

Marche Region

2014-2020 RDP for Marche
Ex Ante Evaluation report

Roma, June
2015

Executive summary



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Ex Ante Evaluation (EAE) of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 of Marche Region was conducted in compliance with the reference regulatory framework, in particular with reference to the article 55 of the Regulation (EU) n. 1303/2013, and taking into account Community methodological guidelines.

In comparison with other types of evaluation (on-going, mid-term, ex-post), EAE peculiarity lies within its support role to the planning phase, since the very first steps of strategy design. Though well separated, strategic planning and evaluation are extremely intertwined, requiring a strong and continuous interaction between stakeholders of RDP sketching out, first of all the Programmer and the Evaluator. In order to ensure this support and a constant dialog with the Managing Authorities, the evaluation activity was divided into successive phases, in relation to the analysis areas, as follows:

- A. SWOT analysis and needs assessment
- B. External coherence analysis
- C. Internal coherence analysis
- D. Monitoring and indicators
- E. Assessment of the available allocated resources in relation to RDP objectives
- F. Governance, management and monitoring system assessment

Evaluator, Managing Authority and stakeholders of the planning phase have regularly met and exchanged their views during technical meetings, workshops and roundtables, as well as informal meetings.

In order to ensure, on the one hand, an actual interaction between involved parties and, on the other hand, a prompt highlighting of their remarks, the Evaluator decided to express himself on the final and complete RDP version, so as to encourage the support logic and the creation of a continuous evaluation system.

Context and needs analysis

The evaluation of regional needs identification and of the importance of proposed strategic options is positive.

The assessment allowed to confirm the **completeness of the context analysis**, well summarized by strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the SWOT analysis. For this analysis, the Region quantified and used **common context indicators**, whose information was integrated by resorting to **specific regional indicators**. This ensured a more accurate view of the reference area.

The assessment analysis highlighted the Programmer ability to thoroughly describe all the structural components of the regional context. In particular, **the SWOT analysis, organized according to the 6 Priorities of Rural Development, gives clarity and allows an easy reconstruction of the underlying logic**. By analysing typical features of the Marche territory, priority needs can be pinpointed, leading to 2014-2020 RDP for Marche strategic guidelines. Moreover, the choice of making reference to context analysis evidence and SWOT analysis elements while describing needs, strategy and taken measures contributes to a higher clarity.

It is important to highlight that, while identifying SWOT analysis elements and needs, **the Programmer was able to exploit the added value of the regional partnership**, and at the same time internalize **the lessons learnt from 2007-2013 planning and from the on-going Evaluator recommendations**, aimed at improving RDP 2014-2020 strategy.

The EAE confirms the consistency of the connections identified by Managing Authority for each need: a comprehensive assessment of the link between needs and Priorities/FA highlights a positive relation given by a correct interpretation.

The Needs identified through context analysis represent in a way the link between demands coming from the territory, the organization of the measures to take,

aimed at supporting strengths, reinforcing weaknesses, facing threats and exploiting opportunities, **and the set of actions offered by Priorities/FA**. Moreover, it is useful to note that context analysis and conclusions of partnership meetings allowed the Programmer to classify identified needs according to a **priority ranking**, used then to define the regional rural development strategy. The following are the needs sorted out as most relevant:

- 5. Increase efficiency and competitive capacity of farms, forestry and agro-industrial holdings.
- 6. Facilitate the entry of young people into agriculture and the start-up of new holdings and other sectors
- 12. Water and air protection by sustainable agricultural and zootechnical management.

2014-2020 Marche RDP relevance and consistency

2014-2020 Marche RDP is consistent with the six EU Priorities in the field of rural development and consequently with Europe 2020 goals.

For the 2014-2020 programming period, the European Commission envisaged a closer strategic integration in attributing goals to different Structural and Investment Funds (ESI funds) through Common Strategic Framework (CSF) and the national transposition of the Partnership Agreement (PA). In particular, the CSF makes reference to Europe 2020 strategy as it aims at adopting *“an integrated development approach through ESI funds together with other Union instruments and policies, in line with strategic goals and main goals of the Union strategy for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”*.

