

ExAnte Evaluation of the 2014-2020 ESF
Report on activities carried out and currently in progress (1st draft)

Executive Summary

The Working Plan of the ex ante Evaluation of the Structural Funds programming round 2014-2020 was drawn up by the Public Investments Evaluation and Assessment Unit (NVVIP) in compliance with article 11 of the Regional Government Resolution 142/2013. The Plan was developed on the basis of the five components that the European Commission (EC) has identified as key elements of the ex-ante evaluation process of the programmes:

1. Strategy of the programme
2. Indicators, monitoring and evaluation
3. Size of the financial allocation
4. Contribution to the 2020 Europe Strategy
5. Strategic Environmental Evaluation

This draft regains this approach.

In June 2013 a single working plan was prepared for the ex ante evaluation of SF planning on the assumption that the Campania Regional Government would draw up a single SF Programme. The subsequent resolution was communicated through a note of the Joint Programming of January 2014 (no. 1585) about the desire to draw up mono-fund operational programmes. This led the Public Investments Evaluation and Assessment Unit (NVVIP) to organise two different evaluation activities with similar methodological approaches which were closely interconnected (and closely linked to the EAFRD operational programme) to ensure the unity and the integrated nature of the evaluation approach.

The following is therefore an update of the activities carried out by the NVVIP until 30 April 2014 describing the activities undertaken and those currently in progress with particular reference to ESF.

To date we still lack a draft of operational programme; the elements of appraisal and the observations provided in this draft are drawn from a series of documents sent by the Managing Authority of the ERDF funds 2007-2013 with note no. 0282623 of 22 April 2014 and by the ESF Managing Authority for the period 2007-2013 with note no. 0292657 of 29 April 2014. Further more detailed analyses can be provided as soon as the observations and documentation sent by the Directorates and/or Departments to the Managing Authority are made available.

As can be seen from the series of guidelines provided by the European Commission, the ex ante evaluation process needs to be interactive. The ex ante evaluation of the programmes should be a means for improving the quality of planning.

The evaluator ought to begin formulating initial observations which, considering the type of documents available, mainly concern point 1 “Programming Strategy”.

More specifically, the observations expressed concern the following topics:

- a) Validity of the programming strategy stemming from the decisions of the programmer regarding the allocation of funds for the thematic objective;
- b) Consistency between programming decisions and needs/priorities outlined in the Regional Strategic Document (RSD) (consistency of the programming objectives);
- c) Selection of the actions according to needs (logical framework of the programme);

- d) Enhancement of the lessons learnt during the previous programming cycles;
- e) Integrated approach with regard to Funding.

Some of the significant observations are presented below.

The strategy has already been partly defined on the basis of the priorities identified in the RSD and according to the allocations of the financial framework in terms of funding, actions and objectives contained in the Partnership Agreement.

With regard to the thematic Objectives concerning ESF, systematic divergences from the allocation outlined in the Partnership Agreement were noted; it would therefore be advisable to provide explicit motivations for the reasons behind these decisions, also highlighting the link with the significant needs and clarifying the contribution that could be made in the same thematic area by other regional and/or national policies. For example, respect for the law is clearly an important theme for Campania; the cross-cutting nature of actions that could be deployed means that they should be clearly developed in the programming stage, also with regard to the NOP on Respect for the Law.

Likewise the documentation that has been examined does not offer the possibility of aligning the decisions regarding the thematic objectives of the programme with the strategic priorities of the RSD. It is therefore advisable to reconstruct the intervention logic of the programme by highlighting the contribution to the 2020 Europe strategy, even for individual actions.

We also suggest to the programmer the enhancement of the lessons learnt from previous programming periods. The document provides a summary of the recommendations of the Investments Evaluation and Assessment Unit (NVIIP) which stem from the evaluation analyses carried out already.

Lastly, it should be noted that the decision to make use of mono-fund programmes reflects a greater effort in terms of adopting an integrated approach which has been so strongly urged by the European Commission.

These initial observations, which are analysed in more detail in this document, could be explored in greater depth through discussions with the programmer and on the basis of new documents being presented for the appraisal of the NVIIP.

This report describes the ex ante evaluation activities of the European Social Fund Operational Programme 2014-20; however, it should be emphasised that it is the result of an integrated assessment of the three scheduled operational programmes (ERDF, ESF, RDF). Despite the fact that there are three separate reports, one for each programming proposal, the NVIIP still adopts a global approach to the process of integrated, joint evaluation.

