreover deadlines were postponed more times. The Ministries were not able to commit themselves in the innovative approach of the SNAI. This made the definition of the APQ an extremely critical point. On the side of the municipalities, the frequent institutional changes and the electoral rounds have hindered the sedimentation of skills and competences on the territory. However, from the pilot project to the following ones a learning process was triggered. If the Union of municipalities works properly, then the territory can manage even complex interventions such as the SNAI. Even if the main SNAI

weaknesses lie at the central level, improvements can be made also by acting at regional level. The Region could implement a staff structure to coordinate the regional programmes and adapt delivery to the SNAI framework. At local level it would be necessary that Union of municipalities managed the main functions such as strategy, animation, planning and monitoring.

## Urban agenda

The urban agenda of the FVG applies to the four provincial capitals. The municipalities are Intermediate Bodies-Urban authorities (OI-AU) of the ERDF ROP. Urban strategies focus on a mandatory action aimed at strengthening the demand for ICTs (action 4.1) and on tailored actions, agreed by each UA with the Region, on innovative services for an intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth.

The implementation model chosen by the Region included 3 phases. In the first one, the Region designated the OI and, along with it, defined: strategy, selection criteria and the call for the projects; in the second one, other municipal offices are beneficiaries and they have to apply for a project; in the third one, currently in progress, interventions are carried out and reported. The Region keeps a strong supervision in its hand, while planning, management and implementation are functions sharply separated inside the municipality. This model entails a gradual involvement of the municipal offices and aims at fostering strategic vision and programming capacity. This model can be defined as a "top-down" model.

Phase 1 was very long (almost two and a half years), because the fulfilment of the procedures envisaged resulted very complex, as shown by the numerous documents produced. The Regional office (Office for Local Development) put in place a remarkable effort to guide the municipalities throughout the procedures, as the municipal OI noted. However, the governance model adopted has entailed a strong centralization of the process in the Region and the "proceduralisation" and fragmentation of relations between the partners. In doing so, the governance of the Urban Agenda has moved away from the collegiality that had instead characterized the programming of Axis 4 of the ROP ERDF.

Phase 2 developed from the signing of agreements between the Region and AA.UU (Urban Authorities). the delivery of grants to the beneficiaries (municipal offices). The latter represent a third level of governance which is added to the previous two. The difference between the minimum and maximum time taken by the AA.UU. to carry out phase 2 is extensive and varies from a minimum of 5 months to a maximum of 12 months.

In phase 3, in addition to the obligatory action 4.1, **Gorizia** has activated an action to enhance the historic location of Borgo Castello, a cultural heritage around which to expand the offer of tourist and cultural services, signing agreements with other institutions and private bodies. Delays occurred in 3 moments: from signing the agreement to issuing the call, from the end of the selection to the approval of the grant and, finally, from delivering the grant to the implementation of the intervention. **Udine** focused on innovative services for the historic town. Some delays occurred due to the difficulties encountered in drawing up a technical specification that took into account the actual offer of the innovative services requested, as well as to the move of the beneficiary office from the Municipality of Udine to the newly established Territorial Union of Municipalities. **Pordenone** has chosen intervention in the field of sustainable mobility to connect the centre to the peripheral suburbs. In this

case the main difficulty was encountered when starting the works, because it was necessary to carry out a number of unplanned preliminary works. **Trieste** chose to set up an environment (Urban Centre) to host innovative entrepreneurship, as well grants for enterprises (not yet approved).

The analysis of the critical points highlights both common and specific difficulties for each A.U.. In Trieste strategic problems depended on weaknesses in the planning phase and the different vision between the Region and the Municipality about the criteria to select the interventions. In Pordenone it was first necessary to clarify that the OI and the beneficiary offices have different responsibilities. Then, keeping the management and the implementation "physically" separated brought about difficulties for the ordinary set up of the Municipality. As in Trieste, specific aspects unforeseen in planning came out along with the implementation. In Udine, if compared to Pordenone, there is a clearer organization of the internal governance, but the lack of knowledge of the market for innovative services that they intended to acquire slowed down the selection of the providers. Even in Gorizia, which is, like Pordenone, a small municipality compared to Trieste and Udine, implementing the management and control system within the ordinary organisation was problematic. This problem affected above all the management of the works.

In summary, the "top-down" model chosen by the Region shows strengths and weaknesses. It led the Municipalities to adopt a specific internal governance dedicated to the Urban Agenda. In this regard, it has brought about an empowerment of the Municipalities, useful for the next planning. On the other hand, the 3 phases should be less sharply separated and Municipalities should be more autonomous to enhance their commitment. Finally, a technical assistance should be dedicated to the Urban Agenda, aimed at facilitating the multi-level governance between Region, the OO.II. and the beneficiary Offices.

