

Improving Structural Funds for better delivery of R&D&i policies

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Action Plan to improve the monitoring and follow-up of R&D grants

Extremadura (Spain)

May 2022



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. General information.....	3
2. Introduction	4
2.1. Improve Project.....	4
2.2. Regional Action Plans.....	5
3. Policy context	6
3.1. The policy instrument.....	6
3.2. Main challenges or areas of improvement.....	7
3.3. Identification of best practices relevant for the Policy Instrument.....	9
4. Action Plan.....	13
4.1. General description	13
4.2. Action 1.....	14

1. General information



Project: *PGI05786 Improving Structural Funds for better delivery of R&D&I policies*

Partner organisation(s) concerned: *FUNDECYT-PCTEX*

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NUTS2 region: *Extremadura*

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The Action Plan aims to impact: Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
 European Territorial Cooperation programme
 Other regional development policy instrument

Name of the policy instrument(s) addressed: *ROP ERDF of Extremadura 2021-2027*

2. Introduction

2.1. Improve Project.



Structural Funds Programmes are the main policy instruments European regions have for building up Research, Technological Development and Innovation and support the implementation of their Smart Specialisation Strategies.

The policy instruments addressed by the IMPROVE project are mainly Structural Funds Programmes, except for the Municipal Plan for Development of Gabrovo (Bulgaria) and the Development Plan of Tartu City (Estonia), which have in common the goal of enhancing a knowledge based regional/municipal economic growth.

Beyond their different background, scope and particular target, these policies seek a smart, sustainable and inclusive regional/local development by means of actions and instruments that, to a greater or lesser extent, focus on entrepreneurship, competitiveness of regional/local businesses, employment, education and lifelong learning, innovation, research, technological development, etc.

Achieving an efficient delivery of regional development policies is crucial, not only in terms of making the best possible use of public funds, but also in terms of maximising regional potentials, fighting regional inequalities and strengthening Europe's economic well-being, as well as its social and political cohesion.

The partnership includes a wide range of regional realities, with different levels of economic development, more and less centralised administration systems and different levels of innovation performance, as well as distinct level of involvement in the management of the addressed policies (more strategic for some partners and more operative for others), which allowed a comparative analysis of the policy makers approaches and enriched the perspective about the management and implementation of Structural Funds.

2.2. Regional Action Plans

Produced by each partner, the action plan is a document providing details on how the lessons learnt from the interregional cooperation during the Phase 1 of the project will be implemented in order to improve the policy instrument that is addressed within their region. It specifies the nature of the actions to be implemented, their timeframe, the players involved, the costs and funding sources.

Based on a learning process that included a State-of-the-Art report for the identification of the areas of improvement of each Policy Instrument, the organisation of Thematic Workshops on key topics shared by the partnership, the participation in 8 Peer Reviews (organised in an on-line mode due to the COVID-19 pandemic), the identification of good practices, a 2nd round of visit (in a face-to-face mode) for an in-depth analysis of the GPs, and a close relation with the Regional Stakeholders' Groups, the action plans will be developed focusing on the improvement of the identified challenges within each region.

During Phase 2, the project partners will closely monitor the implementation of the action plans and will regularly check the extent to which the measures described in the action plan are implemented on the ground, evaluating the results of these measures and gathering evidence of success to be reported to the programme. During Phase 2 the project partners will continue to learn from each other and will exchange and build on the success achieved or on the difficulties encountered.

3. Policy context

3.1. The policy instrument



(Description of the Policy Instrument. If different from the original one, explain why the original one can no longer be influenced and what is the relevance of the new one and how the partner can actually influence it)

The region of Extremadura (Spain) has originally selected Priority Axis 1 "Strengthening Research, Technological Development and Innovation" of the ERDF Operational Programme of Extremadura 2014-2020 as the policy instrument to be improved within IMPROVE project. Based on the fact that the new programming period 2021-2027 is starting, the focus of the project will be on the new ERDF Operational Programme of Extremadura 2021-2027, Political Objective 1.

This policy instrument, in line with the Smart Specialisation Strategy of Extremadura (RIS3), finances different types of operations with the aim of:

- Attract and retain talent in the region.
- Encourage technology transfer, innovation and cooperation networks.
- Foster innovation.
- Invests in centres and resources for the promotion of innovation.
- Consolidate the most relevant research groups in Extremadura.

