ERDF and CF 2014-2020 ex post evaluation

2nd Evaluation Network of NSRF Programs 2021-2027
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Introduction

Complementary exercises & single message

Ex post 2014-2020, ERDF and CF + REACT-EU:

- Implementation ended in 2023 (almost full data)
- Focus on impacts and thematic findings
- Call for evidence Jan 2022 -> 13 WPs and internal work -> RSB April 2025

Mid-term 2021-2027, ERDF, CF and JTF:

- Implementation considered until mid-2024, with updates from end-2024
- Focus on policy features and early implementation
- Call for evidence Sep 2023 -> Supporting study and internal work -> RSB Nov 2024

Cohesion policy over the last 10 years has worked.

It has delivered sustainable development for all territories and reduced inequalities between regions.

In some territories and thematic areas it has worked better than in others and we have the knowledge to improve it.

Evidence base and methodology

- 13 work packages – 12 tendered externally; thematic and cross-cutting
- Monitoring data at operation level (WP2 – Preparatory study):
- RHOMOLO-based macro-economic modelling (WP3 – Effects of funding)
- 5 Counterfactual impact evaluation studies and review of external studies
- Evaluation Library: synthesis reports of Member State evaluations (including Greece)
- Relevant academic and grey literature

Desk research

Surveys and interviews

Stakeholder consultation

Case studies (matrix structure)

Data & econometric analysis (financial & indicator data)

What about Greek programmes?

Case studies!

- **WP5 ICT:** ICT broadband and networking
- **WP6 SME support:** Support to tourism
- **WP7 Climate & environment**: Climate + Waste + Water + Financial instruments + 2020 targets
- **WP8 Transport**: Electricity + Gas + TEN-T road infrastructures
- **WP10 Institutional capacity and reform:** Administrative capacity + Public sector digitalisation
- **WP11 Interreg:** Interregional + Inter-EU + Transnational + Pre-Accession
- **WP13 Territorial Instruments:** SUD Integrated Territorial Investment

Each WP also include country fiches!

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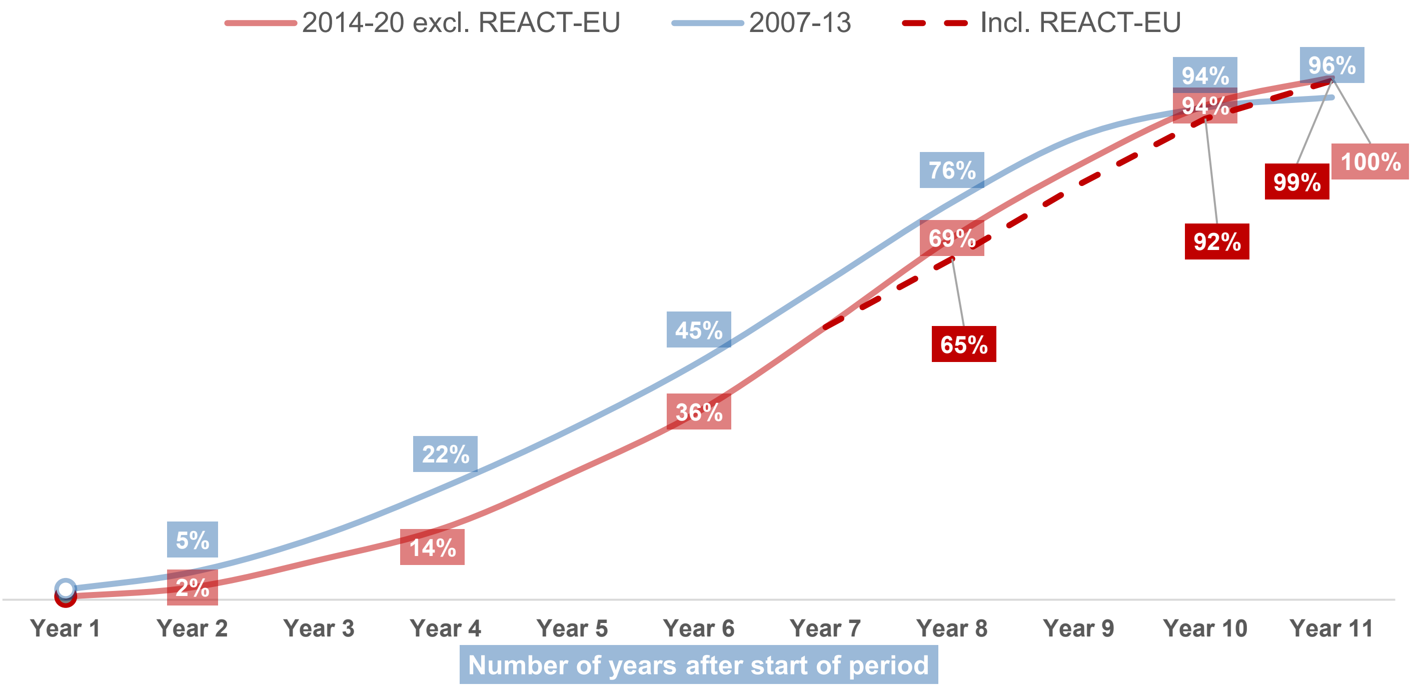
Ex post evaluation 2014-2020