## **ESF interventions for the regional systems of training and social policies**

Since 2016, Axis 4 of the ESF ROP has financed 7 training campaigns, realizing 56 courses based on 37 prototypes. The prototypes are designed according to the directives issued by the Region. The eligible operations are seminars (not training activity) and training, the latter carried out so far only for social operators. The participation was high with 3,535 participants corresponding to 1,845 individuals. The number of participants is on average much higher for seminars targeting social operator. Over a thousand recipients participated only once, while around 800 recipients attended at least two courses, and over 300 attended three or more courses.

The chapter analyses the results of the survey to the professionals and operators who attended the courses.

### **Seminars for operators of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Certification of skills**

80% of participants in seminars for VET operators come from accredited training agencies (41%), vocational institutes (28%) and vocational training centres (CFP, 15%). Most of these are engaged in teaching activities. The absolute majority regularly take part to training (58%) and more than half of these (30%) two or more times a year, while 32% only occasionally and only 10% never. Considering only who attended the seminars on skills certification, 56% already had experience in this field and 75% knew the regional guidelines

on certification of skills before participating. Between 80% and 90% of the participants were selected by the institutions in which they are employed.

The responses confirm that the courses dealt with the wide range of themes envisaged by the Region, which were strategically relevant for the training sector. Almost 90% of respondents considers the training offer adequate to the sector's development priorities, but the satisfaction tends to be better for certification seminars. The overall quality of the course is appreciated, with 85% of the preferences 'good' or 'excellent'. The results are well positive among those who never participate in training (92%), but also for those who participate regularly. The seminars for VET operators recorded a positive appreciation for all the specific contents, but satisfaction decreased for practical exercises and knowledge of other regional systems. The seminars on the certification of competences register an even better situation, but a specific lack in theme 'knowledge of other regional systems' (60% scarce or insufficient judgments). The opinions on the quality and organization of the courses are very positive and there are no specific shortcomings. Overall, the seminar is considered an adequate tool matching the training needs of the operators.

80% of respondents are somehow applying the knowledge acquired, divided between those who are working to do it and those who already apply it regularly. For the operators of the certification of skills, on the other hand, this share is equal to 48%, but most of the remaining 52% does not deal directly with certification but must know it for the work they do.

The comments on the weaknesses of the seminars for VET practitioners focus on the shortage of practical contents of the courses. We remind that many interviewees are trainers who probably need more in-depth knowledge. Indeed, the training should respond to this need, but it has yet to be implemented. Strengths get more responses and focus on the quality of teachers and on the seminar's contribution to strengthening professional communities.

### **Seminars and training for social policy operators**

Both seminars and training were provided for social policy operators. The audience is more varied than that of training operators. 26% of the interviewees come from the third sector, 23% from other entities (mostly schools) and 21% from social services. A wide typology of subjects ranges from 7% (training agencies) to 1% (social enterprise). 47% attends training regularly, but there are differences depending on the type of institution one belongs to. Social services, Health services and Employment services are more used to train than others.

Over 70% of the interviewees deal with 'taking in charge' and case management activities or has to collaborate with subjects who do so. For most respondents (87%) these tools are applied enough (57%) and always if necessary (30%).

The courses provided appears in line with the contents of the training programme. The offer (topics covered in the courses) appears to match the demand for training (topics of interest declared): it ranges from 85% for the 'individual taking charge and management of cases' to 57% for 'contrast to human traffic'. It can be concluded that training satisfied a large audience with different roles and backgrounds. 85% of the interviewees also thinks that the training program is quite (62%) or very much (23%) in line with the evolution of social policies.

The quality of the courses is good for 68% and excellent for 22%, but in the case of training it is even better (27% excellent). The opinion on the seminars increased significantly for who also participated to training. The quality of the teachers is good or excellent for both training and seminars. However, with respect to the seminars, 60% of respondents considers classrooms, tools and arrangements only sufficient. These weaknesses are probably due to the number of participants per course which is on average markedly higher than other courses.

In specific aspects, training obtained a good and excellent evaluation, above 70% for all the aspects proposed. Seminars are considered less effective in two aspects: debate and empowerment of professional communities. Again, these may depend on the high average number of participants per course. The majority has a positive opinion on how the seminars have treated specific themes, only for 'job placement' and for 'coordination between institutions' opinions are less positive. In any case, for over 90% of respondents, the seminar is fairly or very adequate for professional training.

The satisfaction for the usefulness of the regional training program goes over 90%. The application of the knowledge acquired is equal to 70%. More than 25% of the interviewees do not think there are specific obstacles hampering the application of the knowledge learned. But, on the other hand, another 25% thinks the passiveness of the working context is an obstacle.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

The intervention for training and social operators appears to be effective since it is appreciated in all the dimensions analysed (tools, contents, organization) and in line with a changing policy context. The impact of this intervention on regional policy systems is potentially significant. Training, as well as the combination of training and seminars, obtain better judgments in all the aspects analysed and the satisfaction becomes high. There could be room for improvement on single aspects of the seminars that are lacking if compared to the high average satisfaction. Seminars in the social field, for instance, should offer a higher number of courses and reduce the average number of participants, and they also should take into account the newly emerged needs of the operators engaged in social policies.