

# SECOND EVALUATION

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME 2014-2020

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

This evaluation targets the Technical Assistance Programme 2014-2020 (TA OP in this document), as an instrument supporting the optimization of the allocated resources and the improvement of the effectiveness in the management of the European Social Fund (ESF) in Spain.

The TA OP aims at achieving proper management and quality control of the funds, developing evaluations to measure effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the initiatives, as well as quality research that help improve and, if needed, review operations; it also aims at ensuring adequate disseminations and impact of the co-financed activities. It is the single Programme among the 23 Operational Programmes of ESF in Spain that does not include measures in the employment, education, training or social inclusion fields.

**Main objective** of TA OP is to ensure the conditions so that all ESF interventions in Spain can be conveniently implemented along the whole cycle – programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – as well as its certification and payments along with its control and audit.

The Programme has established 3 specific objectives and the associated results that are expected to be achieved:

- SO1.- To reach a high standard quality management and control, leading to the achievement of the objectives for ESF in Spain, ensuring proper support and monitoring of the ESF PO 2014-2020.
- SO2.- To develop high standard quality research and studies for the measurement of effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the ESF OP, as well as for the improvement of the co-financed activities.
- SO3.- To ensure adequate dissemination and impact of the FSE interventions, through information and communication measures, networking, best practices exchange and transfer of results.

In order to reach these targets, the TA OP plans to develop activities included in the Axis 8. ESF Technical Assistance in all Spanish regions, according to their level of development (more developed regions, transition regions and less developed region).

The TA OP actions target the Managing Authority, the Certification Authority, the Audit Authority and the Intermediate Bodies of Regional and National Operational Programmes.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The second evaluation of the Technical Assistance Operational Programme 2014-2020 meets the need of the Sub Directorate General for Programming and Evaluation of European Social Fund of the Ministry of Employment, Migrations and Social Security to have information as well as objective and critic elements supporting the decision making related to the Programme improvement and, if needed, for the reviewing of the co-financed activities.

The evaluation has focused on the assessment of the implementation, the effectiveness, the efficiency, the impact and the European added value of the Programme, and it covers the following areas of analysis:

- **Programmatic scope:** the Technical Assistance Operational Programme 2014-2020.
- **Time frame:** from the start of the Programme to 31st December 2018.

- **Territorial scope:** national level, including all types of regions and autonomous cities (less developed, transition and more developed regions).
- **Target groups:** all key actors involved in the management of the European Social Fund in Spain.

This is a mid-term evaluation, based on a methodological approach that combines the **Theory of Change** and the integration of cross-cutting principles of **equality between men and women, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, with a mixed and participatory approach**.

Equality between men and women, together with equal opportunities and non-discrimination, has been integrated in the evaluation both as a conceptual framework, as an interpretation methodology and analysis criterion. A mixed approach has been followed as well, based on the combination of methods and quantitative and qualitative data. The participatory approach has been implemented through the application of quantitative and qualitative techniques and instruments of social research:

- 10 personal interviews: 3 interviews with beneficiaries and members of the TA OP Monitoring Committee, and 7 interviews with regional intermediate bodies.
- 33 structured questionnaires, answered by beneficiaries of TA OP and regional and national intermediate bodies.
- 2 focus groups, with members of the TA OP Monitoring Committee and regional and national intermediate bodies.
- Desk research, based on secondary information sources.

## MAIN RESULTS

### EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

The evaluation of the implementation, alongside with the physical and financial implementation of the developed operations and the integration of the horizontal principles (equality between men and women, equal opportunities and non-discrimination), includes a previous phase evaluating the design and operation of the TA OP.