The correct implementation of these operations is of great importance for the region as the Operational Programme is the main instrument for the delivery of the R&D&i policies in the region, and often administrative burdens, lack of personnel or an isolated approach might put in risk the proper deployment of the OP.

In this sense, the improvement in the management and implementation of Structural Funds by means of the exchange of knowledge and experience with other regions/countries will increase the effectiveness of R&D&i support public policies based on a better and more sustainable use of resources, better decision-making processes and a more effective governance and evaluation of the actions undertaken.

3.2. Main challenges or areas of improvement

*(Details about regional barriers and challenges. Key stakeholders involved.
Information updated from the Peer-review report.)*



Three main challenges or areas of improvement have been identified in Extremadura with regards to the selected Policy Instrument:

1. The **governance, co-ordination and communication between actors** could be improved with a view to ensure a user-driven focus in the design and implementation of ROP programmes and instruments, as well as to maximise the support provided on the ground. Strengthening information flows and knowledge sharing could also help generate a greater sense of ownership and common understanding.
2. In relation to the **design and implementation of the ROP**, there is a difficulty to adapt the Regional Operational Programme programming to Extremadura's regional profile of beneficiaries. The ROP implementation processes are unaligned with regional specificities/beneficiary capacities. Therefore, the region should address this challenge by ensuring that the OP implementation aligns with regional/beneficiary needs and capacities adapting the project selection process to regional specificities.
3. Finally, **Monitoring and evaluation** of the Policy Instrument is another area of improvement to consider. A weak performance measurement culture limits the evidence bases to support strategic planning, priority setting and programming for the OP. Therefore, a more robust approach to ROP evaluation could help inform any necessary adjustments.

The different elements mentioned above (the need of a solid monitoring and evaluation system, the multilevel governance, the strong participatory process, the effective management of the EDP, especially at operational level for the implementation of RIS3) together with the strategic alignment between the Smart Specialisation Strategy 2021-2027, the Regional R&D&I Plan and the Regional OP of the ERDF 2021-2027

(OP1) should help to achieve a well-designed RIS3 with specific priorities and a user-centred policy mix, as well as strategically aligned with the territorial stakes and with the other R&D&I strategies.

On the other hand, and regarding the key stakeholders involved in the improvement of aforementioned challenges, the General Secretariat of Science, Technology, Innovation and University of the Regional Government of Extremadura as owner of the Policy Instrument selected by FUNDECYT-PCTEX, will be the main one.

Other stakeholders involved are:

- General Director of Autonomous Financing and European Funds
- General Secretary of Digital Administration
- General Director of University Policies
- General Director of the Digital Agenda
- General Director of Enterprises
- General Secretary of Employment
- General Director for Planning, Training and Quality in Health Care
- General Director for Agriculture and Livestock
- General Secretary of Ecological Transition and Sustainability
- General Director of Tourism
- Rector of the University of Extremadura
- Managing Director of FUNDECYT-PCTEX
- General Director of Extremadura Avante

FUNDECYT-PCTEX as Technical Office of the RIS3 and Lead Partner of IMPROVE project plays a special role in the improvement of the Policy Instrument by means of the present Action Plan.

3.3. Identification of best practices relevant for the Policy Instrument

(Indicate the GPs from other partners' region identify as more relevant for your Policy Instrument, based on the 2nd round of in-depth analysis. Please fulfil as many tables as needed.)



In line with the first challenge related with **governance, co-ordination and communication between actors** we have identified an interesting GP in the framework of the exchange of experiences of IMPROVE project:

NAME OF THE GP	Lapland's regional working group for structural funds management
OWNER	Regional Government of Lapland (Finland)
DESCRIPTION	<p>A regional working group for structural funds management has been established in Lapland with the aim to increase coordination between regional authorities.</p> <p>Lapland has set up a working group in order to facilitate better cooperation and to take into account the priorities and funding from international/interregional programmes, agricultural programme and national development funding. The group consists of those officials who are directly responsible for the evaluation of the project applications.</p> <p>The group has been established with the aim to increase coordination between regional authorities, to provide support and add value to the evaluation of project proposals, and to create synergies between regional and interregional programmes.</p> <p>All project applications must be presented for the group for a joint discussion. The group does not have the authority to evaluate or approve projects, for which the members of group are responsible in their own organisations. The aim is to coordinate different funds and programmes and to create cooperation with ongoing projects, as well as to prevent overlapping projects and actions. The value of joint discussions and debate is in the views and knowledge of the group and in the learning process that the joint meetings facilitate.</p> <p>The main stakeholders are the intermediary bodies and the regional and state representatives working with regional development and funding.</p>