With reference to external consistency, the evaluation analysis pointed out that **the Programme is actually consistent with Europe 2020 “Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” macro-priorities and with the 11 thematic objectives defined under the Common Strategic Framework (CSF), as well as with the main ideas of the PA**. In particular, the consistency analysis highlighted that Marche RDP well received PA guidelines concerning the following themes: competitiveness promotion, climate change, prevention and risk management, knowledge transfer, sustainability and environmental protection promotion, integrated approach to bottom-up planning of interventions and cooperation as for productivity and sustainability.

With reference to consistency with other relevant instruments, no specific critical point was observed as regards any possible overlap or repetition within planning. On the contrary, where appropriate, the Programme makes reference to **synergies and complementarities with the measures taken by other Community, national and regional Plans**.

The assessment about **complementarity and non-overlap of instruments** shows that a correct understanding of the PA led to strategic priorities underlying Regional Operational Programmes (ERDF, ESF, EAFRD).

At general strategy level, the logic underpinning each activated Priority/FA appears to be well structured and there is a clear and positive relation between strategic choices as a result of an efficient identification of needs and **specific regional needs**. The evaluation process emphasized a comprehensive consistency between measures/submeasures/interventions to be implemented and related FA, and, even if concise, a satisfying level of clarity in their motivations.

More broadly, **the selection of measures/submeasures/interventions to be implemented seems to be the logical result of regional needs identification and prioritisation**, allowing to achieve a **clear strategic direction** consistent with the central role attributed to some specific intervention areas:

- strengthening agricultural, forestry and agroindustrial productive system competitiveness, through generational change and support to new enterprises / activities in rural areas (FA 2A and 2B)

- encouraging the spreading of environmentally-friendly agricultural and breeding practices, especially as for water and air protection (Priority 4), as it is clearly showed by financial resources allocation.

As the Programme pays serious attention to organizational coordination, simplification and governance skills (**horizontal need**), the Programmer himself identified **actions to support RDP efficiency and effectiveness**. This need led to plan appropriate investments in the field of **training and support to economic and local actors**, resulting in the central role of the **horizontal measures** (1, 2 and 16) within RDP strategy as regards knowledge transfer, consulting services and cooperation activities.

These horizontal measures, especially the different types of cooperation actions, appear to be positive thanks to the use of **innovative and/or complex implementing tools** identified by Marche RDP and linked, for example, to the establishment of networks of rural workers and researchers, to an integrated supply chain planning, at local level too, to the integrated local development, even different from LEADER-CLLD, such as Local Integrated Projects.

Internal consistency analysis also showed a **full correspondence of the contribution of taken measures in the view of pursuing RDP objectives**.

In a future perspective, the Programme shows that **the financial resources allocation for different taken measures/submeasures/interventions is consistent** with pursuing general and specific strategic objectives for Priority and FA, increasing added value of public support and encouraging, at the same time, a more efficient use of resources.

The analysis of the 2014-2020 Marche RDP financial plan points out the following **major choices**:

- the Programmer devoted around 41% of the total resources to climate and environment measures (Priority 4 and 5), and around 18% to Priority 6. Moreover, the share concerning technical assistance (about 2,8% of total) is aligned with the regulatory estimation;
- more specifically, investments in tangible assets (measure 4) represent the cornerstone of the whole Programme, with a 122 million euros allocation, that is to say 22,7% of available resources;
- environmental measures (10, "Agro-environment payments", 11 "Organic farming", 12 "Natura 2000 payments", 13 "Payments for areas under natural constraints", 14 "Animal welfare", 15 "Climate and forestry services and forest protection") represent the other RDP pillar, with an 161 million euros allocation for 2014-2020 period, these resources account for 30%;
- measure 6 appears to be strategically important, with an allocation of 44,6 million euros (8,3% of Programme resources), and concerns many strategic areas through 3 submeasures – 6.1 "Support to young farmers start-ups", 6.2 "Support to non-agricultural start-ups in rural areas", 6.4 "Support to investments for non-agricultural activities creation and development";
- LEADER-method actions receive more than 11% of the available resources, a high share in comparison with the minimum 5% share as for Community regulations, and the previous allocation (2007-2013 period).

