

# MID-TERM EVALUATION COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR THE ANDALUCÍA ERDF AND ESF OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES 2014-2020

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

July, 2020



This document presents the main conclusions and recommendations from the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Communication Strategy for the Andalucía ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes 2014-2020, conducted by Grupo Considera, S.L. for the Directorate General of European Funds in the regional ministry of Economy, Knowledge, Businesses and University of the Andalusian regional government (Junta de Andalucía).

The content of this report meets all requirements established in the Terms of Reference for the technical assistance service for the development of evaluation actions of the Communication Strategy for the Andalucía ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes 2014-2020, to be co-financed through the Technical Assistance Axis of the Andalucía ERDF Operational Programme 2014-2020 and the Andalucía ESF Operational Programme 2014-2020.

CONSIDERA 

## METHODOLOGY

The mid-term evaluation of the Communication Strategy for the Andalucía ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes 2014-2020 includes all information, communication and visibility (ICV) actions implemented between **1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 and 30<sup>th</sup> 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*, edited by the Directorate General for European Funds of the Ministry of Treasury and the Managing Unit of the European Social Fund (UAFSE). It also follows orientations of the Spanish Group of Information and Publicity Officers (GERIP), in order to ensure consistency in the contents of the evaluation reports of Communication Strategies for all regional Operational Programmes.

The evaluation process has followed a **mixed and participatory approach**, based on methodological triangulation through the combination of quantitative and qualitative research techniques, in order to gather the widest possible range of information needed to evaluate all dimensions. 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.

Furthermore, some elements regarding the information provided by the indicators system have constrained the evaluation of some of the targeted dimensions.

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

According to the regulation requirements, two evaluations of the Communication Plan for the Andalucía ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes were conducted in the 2007-2013 period: a mid-term evaluation in 2010 and a final evaluation in 2013.

The ERDF Managing Authority, as well as the coordinating Intermediate Body, have published the mid-term and the final evaluation reports in their Websites, ensuring transparency and dissemination to all interested entities and persons. In addition, the final evaluation was sent to all members of the ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes Monitoring Committees.

These evaluations concluded with a series of recommendations, that have been considered in general terms. Both in the end of the 2007-2013 period and in the 2014-2020 period, some measures have been taken in order to implement the recommendations, having led to improvements in terms of programming, management, implementation, monitoring and results of the Communication Strategy.

## ANALYSIS OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS

The approach for communication in this programming period fully addresses the applicable guidelines and regulations for information, communication and visibility issues, and consolidates the

progress that started in the previous period (2007-2013). As a result, the Communication Strategy is **relevant** and addresses the needs that have been identified.

Regarding the articulation of this Communication Strategy, there is broad continuity in the **intervention approach** under the current framework. It is based in the definition of two strategic objectives (being aligned with the ones agreed in GERIP) and nine strategic priorities, together with measures and activities for four main target groups. All of these have a strong focus on ensuring compliance with the information, communication and visibility requirements, as stated in the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

Even if all measures included in the Communication Strategy are coherent with the strategic approach, they are not explicitly linked with the objectives nor with the strategic priorities, which is a weakness in terms of **internal consistency** as well for the evaluation of results.

The ERDF Managing Authority has allocated enough and appropriate **human resources** for the development of the Communication Strategy. The staff allocated by the ESF Managing Authority, as well as by the coordinating Intermediate Body and the beneficiaries is not coherent in quantitative terms with their responsibilities. There are appropriate **technical resources**, with outstanding relevance of the ones provided by the technical assistance contracted by the coordinating Intermediate Body. The **estimated budget** is considered to be appropriate, on the basis of the proportionality criterion.

Finally, the integration of the **equal opportunities' principle** could be improved in the design phase of the Strategy, as it is currently limited to the equal treatment, not considering the gender perspective.

## ANALYSIS OF THE INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY ACTIONS IMPLEMENTATION

Even when almost all the lines of communication actions included in the Strategy have already been launched, the **implementation progress** of the Communication Strategy at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2019 can be rated as low on a general basis. The progress is, nevertheless, coherent with the compliance of the responsibilities stated in the Common Provisions Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 (article 115 and Annex XII).

Most ICV actions developed to date have been linked to ERDF co-financed operations, as it is the biggest Operational Programme in terms of financial allocation. Most frequent actions include dissemination via press releases and published news in digital and traditional media; publicity materials such as billboards, plaques and posters, as well as public events and activities (seminars, information sessions and fairs linked to the development of co-financed projects).