TRANSFERABILITY ASPECTS TO THE REGION	<p>The group has been established with the aim to increase coordination between regional authorities, to provide support and add value to the evaluation of project proposals, and to create synergies between regional and interregional programmes. The main characteristic of the working group is that it is preliminary and informal in the sense that it is designed to support the officials in their work.</p> <p>It is a good transfer practice for Extremadura because it would facilitate the coordination of the different funds (ERDF, ESF) and programmes and create cooperation with ongoing projects, as well as avoid overlapping of projects and actions. This could be a co-ordination mechanism between ministries belonging to the Government of Extremadura and officials should be part of the process, even if it is not a working group without decision making skills, it is important, that regional authorities are coordinated, and officials are informed.</p> <p>Finally, the practice is built upon the Finnish model for regional development. As a practice for transferring of knowledge, inter-organisation learning and coordination of funds it may be considered to be interesting. Extremadura could introduce this methodology through our Office for Innovation (O4i) and in this case, we could widen the capitalisation of R&D&I projects involving companies, researchers, public administration and citizens.</p>
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Moreover, in line with the challenge related with the **design and implementation of the ROP** and the need of a better **monitoring and evaluation** of the instruments, we have identified two interesting GPs in the framework of the exchange of experiences of IMPROVE project:

NAME OF THE GP	The RIS3 monitoring system
OWNER	Regional Government of Puglia (Italy)
DESCRIPTION	<p>The RIS3 monitoring system allows to collect and elaborate data for monitoring the effectiveness of the Strategy with granular data and timely</p> <p>This RIS3 monitoring system is carried out through the regional calls launched in the framework of the Smart Specialisation Strategy. Applicants and beneficiaries have to provide primary data when applying for a call.</p> <p>The RIS3 monitoring system has four questionnaires, which are available on a web interface during the application and, in case of success, at the end of the grant: there is an ex-ante and an ex-post project questionnaire, i.e. an ex-ante questionnaire for applicants and an ex-post questionnaire for beneficiaries.</p> <p>This type of approach overcomes some obstacles related to RIS3 monitoring and allows for a good level of granularity and timeliness of data.</p> <p>On the one hand, companies and research centres are actively involved in monitoring and they are aware of the importance of providing reliable and useful data. This has allowed us to collect information over time on 400</p>

	<p>beneficiaries of the 10 regional interventions implemented under RIS3. Long-term monitoring has given us insight into how the dynamics and innovative behaviours of these beneficiaries have changed.</p> <p>On the other hand, with regard to the policy design process, this system allows to better understand the dynamics of innovation within each area of specialisation in order to better define these areas and to define more specific instruments. In addition, policy makers can be provided with original data for a more efficient policy design process. Still, the organisations in charge of RIS3 monitoring with the Managing Authority and all the organisations involved in the design and implementation of the Smart Specialisation Strategy, they have to continue working on joint coordination.</p>
<p>TRANSFERABILITY ASPECTS TO THE REGION</p>	<p>This system may be adapted to the different needs of other regional and national administrations as it is flexible enough. In particular, the structure of the proposed questionnaire can be adapted to respond to the specific objectives of the strategy identified and to the specific knowledge needs. It allows to acquire the data necessary to calculate the output and result indicators for the areas of specialisation, it allows you to have a system of constantly updated data and to be able to prepare short reports to analyse the dynamics of evolution in the various areas of specialisation.</p> <p>For the Extremadura Region it would be an opportunity to transfer this monitoring system from the Region of Puglia, because it would make it easier for us to obtain real and updated data that we can evaluate, this would allow us to adapt, change and innovate in our RIS3, accordingly to the needs found in the monitoring. The decision making by policy makers according to the results obtained would be more agile and dynamic in the changes and there would be a greater adjustment to the needs of the R&D&I ecosystem.</p>
<p>NAME OF THE GP</p>	<p>Apulian Innovation Overview</p>
<p>OWNER</p>	<p>Regional Government of Puglia (Italy)</p>

