

Mid-Term Evaluation of the Operational Program Lisbon 2020

Executive Summary

Promotor organization:

Management Authority of the Lisbon Regional Operational
Program Lisbon (*Autoridade de Gestão do Programa Operacional
Regional De Lisboa*)

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Authorship

EY-Parthenon



Coordination:

Sandra Primitivo

Team:

Catarina Pereira

Diogo Martins

Heitor Gomes

Inês Andrade

Luis Carvalho

Larissa Dowdney

Manuel Reis

Nuno Morim

Raquel Morgado

Rui Faustino

Pedro Casimiro

1. Object, scope, and objectives of the Evaluation

The main goal of the "Impact evaluation of the interventions of the Regional Operational Program (ROP) Lisbon 2020" is to "identify and explain the contribution of the Operational Program (OP) to the results expected in the Specific Objectives of each Investment Priority (IP) mobilized in each of its Priority Axes", which includes: (i) assessing the degree of effectiveness and efficiency of the supports granted by the OP, identifying its contribution (cause-effect relationship) to the Specific Objectives pursued in each IP; (ii) identifying the impact, be it potential or actual, of the implementation of the OP and its alignment with the European Union's strategic objectives for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and for economic, social and territorial cohesion in the Lisbon Region (iii) identifying the European Added Value associated with the implementation and the results of the OP; (iv) assessing the relevance and coherence of the configuration of the OP in relation to the needs of its main recipients and to the evolution of the context over the programming period, taking into account the effectiveness, efficiency and potential impact revealed by the OP.

OP Lisbon 2020

The OP Lisbon 2020 aims to continue the development path that the Region has been following since 1986, overcoming social and economic bottlenecks, and taking advantage in a smarter, more inclusive and sustainable way of the potentials generated by the territory and its human, cultural and environmental resources.

In the European reference, the architecture and strategic options of the ROP Lisbon are aligned with the priorities defined under the Europe 2020 Strategy (Europe 2020) for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. In the context of the guiding framework of the ROP at the national level, the National Reform Program (NRP) stands out in the priorities assigned to the challenges arising from the thematic agendas of competitiveness and internationalization, human capital, social inclusion and employment, and sustainability and efficiency in the use of resources.

At the level of the Lisbon Region, the architecture of the priority axes of the respective ROP (eight axes, plus the axis of technical assistance of the OP) and of the Specific Objectives associated with the selected Investment Priorities reflect a response to the regional challenges listed in the "Lisbon Regional Action Plan 2014-2020", developed in 2013.

Status as of December 31st, 2020

At the cut-off date, 4 137 projects had been approved, involving an eligible cost of around €2 258 million, to which €943 million of approved funds are associated (79% financed by the ERDF and 21% by the ESF). It is worth to highlight, due to the dimension acquired in these three indicators, Axes 2, 1 and 6 (competitiveness and internationalization, R&D, and social inclusion), in this order, standing out as the axes with the highest community funding, and the axes whose intervention typologies have the highest volume of approved projects.

The commitment rate of Lisbon 2020 was 115%, aligned with the average of that of PT2020, while the execution and completion rates (64% and 55%, respectively) were slightly below the global average, showing the capacity of the OP to attract qualified demand, but difficulties in the execution of contracted projects on the promoters' end.

Despite the moderate completion rates, Axes 1 and 2 have the highest commitment rates, reflecting good demand (after reprogramming) for most of the intervention typologies covered by them, which indicates that the two axes might accommodate the drop of some execution without compromising the financial execution of the OP. In three of the axes (3, 6 and 9), the approved amount does not exceed the programming, and only Axis 3 - with low commitment and completion - presents a worrying situation from the point of view of the overall achievement of its objectives, not significantly compromising, however - due to its lower financial importance - the global performance of the OP.