The degree of **results' achievement** considering the 2020 targets has been high in general terms, even though it's not coherent with the implementation rates.

The implementation of the communication measures has a high **expenditure rate**. The estimated overall expense is so far even higher than the total estimated budget for the 2014-2020 period. As not all beneficiaries are using the same criteria when registering communication expenditure in INFOCO2014, the accuracy of the information is lower.

According to the field work, there is certain lack of information among beneficiaries regarding the technical assistance budget availability to develop ICV actions. They frequently point out that it is difficult to implement the Communication Strategy measures with their own financial resources (without involving additional not co-financed external costs). That can be the cause for the major use of their own channels, such as their Websites, press releases, or publications in official journeys.

It would be positive to enhance a wider media coverage, as well as using a wider range of communication tools and methods. Also the accuracy in indicator's registration could be improved, as well as the application of common criteria, in order to increase the quality of this information.

There are also other weaknesses that are having impact on the compliance with the requirements regarding the elaboration and publication of the **list of operations**, which should be solved.

The integration of information regarding **information, communication and visibility in the annual implementation reports** of the Andalucía ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes 2014-2020 is appropriate.

The information regarding both Operational Programmes is mostly included in the specific communication annex to the annual reports, as well as in the 12.2. sections "Results of the information and publicity measures according to the Communication Strategy" for those years (2016 and 2018) when it's mandatory to comply with the 111 article, section 4, first paragraph, letters a) and b), of the Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013.

Nevertheless, the information included in the annual reports and their annexes could be improved, providing more clear information about the progress degree of implementation of the specific measures in the Communication Strategy, as well as the objectives' achievement.

Regarding the monitoring system of the Communication Strategy, there are **instructions and procedures** on ICV for the agents involved in the management and implementation of the Andalucía ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes 2014-2020 co-financed activities.

The availability and use of the INFOCO2014 tool is having a positive effect on monitoring, even though its usefulness is limited by the lack of information from some beneficiaries (who are not providing data), as well as by the lack of uniformity when implementing the methodological criteria agreed in GERIP. Other areas of improvement are those related to its functionality and contents, especially in order to facilitate the evaluation of the Communication Strategy objectives' achievement.

European, national and regional **networks of communication managers** have consolidated their role as a key instrument to coordinate and monitor the development of the Communication Strategy. Nevertheless, the agreed common criteria and other agreements are not being implemented at the expected degree, and the participation of certain agents should be more frequent.

The coordination between the coordinating **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 the evaluation of communication.

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

The verification of compliance with information, communication and visibility requirements is integrated in the **checklists** used by the Intermediate Bodies, both in administrative verifications and in situ verifications.

The analysis performed on a **selection of in situ verification reports** has concluded that the ICV elements are being appropriately considered, as there are specific sections including detailed information on the checks that have been performed, the findings and conclusions.

The main events found in verification and control processes are related to the absence of the agreed slogan "*Andalucía se mueve con Europa*" ("Andalucía moves with Europe") as stated in the Communication Strategy. Even if the coordinating Intermediate Body registers the findings of

verifications, the team in charge of the Communication Strategy does not perform a systematic monitoring of them, which could be useful in order to propose actions to prevent these deficiencies from occurring.

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

The coordinating Intermediate Body, as well as the consulted beneficiaries, consider that the **gender and equal treatment principle** is integrated in the Andalucía ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes 2014-2020 communication actions. Despite that, the field work has revealed that these agents are not using guides or methodologies to support the implementation of the gender perspective and the equal treatment principle. They do not gather nor register information disaggregated by gender (when referred to persons) or by priority groups, those being elements that will provide evidence of effective integration of the gender and equal treatment perspective.

Even if there are some examples of ICV actions that make visible to public opinion the ERDF and ESF contribution to men and women equal opportunities, they have a limited relevance regarding the total number of information, communication and visibility actions registered in INFOCO2014.

In this regard, there are frequent difficulties among beneficiaries to integrate the equal opportunities' principle in communication, as there is certain confusion regarding the concept and its potential implementation.

One of the approved Good Practices contributes to raise awareness about Structural Funds co-financed actions, aimed at reducing inequalities in society. Nine additional Good Practices justify the integration of the equal opportunities' principle including detailed arguments, but six of them are not as complete in terms of justification.