ExAnte Evaluation of 2014-2020 ESF
Report on activities carried out and currently in progress (2nd draft)

Executive Summary

In compliance with art. 11 of Resolution no. 142/2013 approved by the Regional Government of Campania on 27.5.2013 (published in the Campania Region Official Bulletin of 17.06.2013) by which the Public Investment Evaluation and Assessment Unit (NVVIP) was entrusted with the Ex-ante Evaluation of the programming period 2014/20 (and the 2014/20 EAFRD), the NVVIP drew up two Working Plans; one of the plans concerns ERDF and ESF Programmes while the other concerns the RDP (both the Working Plans with their relative schedules were sent to the Urban Recovery Program and to the Managing Authorities on 21.06.2013, reference no. NVVIP 125). These Working Plans were subsequently reviewed so that they correspond to the sequence of requirements and the times indicated by the Commission (Regulation No. 1303/2013 of 17 December 2013).

The Working Plan of the ex ante Evaluation of the Structural Funds programming round 2014-2020 was developed on the basis of the five components that the European Commission (EC) has identified as key elements of the ex-ante evaluation process of the programmes:

1. Strategy of the programme
2. Indicators, monitoring and evaluation
3. Size of funding
4. Contribution to the 2020 Europe Strategy
5. Strategic Environmental Evaluation

This draft follows this approach.

In June 2013 a single working plan was prepared for the ex ante evaluation of SF planning on the assumption that the Regional Government of Campania (*Regione Campania*) would draw up a single SF Programme. The subsequent resolution was communicated through a note by the Joint Programming of January 2014 (no. 1585) about the desire to draw up mono-fund operational programmes. This led the Public Investments Evaluation and Assessment Unit (NVVIP) to organise different evaluation activities with similar methodological approaches which were closely interconnected (and closely linked to the EAFRD operational programme) to ensure the unity and the integrated nature of the evaluation approach.

On the basis of the material gradually made available by the ESF Managing Authority, the NVVIP produced an initial ex ante evaluation draft (*Report on the activities already carried out and currently in progress on 30 April 2014*) and a second ex ante evaluation draft (*Report on the activities already carried out and currently in progress on 17 July 2014*). The second draft resumes the structure described above and integrates the observations contained in the first draft.

More specifically, the ESF Managing Authority sent (with note reference no. 467475 of 7 July 2014) the draft documents received from the Education and Training Department concerning the programming of Thematic Objectives 8, 9 and 10 (in the *template* format required by the Commission departments) with the accompanying files Expected Results – Actions.

Afterwards (11 July 2014) was sent the *Summary Document of the European Social Fund Operational Programme 2014-2020 – Investments for growth and jobs* presented to the Economic and Social Partnership on 15 July 2014.

The evaluation and the observations provided in this draft therefore derive from a careful reading of all the aforementioned material which currently represents the most up-to-date reference made

available by the European Regional Development Fund for the programming period 2014-2020. However, the material has not yet been formulated into the overall structure required by the Operational Programme template.

As can be seen from the series of guidelines provided by the European Commission, the ex ante evaluation process needs to be interactive. The ex ante evaluation of the programmes should be a means of improving the quality of planning.

The evaluator ought to begin formulating initial observations which, considering the type of documents available, mainly concern point 1 “Programming Strategy”.

In particular, the observations expressed concern both general aspects, which partly update and supplement the observations already contained in the first draft of the Ex Ante Evaluation and more detailed issues related to the 4 Thematic Objectives of prevailing interest for the ESF (TO 8, TO 9, TO 10, TO 11).

The first series of observations concerns:

- the decisions concerning the allocation of funds. A comparison was made between the structure of the Partnership Agreement and the structure proposed by the regional programmer and the reasons underlying the differences were analysed. This should be examined in more detail by considering the uncertainties regarding national and regional resources for the co-funding of the programme;
- consistency between programming decisions and needs/priorities outlined in the Regional Strategic Document (RSD). To this end it emerged that the programmer needs to provide more explicit clarification of the logic sequences linking the programme – on the basis of the distribution of resources and the selection of actions for each TO – to the 2020 Europe strategy and to the RSD;
- the selection of actions according to needs. Greater clarification is required of the logical framework of the Programme and the importance attributed to each line of action in relation to needs;
- the enhancement of the lessons learnt during the previous programming periods, both in the definition of the strategy and the selection of the actions;
- an integrated approach between Funding and the territorial aspect of the Programme. The decision to make use of mono-fund programmes reflects greater effort in terms of preparing and running integrated measures. The territorial dimension of the programme should be clarified both with reference to the urban and internal areas.

As already mentioned, this is followed by a series of observations and proposals related to TO 8 Employment, TO 9 Social Inclusion, TO 10 Education and Training, and TO 11 Institutional Effectiveness. The observations relative to Thematic Objectives link part of the general guidelines to more specific fields. They generally concern the process of identifying and selecting the actions and focus on the advantages of identifying real priorities in relation to specific needs.