<p>DESCRIPTION</p>	<p>A Knowledge Tool for Better Informed Public Decisions.</p> <p>Apulian Innovation Overview is a web-based informative tool aimed at the systematic valorisation of the information resulting from the institutional activity of survey, monitoring, elaboration and analysis of the Regional Innovative System carried out by the Regional Agency for Technology and Innovation (ARTI) and support policy makers decision process.</p> <p>It has a flexible structure: it is both dynamic, since it is continuously updated, and integrated, since it allows over time to add further indicators elaborated on information taken from different sources belonging to other sectors of the regional administration.</p> <p>For its implementation, an initial step-by-step approach was adopted. The tool can be accessed through institutional Agency portal via various navigation modes (selecting an area of interest; scrolling the full list of indicators; navigation for experienced users) and leads to pages dedicated to individual indicators, including detailed descriptions; comparative tables with time and other territorial breakdowns (usually, Italy and South of Italy); possible other disaggregation (by type, sector, etc.); direct connection to the data source; graph and other functionalities, including references to other information resources on the portal (thematic in-depth analysis, statistical information column).</p> <p>The tool is consulted and used for a rapid response to information needs expressed by the regional offices (at least 5 requests/month) and for the preparation of context analyses necessary for regional programming (S3 Strategy, INTERREG Italy-Albania-Montenegro 2021-2027, etc.). Only in the last year, the tool received almost 6,000 unique page views, with an average time on page of almost 2 minutes and a rather low bounce rate (44.5%).</p> <p>The main beneficiaries are: policy-makers; researchers and entrepreneurs; civil society; subjects to be attracted to the region (researchers, investors).</p>
<p>TRANSFERABILITY ASPECTS TO THE REGION</p>	<p>AIO allows in a user-friendly way to analyse the degree and dynamics of specialisation of the Apulian production and research system, with particular regard to phenomena that affect innovation and competitive advantages, in order to redefine and implement the new regional interventions inspired by the principles of the S3 Strategy.</p> <p>The tool is especially addressed to policy makers and practitioners that can find it as a good practice on which to graft a useful comparison. This is especially true for public decision-making processes at sub-national level, which often lack those bodies, governmental and non-governmental, responsible for providing updated information and structured analysis.</p> <p>Extremadura has the RIS3 Monitoring System that integrates external and internal data on the R&D&I activities of all the agents of the innovation system, allowing, through interactive visualisations and full access to the data, to carry out an in-depth exploration of the ecosystem, to analyse and better understand the R&D&I activities of all actors and the evolution of the regional smart specialisation pattern. This tool can integrate different data sources and its exploitation has been possible thanks to the use and the adoption of the linked open data approach and the use of semantic web technologies. For this reason, Extremadura region can make a comparative study between both tools and decide to integrate or complete some modules to improve its information and usability. It is necessary to know the tool well and to be able to make a decision on what we are interested in and how to integrate these modules technologically and technically.</p>

4. Action Plan

4.1. General description



Although all the identified good practices are of great interest to address the challenges of the region in relation to our Policy Instrument, this Action Plan will focus exclusively on implementing the action "Improvement in the monitoring and following-up processes for R&D&I project grants" on the basis of the lessons learned from Puglia region.

Specifically, we will introduce improvements in the monitoring and follow-up processes related to the R&D&I project grants, based on the GP "RIS3 Monitoring System".

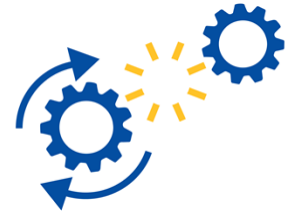
4.2. Action 1

4.2.1. Summary of the action

Context of the Action Plan	Instrument to be improved	Grants for the development of R&D&I projects											
	Policy instrument tackled	ERDF Operational Programme of Extremadura 2021-2027, Political Objective 1											
Name of the ACTION 1				Priority	(x)	High							
Improvement in the monitoring and following-up processes for R&D&I project grants.						Medium							
						Low							
Activities			Funding Sources	Costs	2021		2022				2023		
					Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	
1	Design of questionnaires based on lessons learned from Puglia region		Own resources	-				X	X				
2	Implementation of a pilot version of the questionnaires.		Own resources	-						X	X		
3	Analysis of the data obtained and conclusions on the results for the final implementation of the model in the 2021-2027 calls for proposals.		Own resources	-								X	
Players Involved				Indicators/ Monitoring									
Responsible		Functions		Indicators								No	
A	General Secretariat of Science, Technology, Innovation and University		Implementation of activities	1	Number of pilot version of questionnaires completed by beneficiaries of an R&D&I project grant								30
B	RIS3 Technical Office (FUNDECYT-PCTEX)		Technical assistance in activities 1 and 3	2	Number of instruments that introduces de final version of the questionnaires for the calls of the 2021-2027 period								2