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

The achievement of the expected impact on **Intermediate Bodies and beneficiaries** is still far from the targets set for the end of the current programming period. It is particularly necessary to raise the awareness level regarding the ICV requirements, as well as the usefulness of the training or information sessions for beneficiaries.

The **impact among citizens** is being more positive, even though the established goals for 2020 could have been more ambitious. A large majority of Andalusian population (more men than women) are aware that Andalucía receives financial support from the European Union, contributing to its economic and social progress. This impact has even increased from the previous programming period and is slightly above the 2020 target.

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is, for the first time, the best-known fund among Andalusian population. Its awareness level has significantly increased in this period, mainly due to large investments in infrastructures and equipment. The effect of the communication linked to the European Social Fund (ESF), besides being still far from the established goal for 2020, is decreasing as the awareness rate among citizens is lower compared to 2013.

The traditional **media** (press, radio and/or television) are the ones having a greater impact on citizens, both men and women, followed by the Internet, especially for younger population (between 16 and 24 years of age), as well as the information received from other people (with greater impact on women) and the billboards in roads and/or plaques in training centers.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the various communication measures implemented so far are having a very positive effect in terms of the citizens' opinion on the role of ERDF and ESF in the development of Andalucía.

### GOOD PRACTICES

The level of presentation and validation of Good Practices is not meeting the **quantitative objectives** established in the Communication Strategy. The ERDF and ESF expenditure linked to Good Practices is still far from the 50% target for the end of the period (over the total amount).

Despite the broad knowledge among beneficiaries of the criteria and requirements associated to Good Practices, the requirements are not being fulfilled in the ERDF Operational Programme nor the ESF Operational Programme.

Some of the main causes behind this failure to comply with the requirement include the following: low degree of certified expenditure in some cases, the difficulties to correctly justify that the projects meet the seven criteria to be considered Good Practices, or, in general terms, the low priority given to this activity by many of the beneficiaries.

The Good Practices presented so far are related to several **themes**. There is a relevant number of projects regarding investments in education, training and professional training, together with projects aimed at preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency.

In terms of **quality**, the Good Practices are presented in reports that include appropriate information and use a simple and clear language. The projects have an outstanding social impact and broad population coverage; they include innovation elements as well and are linked with the environment protection and fight against climate change.

### GENERAL ASSESMENT OF THE MAIN STAKEHOLDERS IN THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

This assessment is based on the criteria previously considered to analyze the performance of the main agents involved in the development of the Communication Strategy.

The following agents are the ones with a **better performance**, due to the coherence of their progress with the compliance with all the ICV requirements. They also show good progress in indicators, they do have an specific ERSF/ESF Website with appropriate content, they have validated Good Practices and have regularly participated in the RETINA network meetings:

- Coordinating Intermediate Body responsible for the Communication Strategy.
- ERDF Operational Programme.
  - ERDF Managing Authority.
  - Agencia IDEA (Intermediate Body).
  - Agencia Andaluza de la Energía.
  - Dirección General de Infraestructuras.
  - Instituto de Investigación y Formación Agraria y Pesquera (IFAPA).
  - Instituto de Estadística y Cartografía de Andalucía (IECA).
- ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes.
  - Agencia Pública Andaluza de Educación (APAE).

There is a second group of agents with a **medium rating**. Even if they show coherent progress in indicators according to their responsibilities and their profile, and have a dedicated Website with appropriate contents, they have not validated Good Practices.

- ERDF Operational Programme.
  - Agencia Andaluza de Promoción Exterior (EXTENDA).
  - Secretaría General para el Turismo.

- Dirección General de Economía Digital e Innovación.
- Dirección General de Infraestructuras del Agua.
- Agencia de Gestión Agraria y Pesquera de Andalucía (AGAPA).

There are two additional beneficiaries with a medium rating (Dirección General de Calidad Ambiental y Cambio Climático y la Dirección General de Ordenación del Territorio y Urbanismo) as they have presented Good Practices and have complete and updated information in their Websites, even if they have not provided information on indicators progress.

The **performance** of all other beneficiaries is **not being good**, as they are not developing ICV actions to fulfill their responsibilities according to the regulations and the Communication Strategy.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2021-2029 PERIOD

#### Recommendations for the ERDF Managing Authority

**R1. Improve the current monitoring system for the Communication Strategy for the Andalucía ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes 2014-2020**, introducing new information fields in order to enable the link between ICV actions and the Strategy measures, strategic objectives and/or target groups, as well as undertaking functionality improvements in INFOCO2014.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CURRENT PERIOD (2014-2020)

#### Recommendations for the ESF Managing Authority

**R2. Enhance involvement of the ESF Managing Authority to develop the Communication Strategy**, assuming a more active role in compliance with their ICV responsibilities, developing and implementing protocols to validate Good Practices, registering indicators and participating in all GERIP meetings, in order to contribute to a better implementation of the Communication Strategy.