With reference to the theme of the ex ante conditionalities, it is suggested that the programmer, following the analyses carried out by the relevant departments, clarifies the steps required to fulfill the conditionalities that have not yet been met or only partially met.

The TO 8 – Boosting employment and supporting the mobility of workers represents the main sphere of intervention of the European Social Fund Operational Programme 2014-2020 for which 42% of the total resources have been theoretically allocated, corresponding to 7.1% of the total of regional structural investments planned for the forthcoming programming period (as opposed to 9.7% stated in the Partnership Agreement).

Given the current context of the regional economy, policies designed to boost employment should take account of the market conditions and therefore of the situation, prospects and needs related to the productive activities and functioning of firms. Within this context, in fact, the measures designed only to retrain workers and enhance the “professional” skills of the workforce (especially young people) have less likelihood of having a significant and stable effect on the market. At most, they provide “passive” support for income and assistance (albeit practical and useful) in the search for employment and work whose outcome always remains extremely uncertain and needs to be carefully analysed.

In this respect, interventions designed to boost employment need, on the contrary, to be linked more closely to investments aimed at safeguarding and upgrading the regional business structure and manufacturing base and to investments in research (TO 1). In other words, the actions (which are constantly increasing in number) that are vital for ensuring that the whole regional economy enjoys a broader range of more long-term advantages in terms of competitiveness (TO 3) are the main (and arguably the only) necessary condition for making intervention in the employment sector (TO 8) really effective. The explicit and large-scale additions to the interventions provided for by the Funds represent an important theme in this context (support for the economic basis and employment). The specification of the procedures (i.e. Actions) designed to tackle the problematic issues related to the TO currently seems to be too generalised and undefined and fails to respond to the conditions in the territory and the sector. The Document makes an initial selection from the Actions proposed in the Partnership Agreement for each Expected Result. However, since no indications are provided for the scale and importance of each type of intervention, the Document does not make it possible to evaluate the connections and effectiveness of these decisions in relation to the most pressing needs and emergencies to be found in the context. Moreover, there is no mention of the lessons learnt from the European Social Fund Operational Programme 2007-2013 and the aid measures (and guideline measures) which are already operational. Yet the programming currently in progress in Campania has already tried out a wide series of interventions for labour mobility and employment. Indeed, a Working Plan has been drawn up with measures designed to provide support, outplacement opportunities, training and internships for young people, the unemployed and workers who come from deprived or high-risk areas.

Although TO8 clearly aims to improve conditions in the labour market (reduction of periods spent out of work and unemployment rates; increase in employment; greater opportunities to find jobs and enter the labour market for young people), the actions identified until now seem to be aimed mainly at addressing “frictional” and specific problems (lack of correspondence between workers’ skills and the demand for skills; inadequate mediation services; social barriers that affect entry into the labour market; transport costs). These actions are inadequate for tackling the “structural” causes of regional unemployment.

TO 9 focuses on fighting against poverty and social exclusion and undoubtedly addresses issues that affect the region. These issues could be identified in greater detail to enable improved selection of actions, intervention procedures, beneficiaries and target areas.

The European Social Fund Operational Programme 2014-2020 includes a proposed allocation of 22% of the overall resources to TO 9, which is supplemented by 5.5% of the overall resources of the proposed EDRF Programme. This TO is closely related to the ESF which will also be the area of intervention of three National Operational Programmes (Social inclusion, Metropolitan areas and Respect for the Law). Moreover, the theme of social inclusion is dealt with at regional level in the Regional Social Plan 2013-2015, the instrument for joint planning of the social-welfare and medical welfare policies.

The TO is based on 4 thematic priorities:

- a) active inclusion, designed to promote equal opportunities, active participation and to enhance employability;
- b) marginalised communities, socio-economic integration of marginalised communities as the Roma community;
- c) access to services, improved access to sustainable, high quality services, including social services and general healthcare services;
- d) local development, local development strategies with a focus on participation.

Following the Partnership Agreement (PA) approach, the ESF OP proposal identifies specific objectives (Expected Results in the PA) for each priority of investment and includes an illustrative list of actions. More than half the resources designed for TO 9 are allocated to the “active inclusion” priority; this is followed by three other priorities: “access to services” (5%); “local development” (about 3%) and “marginalised communities” (about 2%). The criteria that led to this distribution of resources and, at the same time, selected and highlighted the most significant actions in the light of the specific needs detectable at regional or sub-regional level need to be made explicit. The actions planned for the ESF Fund need to be linked to the actions planned for the ERDF Fund, clarifying exactly how infrastructural investments should be combined with immaterial investments. The risk of separated management strategies for this Thematic Objective related to the choice of the mono-fund programmes seems to be fairly high. Indeed, an integrated approach should be adopted for defining the territorial dimension of the programmes (Urban Areas and Inner Areas).