Table 1. Number of projects, eligible investment and approved fund by Axis

Strategic Vector	Priority Axis of the OP Lisbon 2020	ESIF	Financial Allocation (thousands of €)	% OP Total	Approved Operations (Nº)	Approved Fund (thousands of €)	Commitment Rate	Executed Fund (thousands of €)	Completion Rate (%)
Training and employment	Axis 5 - Promote the sustainability and the quality of employment, and support worker mobility	ESF	66 734	8%	301	72 753	109%	42 499	58%

Strategic Vector	Priority Axis of the OP Lisbon 2020	ESIF	Financial Allocation (thousands of €)	% OP Total	Approved Operations (Nº)	Approved Fund (thousands of €)	Commitment Rate	Executed Fund (thousands of €)	Completion Rate (%)
	Axis 7 - Investing in education, in training and in vocational training for skill acquisition, and in lifelong learning	ERDF	49 034	6%	284	59 197	121%	49 681	84%
		ESF	56 432	7%	278	56 002	99%	37 617	67%
Research, Development and Innovation	Axis 1 - Strengthening research, technological development, and innovation	ERDF	158 711	19%	875	246 173	155%	104 613	42%
Competitiveness and internationalization	Axis 2 - Strengthening the competitiveness of SME	ERDF	176 713	22%	1 366	212 607	120%	88 468	42%
Environmental sustainability, energy, and territorial cohesion	Axis 3 - Support the transition to a low-carbon economy in all sectors	ERDF	9 930	1%	59	7 060	71%	2 915	41%
	Axis 4 - Preserve and protect the environment, and promote the efficient usage of resources	ERDF	21 000	3%	52	22 680	108%	14 916	63%
	Axis 8 - Sustainable urban development	ERDF	101 292	12%	216	110 825	109%	75 764	68%
Social Cohesion	Axis 6 - Promote social inclusion, and fight poverty and discrimination	ERDF	81 678	10%	173	72 600	89%	62 907	87%
		ESF	71 288	9%	490	70 827	99%	31 536	45%
Technical Assistance	Axis 9 - Technical Assistance	ERDF	24 270	3%	43	12 586	52%	8 873	70%
OP Lisboa 2020 Total			817 081	100%	4 137	943 310	115%	519 068	55%

Source: EY-Parthenon

2. Methodology

Theory-Based Evaluation (TBA) was used as the methodological framework for impact analysis, that entailed the structuring of the logical framework of the OP Lisbon 2020 intervention and its respective Theory of Change (ToC). The evaluation process involved a wide range of methods and techniques for information collection and analysis, including document and statistical data collection and analysis, 10 interviews/meetings, 3 case studies, 5 focus groups and 2 surveys (one to business promoters and another to non-business entities).

The design of the ToC was further supported by a literature review and document analysis process, and took into consideration, as far as assumptions and risks are concerned, a focus on the evaluation criteria governing the evaluation questions posed in the Terms of Reference and, therefore, a focus on the results and not so much on the process of operationalization of the typologies.

The methodological approach was anchored in a diverse range of methods and techniques for data collection, and of treatment and analysis of quantitative and qualitative information, selected according to the options for further development provided in the Terms of Reference. These options foresee a full evaluation cycle - mobilizing all methods of information collection and analysis, and mobilizing the ToC and Contribution Analysis - for the intervention typologies integrated in option 2.2¹: "Scientific and technological research" and "Social and health infrastructures and equipment" - and a simplification of the evaluation process for the remaining domains, which were analyzed on the basis of information available in other evaluations and of simpler evaluation collection techniques.

¹ Option 2.2 is defined in the Terms of Reference of the Evaluation and integrates the intervention typologies for which greater depth in the evaluation is required

3. Conclusions

Effectiveness

C1. The levels of commitment and completion registered in the Operational Program Lisbon 2020 are in line with those verified in the other OP of the Continent, although below than what was expected for this phase of the programming period. The performance of the OP in terms of meeting the completion targets is globally positive. Notwithstanding, there is still domains in which the action of the Management Authority (MA) will be fundamental to meet the defined targets, either through the reprogramming of targets or through a close monitoring of execution, particularly in enterprise R&D, in energy efficiency, and in some types of training and of urban rehabilitation.

