



FINAL EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF THE ERDF AND ESF OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES OF ANDALUCÍA 2014-2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NOVEMBER 2023



This report summarizes the main results of the final evaluation of the Communication Strategy of the ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes of Andalucía 2014-2020 performed by Grupo Considera, S.L. in 2023 for the Directorate General of European Funds of the Regional Ministry of Economy, Finance and European Funds of the Junta de Andalucía.

The content of this document meets all requirements established in the terms of reference for the services for the final evaluation of the Communication Strategy of the Operational Programmes of Andalucía 2014-2020 co-financed by the ERDF and ESF.

CONSIDERA 



Methodology

The final evaluation of the Communication Strategy of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) Operational Programmes of Andalucía 2014-2020 has aimed to determine the degree of implementation and the impact achieved through the Communication Strategy.

The evaluation process has targeted the information, communication and visibility (ICV) measures carried out between the 1st July 2019 and the 31st March 2023. However, the full validity period of the Communication Strategy has been considered.

The scope and content of this evaluation have 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 also follows 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 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, 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 the characteristics of each kind of agent involved (for instance, private beneficiaries). Complementary techniques have been used to solve this limitation.

Analysis the Communication Strategy programming

The level of implementation of the recommendations from the mid-term Evaluation of the Communication Strategy of the ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes of Andalucía 2014-2020 could be improved, as many have been partially addressed or have not been addressed.

The relevance of the Communication Strategy has been maintained. The communication approach in this period has been fully coherent with the relevant implementation guidelines, and the identified needs have been adequately addressed.

The articulation of the Communication Strategy is considered adequate, precisely defining an intervention approach where all components are logically related: objectives, targets and measures. However, the measures have not been explicitly linked to the objectives, which impacts the internal consistency of the approach and makes it difficult to assess the achievement of the Strategy in the absence of cause-and-effect relationships between means and goals.

Certain weaknesses are observed regarding the allocation of human resources to implement the Communication Strategy. The Managing Authorities have had adequate staff in terms of their skills and training, but there have been weaknesses in quantitative terms, especially in the case of the ESF Managing Authority.

The allocation of human resources has been adequate and sufficient in the Intermediate Bodies (IB), also considering the support of the respective technical assistance that has been assigned for the development of the Communication Strategy measures.



The IB – DG European Funds team, although it has been adequate considering the dimension of the Operational Programmes and its Communication Strategy, has undergone changes throughout the programming period, especially in the last 4 years. The support provided to the managing bodies could be improved, through a more proactive approach.

The scarcity of qualified human resources in the managing and/or beneficiary bodies has been identified as a major weakness in the development of the measures, and greater professionalization is needed.

The provision of material and technical resources for the implementation of the Communication Strategy has been adequate. It has consisted of all the means provided by the agents involved in the implementation of the ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes of Andalucía 2014-2020, including the resources of the two consecutive technical assistance contracts managed by the DG European Funds to implement the Communication Strategy throughout the whole programming period.

The financial allocation of the Communication Strategy has been insufficient, based strictly on the proportionality criterion. Even though the recommendations within the GERIP network have been taken into account (regarding the maintenance of the estimated budgets after the REACT EU funds reprogramming), there is no correspondence between the financial size of the ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes of Andalucía 2014-2020 and the estimated amount for communication (the proportion being below what was agreed in this regard in the GERIP).

The integration of the equal opportunities principle in the design phase has been adequate, as the requirement set out in Annex XII of Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council has been met. However, the weaknesses identified in the mid-term evaluation remain and mainstreaming the principle of equal opportunities when formulating the Strategy can still be improved.

Analysis of the implementation of ICV measures

As of March 31st 2023, all types of information, communication and visibility measures included in the Communication Strategy had been implemented.

The implementation of the Strategy has been high, and the achievement of the programmed targets is generally high. Despite the fact that many managing bodies have not reported data on communication indicators, there has been a notable improvement in the level of implementation compared to the mid-term evaluation.

In general terms, the result indicators show a high level of target achievement. Some of them even register values that point to a higher performance than expected in relation to the degree of physical implementation of the actions.

The implemented budget of the Communication Strategy has been much higher than the physical implementation and triples the estimated expenditure, according to the values of the indicators registered in INFOCO2014. The inconsistency of the data that was previously identified at the mid-term evaluation remains, as the expenditure is not registered in INFOCO2014 with the same criterion applied for the estimation in the programming phase.

The degree of integration of information related to the ICV in the annual implementation reports is adequate for both Operational Programmes.



It has been verified that there are instructions and procedures developed by the IB – DG European Funds aimed at the agents responsible for the management and implementation of ICV actions linked to the structural funds in Andalucía. These instructions could, however, be more effective as, for instance, the instructions aimed at guiding the beneficiaries to comply with the regulatory ICV requirements applying as recipients of European funds.

The availability and organization of computer applications are positively assessed: mainly the INFOCO2014 tool (made available to the Intermediate Bodies at the beginning of the programming period by the ERDF Managing Authority) and the IRIS (the own application of the Junta de Andalucía) for registering and controlling data on communication indicators. However, numerous areas for improvement have been identified in terms of its functionalities. The connection between these two tools could be improved too.

The networks of people responsible for communication (GERIP, RETINA, INFORM and INIO) maintain their role as one of the main instruments that facilitate coordination and standardization between the different levels of agents involved in the development of the Communication Strategy. In general terms, both the frequency of meetings of these networks and the content contents discussed are considered adequate. The operation of the regional network can be improved, as the meetings have not been stable throughout the period and have been interrupted in the last 3 years.