Moreover, in terms of the actions provided for by the proposed ESF OP, it is necessary to clarify the links with the actions envisaged by the Regional Social Plan to highlight the aspects of complementarity and avoid the risk of duplication. Similar attention should be focused on the connection with the actions of NOPs that affect the TO. With regard to the actions already envisaged for the programming period 2007-2013 which will also be repeated in the OP 2014-2020, we suggest specifying with great clarity the achieved results and/or possible problematic issues encountered during implementation and the solutions that were subsequently adopted.

Lastly, for the planned actions, it would be advisable to identify the expected results and the transformation targets with respect to the “natural” trends of the local context of the programme.

TO 10 – Investment in Education and Training is highly significant and absolutely essential in the development strategy of regions lagging behind in this sphere. This theme is particularly important in Campania where the major indicators of effectiveness and result of the education and training system still reflect significant problems (in terms of reaching acceptable basic skills, or the excessively high rates of school dropout and abandonment) as well as a persistent mismatch between education and skills in terms of the supply of labour (mainly young people), with respect to the requirements and needs of firms.

Within this framework, the proposed ESF OP 2014-2020 allocates a relatively high share of resources (30.52%) to this Objective. In close correlation with the guidelines of the PA, intervention is focused on 4 Priorities (School Dropout; Higher Education; Ongoing Training; closer School-Work relations) and, in terms of expected results, follows the entire series of possibilities and objectives for regional programming provided by the PA. In this case too, the degree of detail and the justifications provided to support these initial guidelines – mainly regarding the allocation of funding for this Objective – makes it impossible to evaluate the adequacy and consistency of this approach with relation to the needs and problematic issues identified in the context.

However, although the qualitative level is high, the specification of each measure (Actions) designed to tackle the problematic issues regarding the TO already seem to be clearly outlined and aimed at supporting the primary structural needs that require the intervention of the Fund using an approach that already seems to be very “selective”. In some cases (School dropout – Reduction of failures in the educational system and Improvement of key skills; Higher Education – Raising levels of skills, Participation and Educational Success), the concentration of interventions would appear to be particularly severe. It is therefore necessary to reinforce these features and demonstrate, through the selection and grading of forms of intervention, to ensure that the decisions correspond more closely to the actual conditions of the local territory and the sector.

No mention is made of the lessons learnt from the programming period 2007-2013 currently in progress and, therefore, from the measures already being carried out, even though the initiatives currently underway do offer several useful indications. Lastly, the outlined programming still fails to address the theme of targeted investments (appropriately “supplemented” by ERDF resources) in high-risk areas (Zones), in terms of Education and Training, and the social, economic and cultural context. Interventions of this type could prove both appropriate and efficient with regard to the context and could lead, even in experimental form, to integrated initiatives involving schools (learning environments), families (favourable cultural and social conditions) and productive System (work placement and job opportunities).

TO 11- The ESF PO 2014-2020 allocates 3% of total resources to Institutional Capacity. Little information can be drawn from the documentation available. The programme proposes to “focus” intervention on priority 11.i (Capacity and Effectiveness of Public Administration and departments in view of reforms, control and governance) and chooses as Objectives (Expected Results) types of investments that cover the entire set of options outlined by the Partnership Agreement to which the choice of the primary Actions requiring implementation corresponds almost exactly. However, investment in Institutional and Administrative Capacity represented one of the spheres of intervention that proved to have the greatest problems during the programming period 2007-2013. The new programming period should be based on an explicit and rigorous analysis of the lines of intervention and the instruments that have already been tried out, targeting new investment at opportunities and actions that have proved most significant relevant and effective, taking account of the choices of governance for each of the three programmes and cross-cutting instruments. The ways of reinforcing the evaluation activities set out in the Partnership Agreement should be presented in a more explicit manner, partly through careful planning of the evaluation activities for the programming period 2014-20 which goes hand in hand with the programming process, as is happening within the RDP for the programming period 2014-20.

Given the current state of negotiations, it is clearly necessary to define the links in terms of financial details and actions between national and regional programmes, the links between different aspects of the regional territorial approach as well as the links between territorial policies and sectorial policies. It is also important to adopt a cross-cutting approach that explores the links between courses of action and the synergies to be implemented for the three regional programmes.

This draft is a work in progress and will continue until the end of the process. Further evaluation will be available as the programming progresses and will culminate in the publication of the report on the Ex Ante evaluation.

It concerns the activities of the ex ante evaluation of the ESF OP 2014-2020 but forms part of a joint integrated evaluation process of the three planned operational programmes (ERDF, ESF and RDF) undertaken by the Public Investments Evaluation and Assessment Unit (NVIIP).