C2. The main factor that conditioned the pace and capacity of execution of the OP was, prominently, the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused disruptions on various levels, from the capacity of the MA to respond simultaneously to the ongoing operations and the need to launch support measures in the context of the pandemic, to the disruptions in supply chains, constraints that were more recently amplified by the war in Ukraine which, in addition to hindering the regular functioning of supply chains, increased inflationary pressure and uncertainty associated with the context of implementing operations. In addition, other factors such as the lead time for analyzing applications and payment requests, the procurement procedures, the difficulty in mobilizing the self-financing component and the difficulty in hiring human resources have also conditioned the beginning and the development of operations.

C3. Concerning lifelong training and hiring support, most of the instruments have proven to be adequate and able to attract qualified demand, with most of the targets being met or well positioned to be met, the only exception being vocational training in the business context which is, at the reporting date, far from meeting the completion target, largely due to the companies' lack of knowledge of the existence of such offer, the low appreciation of training activities by companies, and to the administrative burden associated with this type of operations funded by the ESF.

C4. Still in the field of education and vocational training, the notices proved to be adequate and effective to mobilize qualified demand, except for the results of the support to Technological Specialization Courses (TSC), where the non-completion of courses hinder the achievement of the target.

C5. In the scope of the activities to promote research, technological development and innovation, most of the targets are in good conditions to be met, in a scenario of reduction of the targets and resources initially programmed.

In the IP 1.1 (strengthening of R&I's infrastructure and capacity) there was a good adherence, despite the high levels of selectivity introduced by the Notices of Opening Tenders (NOT). The main difficulties revealed by the promoters (essentially public) refer to the low rate of community co-funding, considering the degree of risk associated with the investments.

In the case of the IP 1.2 (enterprise R&I), the major challenges are at the level of adherence - in projects of cooperation and of knowledge transfer and valorization - having the co-funding rates also been identified as the main constraint to mobilize demand, claiming the need to combine support for individual projects with greater dynamism of support for the ecosystem.

C6. With regard to promoting the competitiveness of SME, a double constraint is faced - one of general demand mobilization, and the other of qualified demand attraction - as demonstrated by the low level of demand compared to that expected in the programming and by the low gross approval rate, combined with the high level of terminations/cancellations and the consequent reduced plausibility of meeting the targets. The mobilized Financial Instruments (FI) (Equity/Quasi-Equity, Debt/Guarantee, and Co-Investment Fund) also had a lower level of adherence than what was initially expected, but still higher than that registered in other regions of the country, with the difficulties of mobilization being found in the low co-funding rates.

C7. Within the OP scope of action to promote the energy transition in companies, in public infrastructures, and in houses, there is a low adherence in the support to the energy transition of enterprises and a high incidence of terminations/cancellations in the support to energy efficiency in houses. The associated constraint calls essentially for greater simplification of the required procedural requirements and for better communication of these to the promoters and, on the other hand, for greater responsiveness from the specialized entities involved in the analysis and monitoring of operations.

C8. With regard to the actions for improving access to and supply of social equipment, the notices proved to be able to attract qualified demand, which, combined with the fact that these are the areas with the largest allocation, means that a large part of the Program's objectives are achieved.

C9. In the promotion of equal opportunities and the fight against discrimination, there are constraints in reaching the targets set both with regard to plans towards equality in Local Government entities (Axis 5) and with regard to the training of strategic audiences (Axis 6).

In the case of the plans towards equality, the difficulties were mainly due to delays in launching the notice. In the case of the training of strategic audiences, the implementation of the actions was clearly affected by the pandemic, which prevented the actions from being carried out.

Efficiency

C10. The resources mobilized and the results generated by the OP prove to be adequate in most IP and Strategic Targets (ST), although the amount of community support falls short of what is required to generate visible and impactful effects in reducing regional asymmetries and to respond adequately to the needs of the Lisbon Region.

C11. The different forms of support mobilized by the ROP Lisbon 2020 boosted the regional investment dynamic observed in the 2014-2020 programming period, despite the existence of some heterogeneity regarding the axes and the IP.

C12. The output-costs calculation for the IP with approved or completed operations is limited by the low number of finished operations on the evaluation cut-off date, but the analysis performed allows to notice a significant range of completions.