As regards **evaluation of forms of support** under each RDP measure, single measure forms were taken into account, comparing them with European Commission *fiches* and with implementation modes applied in the 2007-2013 programming period, for similar interventions.

Therefore, **the Evaluator acknowledges a substantial adequacy of implemented form of support**.

Consistently with Community provisions, **measure 19 "Local development LEADER"** was put into practice with an allocation of more than 60 million euros, within FA 6b "Encourage local development in rural areas" for satisfying needs

22 – Promote local development projects through bottom-up planning and 24 – Facilitate rural area population access to essential facilities.

With respect to territorial division, Marche Region gives sufficient information about **inner areas** strategy, keeping in mind that planning actually addressed to those areas is still under drafting.

Broadly speaking it can be said that **planned LEADER provisions are consistent with Community guidelines and with the challenges proposed by the PA for participatory local development**. In compliance with the PA, in order for LEADER method to develop its potential and to contribute with its added value to rural development objectives, the RDP does not pose any constraint to actions to be included in LDSs. Anyway they will be defined by the LAG through an Action Plan that is an integral part of LDSs. Intervention types will be consistent with peculiarities of LEADER areas and identified in one or more thematic areas.

As for LDS selection methods and their timing, main information is given, proving a tendency by the Programmer to ensure procedures and terms in accordance with LAG and LDP and selection by two years as provided by Community legislation.

The overall opinion of the Evaluator about LEADER provisions in RDP for Marche is positive: every necessary indication concerning LDS definition and implementation was provided, complying with method peculiarities, potentially able to bring added value to local economic system development.

Programme progress and results

The **Indicator system** is the envisaged tool for monitoring hence evaluating activities and achieved results during planning period. Within monitoring activities, indicators plan plays a major role given its function of regular monitoring of achievement of target values at FA level.

Under 2014-2020 planning, target values are essential as they allow to understand the direction of policy choices as well as to evaluate the intensity of the Programmer effort aimed at a specific result according to a given baseline. Therefore they represent the key element of monitoring & evaluation system as provided by articles 67, 68 and 69 of the Regulation (EU) n. 1305/2013 and they contribute to prove progress and results of rural development policies as well as efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of relative interventions.

Target values quantification analysis of Marche RDP was conducted considering the following aspects:

- **Presence:** the aim is to monitor the achievement of targets related to FA activated by the RDP;
- **Solidity:** the aim is to monitor the strictness of calculation methods, with reference to unit cost of similar interventions within 2007-2013 RDP;
- **Plausibility:** the aim is to monitor the proposed quantification, at target logicity level, and the resilience against external variables. If the target appears to be based on highly reliable input data and the following quantification seems to be not biased by external factors, the result itself will be considered as highly plausible.

The overall judgement on target quantification appears to be positive, as indicators that obtained an appropriate evaluation are predominant in comparison with those showing weaknesses, at strictness and plausibility level. In general, the Programmer provided with clear calculation methods based on reliable sources and objective data that can be considered suitable for target achievement.

As regards **performance framework**, Marche Region stands out for using financial framework of 2007-2013 Planning as a benchmark, readapting it in accordance with strategic choices of the new planning that is centred on an integrated approach. **Overall milestones appear to be plausible.**

The Evaluation Plan (EP) was drafted in compliance with provisions of the Regulations (EU) n. 1303/2013, n. 1305/2013 and Annex I, point 9 of the draft of

the implementing act of the Regulation (EU) n. 1305/2013, described at indent 9 of 2014-2020 Marche RDP. Beyond illustrating the goal – ensuring that Programme evaluation activities are carried out in an appropriate and sufficient manner so as to assess efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Programme itself – the Programmer defines its main objectives.