Absorption rate of ERDF/CF 2014-20

- **99%** payment rate (reference to end of 2023 as of December 2024)
- Successful implementation, despite major shifts in macroeconomic conditions
- Indicator targets also on track to be met.



Achievements and effectiveness findings

- Improved SME survival rates; improved revenues
- Improved key transport networks and removed bottlenecks
- Positive contribution to water quality, nature protection, but remaining short on GHG reduction commitments
- Administrative capacity limited effectiveness; further need to invest in skills shortages
- Several large-scale infrastructure projects delayed - public procurement bottlenecks
- ICT investments linked to increased high-speed internet access.

2.5 million SMEs supported

Over **370 000** jobs created
24 million ECEC places

8 million households better broadband access
20 501 km of transport networks built, restored or upgraded

€ 66 billion in climate investments
11.2 million ha conservation status

Effectiveness: macroeconomic impact

Sustained long-term impact

Positive, significant, and sustained effect on **EU GDP (+0.7%** at the end of the period, concentration in LDRs), stimulating convergence. ERDF was most effective in **high-value sectors** and CF on **unemployment and long-term growth.** (Synthetic control method)

Positive impact on key indicators

Higher **EU GDP per capita (+5.3% over 10 years cumulatively,** higher in LDRs**)** than it would have been without the funding. Over the same period of 2014-2023 this resulted in higher **employment (3%) and labour productivity (5.3%).** (Machine learning control method)