C13. At the same time, there are very significant disparities in the unit costs per output unit and different potential levels of efficiency, resulting from different methodologies being used in the calculation of the output indicators presented in the application.

The macroeconomic context and limitation of co-financing rates affected the beneficiaries' execution capacity, exacerbating the investment effort and impacting the compliance with the reference values (standard costs), leading in some cases to adjustments of the average values considered in the programming.

C14. The FI are characterized by presenting more attractive financing conditions than those of the traditional market, contributing to the mitigation of market failures that inhibit demand. The financing conditions of the FI directed to private housing have proven to be particularly advantageous when compared to those offered by traditional banks. In the case of the FI that support enterprises, the main advantages in comparison to the market are the grace period on loans and the guarantee as a credit access mechanism.

Operating Efficiency

C15. The contractualization mechanisms proved to be important instruments for enhancing the territorial leadership capacity. An important role of complementarity was manifested between the MA (greater effectiveness, efficiency, and qualification in terms of management procedures) and the LMA (more strategic dimension and of municipal/regional commitment/articulation), which can and should be strengthened in the future.

C16. The multi-fund, endogenous and exogenous articulation and integration has contributed positively to the operational efficiency. The inability of local actors to structure integrated operations and of the management entities to formulate NOT that would encourage multi-fund operational approaches, set risks that limited, in part, the performance of some instruments (for example, Pacts for Development and Territorial Cohesion, Urban Development Strategic Plan).

C17. The consolidation of the governance scales through the scopes of action of the various instruments (Pacts for Development and Territorial Cohesion, Urban Development Strategic Plan, Community-Based Local Development) allowed to generate an important leadership capital, relational capital and social capital. It would be important, in the next programming period, to ensure the continuity of partnership and proximity logics, to leverage the local/regional entities and agents' greater knowledge of the territory and of the challenges involved.

C18. Although the launched NOT allow for the capture of high qualified demand, enabling the selection of the best projects, the regional specificities (greater concentration of population, investments, and resources in the Lisbon Region) pose additional challenges that must be considered.

C19. Although the offer and kind of support and the eligibility conditions set forth in the NOT meet, in general, the regional demand and no relevant gaps are registered, there are typologies of operations to be financed that may be improved, in order not to leave strategic areas for economic growth and regional integrated and sustainable development uncovered

C20. The complexity of the regulatory and operational framework of the supports, the excessive bureaucratic burden underlying the community funds, the successive and multiple rules of segregation of functions considered, the limitation of resources of the technical structures and weaknesses in the information system, as well as the insufficient autonomy of adaptive and proactive management of some of the entities of the

community funds' ecosystem which are directly involved in the ROP Lisbon 2014-2020, are parameters that need to be reassessed, since they hinder the completion and results achievable by the Program.

C21. The reduced predictability and regularity of the tenders, especially in the enterprise field, is a very significant constraint and inefficiency factor.

Impact and sustainability

C22. Between 2013 and 2019, the Lisbon Region's GDP grew less than the country's average, reflecting a process of convergence (by default) of the GDPpc with the mainland regions and the EU27 average, meaning a lower capacity of the most developed region to drag the other regions.

C23. The completion rate of the supported projects at the time of the evaluation reporting (20%) limits the assessment of the impacts of the OP in the region, but the evidence gathered points to the financial inability of the OP to produce significant impacts at the regional level in a comprehensive/transversal way, and therefore high levels of selectivity in the fields of competitiveness, innovation and R&TD should be maintained in the next programming period, in alignment with the options of the Regional Strategy for Smart Specialization, and there should be a continued focus on the scope of social cohesion, in the areas and territories where the regional diagnosis identifies greater needs for response and where the Combined Added Value is greater, favoring solutions with greater potential for innovation and dissemination in the fields of qualification and support of vulnerable groups.

C24. In the business performance and R&D indicators, the region continues to position itself above the national values, but with an evolution of main indicators aligned with the country's average. Lisbon was the mainland region where the weight of business investment executed (until 2021) with the support of the OP in business GFCF was lower, reflecting the smaller financial dimension of the OP and the restrictions in terms of co-financing.