#### Formulation, rationality and coherence

- TA OP formulation process has followed a logical planning scheme, with appropriate resources assigned for this purpose. The starting point of the OP formulation process has been a diagnosis, based on the integration of financing priorities and challenges that have been identified by the European Commission for Spain, as well as lessons learnt from the previous programming period. All legal procedures to enable key public and private agents' participation have been respected, set up through an appropriate mix of information and communication tools.
- The consultation process has proved to be effective, but it has potential to be improved, in order to allow better identification and submission of eventual contributions coming from relevant stakeholders.
- The TA OP objectives are correctly designed and articulated; they are coherent with the identified problems, and based on the challenges and needs identified during the programming period. There is high consistency between targeted achievements and the starting scenario, as well as a direct link between the general objective and the needs; the OP has appropriate means for its goals.
- Formulation and design of the TA OP has one relevant weakness, associated with the indicators system. The selection and definition of indicators, together with the estimation

of targeted values, has caused problems in management, monitoring and evaluation of the TA OP, mainly when measuring the results, impact and efficiency. Even if there have been improvements in this issue, there is still a margin for improvement.

### Implementation

- Progress degree in the physical implementation of the TA OP is adequate. Considering the number of approved operations, the implementation has been concentrated in initiatives linked to the specific objectives n.2 and n.1, being coherent with the relevance and weight of these objectives in the Programme. Considering financial progress, even if the budget commitment level is high, certification has a lower progress degree; more than 87% of the committed expenditure is still uncertified.
- The implementation of the Programme has been concentrated, according to financial data, in operations linked to the specific objective n.1; this is coherent with the relevance of the objective in the Programme.
- There is certain risk of non-compliance in certification. This is motivated by some difficulties foreseen to cover the whole financial allocation for the Programme.
- Implementation, both physical and financial, is very concentrated in two bodies; other institutions have had limited participation in the implementation of the TA OP.
- The analysis of the physical and financial implementation in the mid-term of the TA OP 2014-20 confirms the relevance of instrumental operations linked to the day-to-day management of ESF managing bodies in Spain.

### Equality between men and women, equal opportunities and non-discrimination

- Gender focus has been considered during the design phase of the TA OP 2014-2020, according to the favorable opinion issued by the Instituto de la Mujer.
- Gender mainstreaming in the public administration interventions has showed certain progress, on a social basis and thanks to some of the thematic evaluations financed by TA OP.
- Equality between men and women, equal opportunities and non-discrimination principles have been respected during implementation of the TA OP financed operations (non-sexist language has been used in all documents, social clauses have been included in tendering processes, indicators breakdown by gender, balance between men and women participation in implementation).

### EFFECTIVENESS

The evaluation of effectiveness is oriented towards the measurement of the level of achievement of the TA OP objectives; it determines the degree of progress achieved in the established time frame for analysis, not considering the costs associated to the implementation.

- Ongoing and closed operations (considering 31st December 2018) are contributing to the achievement of the general objective, with a strong focus on the specific objective n.1. Operations linked to the achievement of the specific objective n.1 show higher achievement rates. This is coherent and aligned with the physical and financial progress degree. The training actions targeting ESF managing bodies show very high progress.
- The evaluation of the effectiveness of the TA OP by priority axis has been constrained by the limited information provided by the indicators system.
- The results linked to the specific objective n.1 are being achieved mainly through tools like training activities, external contracts and management.

- Target bodies consider that the effectiveness of the evaluations financed by the TA OP are low. Also communication activities show a low degree of effectiveness, caused both by its reduced implementation progress and the low level of coordination and integration with the ESF OP individual communication strategies.
- The TA OP operations have covered the needs in the field of technical assistance for most of its final target bodies, according to the opinions gathered in the field research.
- Training actions, together with the IT tool FSE14-20, are the two most used activities, both for regional and national intermediate bodies.
- Target bodies are, in general terms, in a better position with regard to management, certification, programming, evaluation, information and communication of ESF, as a result of the implementation of operations financed through the TA PO. On a general basis, there is a high satisfaction degree concerning the TA OP activities.
- Regional intermediate bodies consider that the TA OP intervention has enabled them to improve their technical management skills. As for the national intermediate bodies, they point to a better and more effective coordination with the rest of ESF agents, as well as the access to better tools, instructions and methodologies to manage ESF, as the main results from the TA OP intervention.