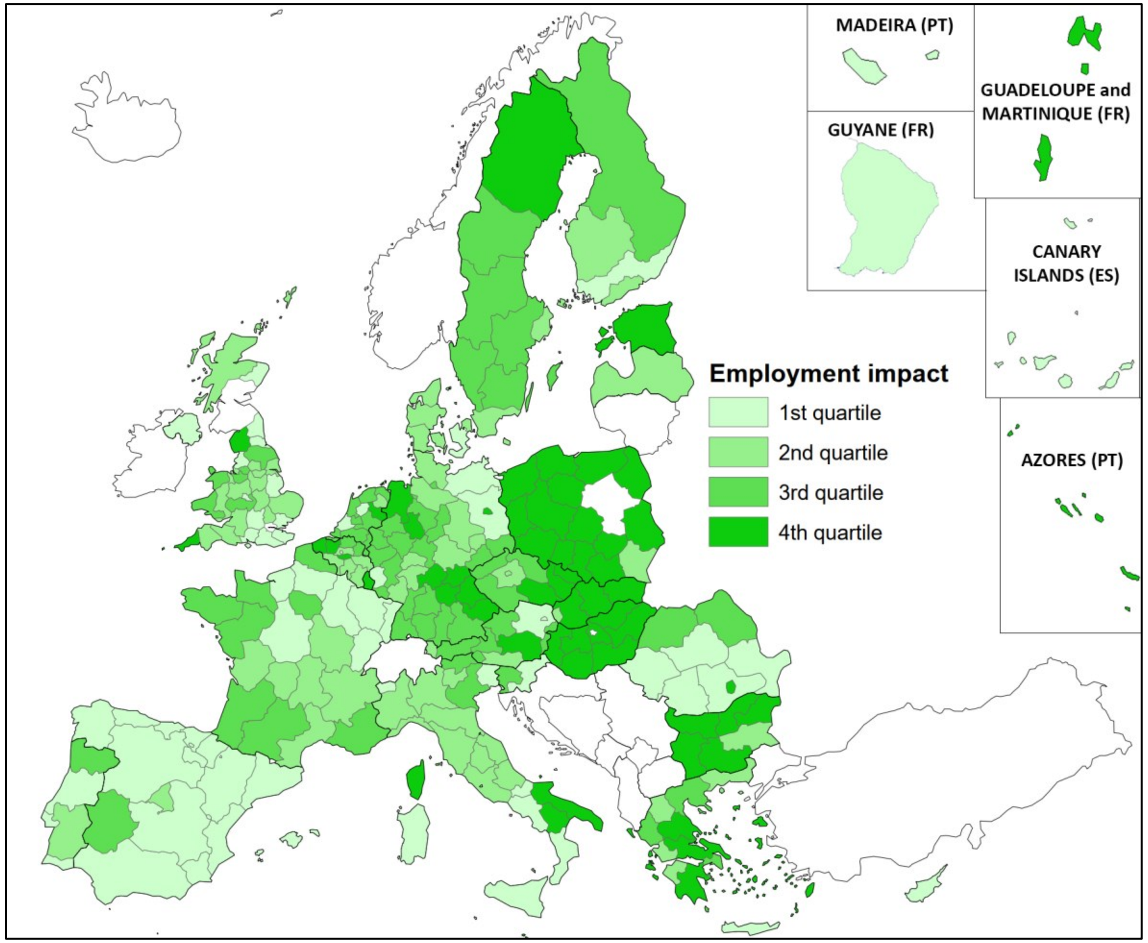
Reduced regional disparities

Higher **EU GDP +0.6%** (+3.4% in LDRs) at the end of implementation compared to no policy. **Lower regional inequality**: the GDP per capita gap between the top and bottom 20% of regions was reduced by **3.5%**. (RHOMOLO)

Heterogeneous impact

Effects not always proportional to aid intensity. Significant impact disparities owing to economic, institutional, and administrative characteristics. (Heterogeneity study)

Example: impact on employment



- Share of employment over population increased by around 3% overall and 4.25% in LDRs (Machine learning control method)
- Largest employment effects (+0.46% vs +13.86%) in regions that spent over 15.20% on transport **and/or** more than €2,950 per capita (Heterogeneity)

Key factors for strengthening impact of the funds

- Cohesion policy has positive effects on macroeconomic outcomes and contributes to reducing regional disparities.
- Effectiveness is conditional on a few key factors, including:

Selected key findings

- **Administrative costs relatively modest**, but more simplification needed (expanding scope of SCOs and FNLC, streamlining public procurement rules).
- Ex ante conditionalities contributed to the funds' coherence and improved governance.
- Extent of coherence with other funds was mixed; **more strategic coordination needed**, e.g. with Horizon 2020.
- Scale of funding and ability to crowd-in private investment are major added values.
- Continuity of funding was a key added value, but **barriers to entry** need to be tackled to ensure inclusive access to support.
- The funds’ ability to adapt (via performance review, in response to crises) allowed the policy to remain relevant and responsive despite major context changes.
- CSRs a key tool for **directing investment towards reform needs**.

Key conclusions and lessons learned

Territoriality

Territorial needs met through the targeting of funds, shared management, and multi-level governance

Need for greater flexibility and adaptation to unforeseen challenges.

Simplification

Administrative costs are relatively low, also thanks to simplification measures.

Gold-plating is still an issue, scope for further simplification for beneficiaries and greater take-up of SCOs and FNLC

EU added value

EU public goods, long-term strategy, place-based approach, improving national investment framework and administrative capacity.

Room for greater reforms-investment link and targeting.

Relevance

The funds are key to achieving the EU's policy objectives.

Flexibility remains important to maintain relevance. (performance review, mid-term review).

Capacity building

Adequate administrative capacity is crucial for effective fund implementation, as testified by case studies and econometric evidence.

Limited capacity hindered management on some instances.

Monitoring system

Performance orientation: progressively better access to micro- and beneficiary-level data for monitoring and evaluation (e.g. CIE) purposes.

Where to access the evaluations?

The material presented here is available online under the following links:

- Inforegio - Ex post evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund for the programming period 2014-2020
- Inforegio - Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the evaluation of REACT-EU
- Inforegio - Mid-term evaluation of the cohesion policy programmmes 2021-2027 financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund (JTF)

Inforegio is currently being redesigned to improve to improve its modernity and appeal for readers. Please share any suggestions.

In addition to SWDs and EC Report, the supporting studies will be published by the end of October 2025. Some of them will feature ad hoc content, while most will include:

- final study report,
- country fiches,
- case studies.

Thank you

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