**R3. Perform a contents and structure update of the national ESF Website**, shifting to a more modern layout and considering the content structure agreed in GERIP, as well as including all 2014-2020 relevant information, regarding programming, management and monitoring, communication and evaluation of all Spanish ESF Operational Programmes.

#### Recommendations for the coordinating Intermediate Body

**R4. Improve the communication tools ensuring transparency in European Funds management**, with a particular focus on elements such as the adaptation of its Website to the structure agreed in GERIP, the development of online tools (both for massive dissemination of funding opportunities in the ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes and to better support beneficiaries to meet ICV technical requirements), a broader use of the infrastructures and networks physically present on the ground all over Andalucía in order to reach groups of population less likely to use Internet, e-mails, etc. (Andalucía Orienta, centers for entrepreneurs, or Chambers of Commerce, among others), or the use of customized channels for each potential beneficiary profile.

**R5. Better coordination and monitoring of the Communication Strategy**, acting at four levels: strengthening communication and distribution of tailored orientations and instructions to the agents that manage operations and, through them, to the grant beneficiaries, the introduction of changes in the current operation of the RETINA network, intensification of the monitoring of the ICV actions carried out by the managing bodies and / or beneficiaries, and promotion of the organization of info sessions and working groups with these agents to reinforce knowledge on specific topics (Good Practices, indicators, list of operations, etc.).



**R6. To make greater use of the information on incidents in verifications concerning information, communication and visibility actions**, coordinating the monitoring carried out by the two Intermediate Bodies and communicating the incidents to the person in charge of the Communication Strategy, so that it can be used to promote actions aimed at improving these weaknesses.

**R7. Enhance the implementation of the equal opportunities' principle in communication**, both in the design and in the implementation of the Communication Strategy, by undertaking measures in this current period, but also facing the 2021-2017 framework.

**R8. Improve the current system for identification, presentation and validation of Good Practices**, including in the monitoring system the registration of information that enables the control of the fulfillment of requirements by each beneficiary; also through regular briefings to beneficiaries about their performance (at least once a year) and informing them when their Good Practices are approved, asking them to also disseminate the projects using their own channels in order to raise awareness and visibility of the Operational Programmes results.

#### Recommendations for the Intermediate Body "Agencia IDEA"

**R9. Extend the verifications in the field of information, communication and visibility**, including more specific questions and/or controls in the checklists, that enable the provision of further details on the performed analysis regarding the ICV obligations compliance.

**R10. Increase the presentation rate of Good Practices**, through measures aimed at promoting its presentation and establishing mechanisms to integrate the identification, justification and presentation of Good Practices within the operations management cycle, so that the justification can be started alongside with the closure of the projects.

#### Recommendations for beneficiaries

**R11. Implement measures to improve internal communication on information, communication and visibility responsibilities** in order to, in coordination with area managers, strengthen communication between communication managers and managers of ERDF and ESF co-financed operations.

**R12. Enhance the integration of the equal opportunities' principle in the information, communication and visibility actions**, through the implementation of appropriate tools for management bodies and/or beneficiaries that allow them to increase the number of information, communication and visibility actions that integrate the perspective of gender and equal treatment, and promote the dissemination of the contribution of the Funds to the achievement of these principles.

**R13. Better compliance with the requirements established in the Common Provisions Regulation as well as with the GERIP agreements**, especially in the following areas: improving the degree of transparency, informing all potential beneficiaries of the contact details of the administrative units to be addressed to request any type of information; planning actions aimed at encouraging the presentation of Good Practices; maintaining a website with complete and up-to-date specific information on Structural Funds, properly structured; registration of communication indicators with the established periodicity; regular attendance at RETINA meetings; submission of complete information to the coordinating Intermediate Body to draw up the list of operations.

In addition, a number of particular recommendations have been made for management bodies and/or beneficiaries aimed at improving the extent to which each of them meets the obligations under the Common Provisions Regulation (Article 115 and Annex XII) and to achieve an adequate development of the measures provided for in the Communication Strategy.