C25. During the implementation period of the program, there was no change in the Region's productive specialization. The OP has contributed to the increase in the relative weight of the knowledge-intensive services activities and, in the manufacturing industry, of the "high-tech" activities in GVA - the profile of granted supports privileged these activities in relation to their weight in the region.

C26. Lisbon continues to be the most R&D intensive region, but its dynamic was below the national average and, similar to the country, it fell far short of the 2.7% target set for 2020 in the Partnership Agreement. There was a clear effort on the part of the Program to strengthen the supports for R&D, particularly in building infrastructure capacity, in supporting quality research and scientific and technological production, as well as in promoting and articulating the participation of the Regional Scientific and Technological System (RSTS) in international networks and programs.

C27. Nevertheless, it does not seem possible to prove the existence of a clear strategy of commercial exploitation of inventions (through the sale of patents and/or licensing) in the international market that enhances the research entities' economic valorization of research results.

Despite the increase in scientific production of quality internationally recognized through greater investment in the participation of the RSTS and the Lisbon region's entrepreneurial fabric in the international R&D panorama, the competitiveness of the Lisbon region's ecosystem (and the country as a whole) is still fragile when compared to the European ecosystem.

C28. The alignment of the research themes with the Lisbon/Regional and National Research and Development Strategies for Smart Specialization did not restrict demand, on the contrary, it helped to focus the R&DI projects on the strategic thematic domains for the region. The main constraints are in the plan of the available co-financing rates and in the limited allocation of the OP in relation to the needs of the region with the greatest scientific and technological potential in the country.

C29. In the domain of education, training and qualification of the population, the context indicators point to a significant improvement in the level of qualifications on the various levels of education, but especially in the school dropout rate, where the OP continued to strive successfully.

C30. In the field of employment, there are also dynamics that suggest a contribution of the Program to the reduction of unemployment, such as a decrease of unemployment in the Region above of that seen in other regions, which is aligned with the good performance of the OP's actions directed to this objective.

C31. In the social amenities, the interventions supported allowed for the reinforcement of the "day-care" response capacity on a regional scale, but the contribution to overcoming the low coverage rates in the region revealed to be modest in view of the enormous shortages and needs existing in the region. In health amenities, the importance of the impacts is limited, especially with regard to the substantial reduction in the population without a family doctor and the reduction in waiting times for specialty appointments. Notwithstanding, enormous progress has been made in the quality of services provided in primary care units, in the quality of diagnoses, and in increasing the number of users with a family doctor.

C32. Most promoters consider that their projects are financially sustainable and that the respective results will last after the completion of the operations. There are, however, some typologies in which the sustainability of results is more limited in time, namely in the employment support measures and in the operations framed within the promotion of social inclusion and the fight against poverty.

European Added Value

C33. The ESIF enabled a substantial part of the investment completed and of the results achieved by the supported projects. This additionality effect of the OP was very relevant for the non-business promoters, but it also became more important for business promoters in the pandemic context.

C34. In the case of companies, the additionality effect of the ESIF reveals itself mainly in areas where market failures traditionally occur and where there is a recognized lack of incentive for investment, such as business R&D and training of entrepreneurs and workers.

C35. In the case of non-business entities, the enhancement effect is even more evident, with R&D, energy efficiency and cohesion as the areas that most depend on the funds to make their projects viable, as well as the health domain.

Besides the catalytic effect, the OP worked as an investment amplifier, accelerator and facilitator, there also being a deadweight effect (the program only financed interventions that would have always taken place even without its intervention).

C36. The OP presents, on average, an investment leverage of 2.38€. The leverage effect is higher on the interventions financed by the ERDF and on the intervention typologies "Business investment in innovation of non-SME" (4.34€), "Qualification and innovation of SME" and "Energy efficiency in housing".