#### **Equality between men and women, equal opportunities and non-discrimination**

- The evaluation of the implementation of the gender focus in operations orientation and its contribution to the promotion of equal opportunities is limited, as there are no specific indicators available nor specific actions in this field.
- Nevertheless, the appropriate mechanisms have been established in order to achieve this orientation in the initiatives that are financed through TA OP, including selection criteria linked to the horizontal principles.

#### **EFFICIENCY**

The evaluation of efficiency is oriented towards the measurement of the relation between the objectives achievement and the associated costs, not only financial but of any other resources.

- It has not been possible to do a complete assessment of the efficiency, as the necessary information was not available. Thus, it is not possible to determine which operations have been more cost-effective and efficient.
- The allocated resources have been certified in most of the 23 closed operations (considering 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018). All of them, except two uncertified operations and four with certified expenditure below the programmed amount, reach 100% of certified expenditure compared to programmed unit cost.

#### **IMPACT**

The impact evaluation aims at analyzing the achievement of the Programme's results through the implemented operations, through quantification and qualification of the achieved results, both expected or not, and that should be aligned with the identified needs.

- The average progress degree on the results indicators is over 25% in all cases. Progress has been better in the indicator regarding contribution of the Programme to the achievement of the specific objective n.2, compared to the progress showed by indicators for specific objective n.1. The achieved impact, according to the progress degree of the results indicators for the specific objective n.3, has not been measured as there are no indicators linked to this objective.

- The impact of the verifications and training activities has experienced an outstanding progress in 2018, compared to previous years. Evaluations reach more than 50% of the targeted objective in the first years of the Programme implementation.
- The evaluation of the impact of the TA OP by priority axis has been constrained by the limited information provided by the indicators system.
- The support received through the TA OP operations has had a positive impact for most of the intermediate bodies. The implementation of the operations has had a positive impact on the operation of ESF in Spain; main impacts identified are the increase of experiences exchanged (at a national level), more identification and application of best practices, the increase of positive audit reports and the decrease of the financial errors rate.
- Regarding structural impacts of TA OP, it can be pointed out that there is raised awareness in regions about the importance of promoting the cooperation between social services and employment services in order to improve employability of persons with more difficulties to access the labor market.
- Main non-expected impacts of the Programme are the problems caused by the malfunction of the IT tool FSE 14-20.
- Sustainability of the impacts achieved through the TA OP implementation is moderate. There is an external element representing a relevant risk that can have a strong influence on future sustainability of these impacts: the change of criteria at European level.

#### EUROPEAN ADDED VALUE

The evaluation of the European added value aims at measuring the additional contribution, both in focus, scope or financing, that can be attributed to the activities developed with European funding of the TA OP; the effects on the beneficiaries have been analyzed.

- There are some changes observed that wouldn't have occurred in absence of the financial support.
- Regional and national intermediate bodies consider that improvements have been made in the ESF management in Spain (mainly because of their perception of improvements in the assistance provided by the Managing Unit of ESF in Spain), and they are aware that this is a consequence of the European financial support; as these organizations work with the ESF, there is full awareness of the financial European support and of the direct relation between the changes and the received support. Nevertheless, as they do not receive direct funds from the TA OP and they are not intermediate bodies in this Programme, these institutions show some difficulties to determine if the changes produced in themselves are caused by the European support, in absence of what the TA OP operations would have not been implemented. This can be the reason why there are some opinions pointing that the same effects could have been achieved without the ESF support.
- As targeted bodies have a long tradition working with the ESF, they already have a clear perception of the European Union; this vision has not experienced significant changes as a consequence of the TA OP implementation.
- There are no significant differences observed between men and women regarding the perception of the European added value.