It has been proven that communication and coordination are fluid with other relevant bodies, especially with the Monitoring Committees of the ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes of Andalucía 2014-2020.

Verification of the inclusion of ICV in the verification and control actions of the Funds and evaluation of incidents

The analysis carried out at a procedural level allowed to corroborate that the verification of compliance with the obligations regarding ICV is adequately contemplated in the preparation of calls, in procurement, etc., as specific questions are included in the checklists used for administrative and on-the-spot verifications in the ERDF and ESF Operational Programs of Andalucía 2014-2020.

It is positively assessed that the verification system of compliance with the information, communication and visibility requirements is fully integrated into the verification process, allowing adequate control.

Evaluation of the integration of the principle of equal opportunities in ICV measures

The application of the equal opportunities' principle in the implementation of the Communication Strategy in the period 2014-2020 has been partial in general terms. Although there is awareness regarding the importance of applying this principle, there are difficulties in its materialization in concrete actions or through specific measures.

Impact analysis: achievements and challenges of ICV activities

The impact of the measures developed in the organizations that have applied the ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes of Andalucía 2014-2020 has been positive in terms of satisfaction and usefulness of the information provided, but discreet in terms of the level of knowledge of the communication obligations.

The impact of the Communication Strategy on citizens has been positive, as the goals set for the 2014-2020 programming period have been achieved in terms of knowledge of the



role played by the European Union in the economic and social development of Andalucía and of the ERDF.

The awareness level of Andalusian citizens regarding the role played by the European Union in the economic and social progress of the region is slightly higher than the value targeted at the end of the period 2014-2020. Moreover, it has increased since the mid-term evaluation.

The Andalusian population is more aware of the ERDF, which has become the most recognized fund amongst citizens throughout this programming period. Awareness of the ESF shows a more discrete level. Even though it does not reach the programmed target, it shows a notable increase in the last 4 years.

In general terms, one of the main achievements in terms of ICV is the positive impact on the population, registering a growing trend and a high level of knowledge and awareness among Andalusian citizens regarding the contribution of the European Union to the development of Andalucía.

Concerning future challenges, there is a need to make progress on issues such as, for example, (i) increasing the degree of awareness of ICV obligations among managing and/or beneficiary bodies, (ii) increasing the coverage and usefulness of training and information actions on structural funds aimed at the agents responsible for their application in Andalucía, (iii) increasing the awareness level among some specific population segments such as young people, or (iv) improving the quality of the information provided to potential beneficiaries.

Best Practices

It has not been possible to fully comply with the commitments established in terms of Good Practices.

Despite the evident increase in the number of validated Good Practices during the time frame covered by this evaluation compared to the intermediate moment of evaluation of the Communication Strategy, the requirements established for the end of the programming period have not been met in in quantitative nor in cost terms.

Regarding thematic variety, the published Good Practices have not presented examples of operations in all thematic areas covered by the Programmes.

The quality of the Good Practices of operations co-financed with ERDF and ESF funds is considered adequate. However, progress must be made towards greater simplicity and homogeneity in the structuring and contents of the files, tending towards the use of more user-friendly formats.

Recommendations

The recommendations derived from the evaluation process aim to facilitate communication development in the 2021-2027 programming period.

- Recommendations addressed to ERDF and ESF+ Managing Authorities:
 - A1. Strengthen the role of the GERIP network as a forum to transmit information from the European Commission and Managing Authorities to Intermediate Bodies.
 - A2. Improve coordination between Managing Authorities in terms of communication.
 - A3. Greater agility in the definition of common criteria to be applied by the managing bodies at the regional level.

- A4. Implement computer systems to support the monitoring of indicators, on a common access and management basis for agents involved in communicating the ERDF and ESF+ Programmes.
- Recommendations addressed to the Intermediate Body – DG European Funds:
 - A5. Reactivate the RETINA network, with a minimum frequency of annual meetings, acting as an exchange forum with a practical approach.
 - A6. Reinforce training and information for managing and/or beneficiary bodies on ICV issues, considering the novelties of the 2021-2027 period and including practical content.
 - A7. Lead the coordination of the technical teams responsible for the communication and management of the co-financed operations, the press offices of the regional Ministries and the DG of Social Communication, reinforcing the knowledge of the ICV obligations and the importance of communicating the contribution of European funding to the development of actions and to the progress of the region.
 - A8. Make changes in the IT tools to support the monitoring of communication indicators, with a more agile operation and fewer technical errors.
 - A9. Intensify the coordination and monitoring of the ICV actions performed by the managing and/or beneficiary bodies, from a proactive approach.
 - R10. Improve the availability of tools that promote transparency, both among managing and/or beneficiary bodies and among the general public.
 - R11. Reinforce the development of measures with a greater impact on segments of the population with a lower awareness level regarding European funds.
- Recommendations to managers and/or beneficiaries:
 - R12. Maintain teams with trained and specialized staff in the field of communication. These teams should be stable over time, as far as possible. The adaptation of the professional profiles of the people responsible for communication to the tasks should be improved, moving towards greater professionalization.
 - R13. Improve attention to the regulatory obligations and agreements of the GERIP in the field of ICV, especially in terms of transparency (by launching and maintaining updated information web spaces) and dissemination of achievements and results of the actions.
 - R14. Establish mechanisms to integrate the identification of outstanding projects into the management of operations for dissemination to a wider audience.