C37. The European Added Value of the ESIF is also manifested through the set of guidelines, rules, and specific procedures applicable to the use of structural funds. The effectiveness of the interventions was strengthened through a greater orientation towards results, a greater focus of the supports in areas covered by guiding sectoral/regional frameworks, and a creation and strengthening of the leadership capital, the relational capital and the social capital.

Internal and external relevance/cohesion

C38. There is a high consistency of the OP Lisbon 2020 with the policy mix associated with its major intervention pillars and with the territorial and sectoral context existing to date, especially as a result of the preparation of important guiding sectoral/regional frameworks (Lisbon Regional Action Plan 2014-2020 and Lisbon Smart Specialization 2014-2020) and the consultation of key partners.

C39. The auscultation process of the regional stakeholders was mainly developed in the context of the preparation of the Regional Action Plan, with the undertaking of multiple thematic Focus Groups, and later with periodic meetings of the Working Groups.

C40. The existence, in some thematic areas, of sectoral planning instruments and of the Regional Action Plan, which established the objectives, priorities, and key operations for their pursuit, was very important in ensuring alignment between the Operation Typologies and the Strategic Objectives and the potential for demand.

C41. The programmatic architecture of the Operational Program matches altogether the development needs of the Region, having the coordinating and mobilizing role of the Commission for Regional Development and Coordination of Lisbon and Tagus Valley/MA OP been very important in the programming phase.

C42. The reprogramming exercises responded very positively and appropriately to several context changes, particularly in the framework of the COVID-19 Pandemic, and to the implementation difficulties in some Strategic Objectives and Operation Typologies.

C43. The complementarity foreseen between ESIF instruments and between these and other public policy instruments has not been very effective, although there are generally no overlaps or competing effects between support instruments.

4. Recommendations

R1. Enhance the attractiveness of vocational training and of Lifelong Learning by adapting the instruments, disseminating the offer, and simplifying procedures

- Promote continuous awareness of the importance of training and continuous learning, using the dissemination of the results and benefits of human capital training among the various groups of beneficiaries.
- Foster the reorientation of supply to areas of training more aligned with the needs of the region's productive tissue and labor market, and reinforce the efforts on initial training.
- Ponder the revision of the application of the minimis regime to modalities that traditionally register low demand and that need to be stimulated.
- Simplify, in the case of business investment projects supported by incentive systems, the application processes and, above all, the process of submitting payment requests in the training component.
- Consider attractive increments in the case of submission of business projects with a training component, as well as incentives to investment in training during work hours.
- Support the legal and normative review - within the scope of collective hiring negotiations and/or revisions of labor legislation - that promote continuous career progression and salary enhancement of workers who carry out, by their own means or by the initiative of the employer, actions of Lifelong Learning (recommendation addressed to social partners).
- Articulate the support instruments to entering the labor market with the supports to training.
- Facilitate new approaches and formats on the training courses that mitigate the risk of dropping out due to entry/re-entry into the labor market.

R2. Promote the regional R&D and Innovation ecosystem

- Implement supporting programs to the stimulus of the R&DI ecosystem.
- Reinforce the support for initiatives that boost the ecosystem.
- Guarantee the continuity of support to the scientific and technological research infrastructures included in the National Roadmap of Infrastructures of Strategic Interest.
- Articulate available community funding (ERDF) with funds from the State Budget, in a cumulative way, in order to create conditions for providing more attractive support in terms of allocation and level of support.
- Establish available community funding synergies (ERDF for PT2030) with other European instruments that support Research, science and technological development.

R3. Stimulate Business R&D, especially in collaborative projects

- Ensure the continuity of the support instruments dedicated to stimulating business R&D.
- Value R&D projects that include activities to disseminate the results.
- Support the innovation and collaboration entities/platforms, promoting the articulation between the Regional Innovation System actors, and between them and the companies.
- Introduce incentives to the creation of strategic R&D programs aimed at companies.
- Maintain levels of selectivity, considering adequacy evidence of the notices.
- Ensure fast advanced payment/disbursement mechanisms and procedures.