Bodies engaged in EP activities are correctly listed and for each one of them a short description of main functions is provided. It is of great importance to underline that the number of mentioned subjects is extremely high, so as to confirm the will of Managing Authority to identify as many as possible actors directly or indirectly interested in EP implementation. Moreover, links and coordination among actors are explained, in order to ensure clear roles and easy relationships, essential prerequisites of a good EP.

The EP is moreover consistent with the strategy that 2014-2020 RDP aims to follow within this 7-year period. Finally, beyond detailing evaluation activities to be implemented during this period, the EP adequately defines data sources to use, collection methods, estimated time for evaluation making, communication strategy aimed at ensuring the spreading of conclusions of evaluation activities and the resources to use.

Envisaged implementation modalities

The **management and monitoring system** is described in Chapter 15 of the Programme and provides with a complete description of subjects responsible for RDP implementation and their function: Managing Authority; Paying agency; Certification body (to be designated and acknowledged by the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies in conformity with the article 7 of the Regulation (EU) n. 1306/2013). As regards the new architecture of the programme and its organization, the Region confirms the current structure, even if foreseeing an increase of planning support staff.

Administrative capacity development is realised through the **enhancement of stakeholders' specific skills**, as well as through a focused intervention of **simplification of administrative deeds, procedures and flows of information relative to the Programme**. In line with these indications, RDP paragraph 15.5 lists a set of measures that the Region envisages to implement for administrative simplification and organizational coordination. These actions include Programme implementing device simplification and the rationalization of the preliminary phase, in order to simplify access to resources through specific procedure manuals including common indications for conducting preliminary phase and to ensure a correct and consistent procedure implementation on the regional territory.

As regards **communication strategy**, the Communication plan contains the main descriptive elements: actors who will draft the plan, target audience, actions and instruments to use for communication strategy. Moreover the target of the actions within the Plan appears to be consistent with the goal of timely informing direct and potential beneficiaries about times, modality and opportunity of access to funds. In order to **extend the RDP communication activity, recipients include Marche citizens and municipalities, social promotion and inclusion bodies, equal opportunities and non-discrimination bodies and environment protection organizations**. It is important to underline that the tools used for communication strategy implementation include **all the new communication channels for a continuous flow of updated information**, such as the Web page, so as to tie stable relationships thanks to new services, like the newsletter.

Horizontal themes

The overall judgement about how the RDP considers and addresses **horizontal and specific themes** is positive. The Programme embeds **sustainable development** goals in a satisfying way.

The Programme features the **ability to sustain economic and business development of the area, so as to encourage integration and equal access to funds**. Within the RDP, the Programmer envisaged a closer integration of women

in the agricultural sector through interventions for social integration of people with disabilities (to note that the selection of projects to be financed by Measure 6.2 – “*Support to start-up of extra-agricultural businesses*” will take into account women entrepreneurship).

The description of activities aimed at ensuring a sufficient **consultancy capacity**, that can facilitate beneficiaries’ participation to RDP measures, appears to be appropriate and considers evidence resulting from the on-going evaluation of 2007-2013 RDP, beyond Partnership demands and proposals. The Programme emphasizes the horizontal character of the Consultancy theme, by a substantial yet indirect contribution of the Measure 2 to many Focus Areas within 2014-2020 Marche RDP. Consultancy activities are addressed to farmers and forestry enterprises, territory operators, SMEs working in rural areas that will benefit from specialized consultancy activities aimed at tackling specific problems, such as new Community regulation implementation concerning management and agricultural and environmental condition, environment-friendly agricultural practices, climate change mitigation, biodiversity and water protection, innovation.