R4. Stimulate the competitiveness and internationalization of the companies in conjunction with collective efficiency strategies that reinforce the Regional Innovation System

- Reinforce the dynamization of collective actions that promote entrepreneurship, preferably the technology-based one.
- Support the training of existing and emerging entrepreneurship units, favoring articulation with the entities that carry the Financial Instruments.
- Educate agents and promote mechanisms for simplifying and prioritizing licensing procedures applicable to the co-financed projects.
- Guarantee fast advanced payment/disbursement mechanisms and procedures, which mitigate the deterrent effects of the low grant rates.
- Promote the articulation between the Incentive Systems and other public funding sources.

R5. Stimulate a greater usage of Financial Instruments

- Promote greater participation of Business Angels (BA) and of more Venture Capital (CR) vehicle companies (including international ones).
- Stimulate greater articulation between the MA, the *Banco Português de Fomento* and the regional entities supporting business activity and entrepreneurship.
- Promote greater dissemination of the benefits of the FI among potential beneficiaries, raising awareness particularly on the potential demand for the attractiveness of these instruments in a context of rising interest rates and deterioration of financing conditions for companies through the market.
- Reassess the procedural constraints related to the mobilization of FI (debt and capital) by companies, and introduce greater simplification in the access conditions.

R6. Strengthen the attractiveness of energy efficiency incentives

- Ponder the introduction of mechanisms aimed at improving the efficiency of the support to the energy efficiency of companies, providing for the possibility of focusing on the contracting of energy performance improvement services.
- Evaluate the possibility (and eventually to negotiate with the European Commission) of making eligibility more flexible.
- Adopt measures to simplify the opinions of the competent authorities (General-Directorate for Energy and Geology) in the context of applications for this support, as well as measures that promote the speed of these procedures.
- Adopt measures to speed up the opinions required from the Intermediate Bodies and to expedite decisions on applications or changes to projects, as well as advanced payments/reimbursements to promoters.
- Prioritize energy performance contracts to ensure better performance and reduce risk for companies.
- Develop communication and awareness actions that allow for a showcasing of the positive effects of investing in energy efficiency actions.

R7. Strengthen the attractiveness of the instruments and the awareness of the strategic actors within the scope of the priorities in terms of equality and non-discrimination

- Ensure greater predictability and alignment with the time horizon for the execution of community frameworks when launching the NOT.
- Consider restructuring the instruments, to phase out the stages inherent to the implementation of equality plans, complementing them with other initiatives that reinforce the perceived importance and awareness of this issue.
- Continue the support aimed at training strategic audiences.
- Maintain the modular nature and the non-obligation to go through all the courses that integrate the reference defined by the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality.
- Complement training approaches with other types of operations that aim at the same objectives, but less costly in terms of time/availability of the final recipients.

R8. Continuing the public policy and investment cycle in improving health, education and social amenities, ensuring a proper articulation with sectoral policies

- Carry out a prospective analysis of needs for densification of the social, education and health network of amenities or of interventions to qualify and equip them.
- Design specific support instruments that encourage demand for this type of investment, by entities with their own sectoral competences and responsibilities.
- Ensure the complementarity of national and European funding instruments.
- Develop mechanisms and solutions for the management and the quality of the working conditions for professionals in different areas.

R9. Intensify strategic planning throughout the process of implementing community funds/OP

- Promoting more participatory cohesion policy planning processes, in the design of strategies and instruments.
- Increase the predictability and regularity of the tenders in the business field.

R10. Continue efforts to reduce the complexity of the regulatory and operational framework of the supports

- Promoting higher levels of autonomy for entities in the ecosystem of the funds directly involved in the OP.
- Mitigate some of the dysfunctionalities in the structure and functioning of the State with a negative impact on the performance of the actor's ecosystem of the funds.
- Promoting greater ownership of the cohesion policy and of the articulation with national policies of the overall actors' ecosystem and reinforcement of training actions.

R11. Define benchmarks and standardized calculation methodologies and provide tools for calculating completion and output indicators

- Ensuring the formulation of benchmarks and construction and application of standardized calculation methodologies, and the availability of tools for their application that make it possible to calculate, when possible, the indicators defined in the future ROP.