4.2.2. Relevance to the project

As stated before, one of the major challenges in relation to our Policy Instrument is to adapt the Regional Operational Programme design to Extremadura's regional profile of beneficiaries. Several analyses done within IMPROVE project (State of the Art report, peer review) and beyond the project (RIS3 evaluation process, diagnosis of the R&D&I system for the design of the new ROP FEDER 2021-2027, etc) highlight a certain lack of alignment between the ROP implementation processes and the regional specificities/beneficiary capacities. Therefore, it is necessary to address this challenge by ensuring that the operations aligns with regional/beneficiary needs and capacities adapting the instruments and project selection process to regional specificities.



The adaptation of the GP “**The RIS3 monitoring system**” from Puglia Region to our regional context will help us to better understand the nature and needs of the applicants and beneficiaries of the intervention (grants for the development of R&D&I projects) in order to better shape the instrument in the new programming period. Moreover, the access to real and updated data would allow us to adapt, change and innovate in our RIS3 and/or ROP, accordingly to the outcomes of the monitoring, reinforcing also our challenge of having a more robust monitoring and evaluation system.

4.2.3. Nature of the Action

Action 1 “**Improvement in the monitoring and following-up processes for R&D&I project grants**”, will be implemented through three major activities:

1. Design of questionnaires based on lessons learned from Puglia region
Once analysed the information gathered during the visit to Puglia region, a first version of the questionnaire/s will be design. The questionnaires will be focused on better understanding what worked well or not for the beneficiaries, in the framework of the regional specialisation.
2. Implementation of a pilot version of the questionnaires
Projects submitted under the calls for proposals for the 2014-2020 programming period are currently being finalised. Taking into account that these beneficiaries

will have to close their files in the coming months, it is appropriate to carry out a pilot action by sending to these beneficiaries the questionnaire designed in activity 1.

This pilot activity will allow us to have a first set of data and thus fulfil the dual function of better understanding the needs of the beneficiaries/the functioning of the instrument and allow us to readapt the pilot questionnaire for its subsequent implementation in the calls of the period 2021-2027.

3. Analysis of the data obtained and conclusions on the results for the final implementation of the model in the 2021-2027 calls for proposals

Once the data is collected from the beneficiaries, an analysis will be done in order to understand whether the questionnaire is gathering sufficient and quality information to better assess the impact of the intervention or if amendments are needed. As a result of this analysis, a final version of the questionnaire/s will be validated and implemented in the future call for proposals.

4.2.4. Stakeholders involved

The main stakeholder involved in the implementation of the Action Plan is the General Secretariat of Science, Technology, Innovation and University of the Regional Government of Extremadura as owner of the Policy Instrument. Two Units of the General Secretariat (the Business Research Resource Service and the Scientific Research Resource Service) will work together with the Technical Office of the RIS3 in the implementation of the activities included in this Action Plan.

4.2.5. Timeframe

1. Design of questionnaires based on lessons learned from Puglia region

May-September 2022: internal meeting with the involved stakeholders for the design of the questionnaires

September-October 2022: meeting with IT area for the implementation of the questionnaires in an online format to better gather the information received from the beneficiaries.

2. Implementation of a pilot version of the questionnaires

November 2022-March 2023: the questionnaires will be sent to the beneficiaries and the information will be collected for future analysis.

3. Analysis of the data obtained and conclusions on the results for the final implementation of the model in the 2021-2027 calls for proposals

April-May 2023: Analysis of the data received from the beneficiaries.

May-July 2023: meetings among the involved stakeholders to draw conclusions and make the necessary adjustments of the questionnaire.

4.2.6. Cost and funding sources

The activities to be implemented in the framework of this Action Plan will be covered by the stakeholders involved own resources: namely, staff costs of the General Secretary of Science, Technology, Innovation and University of the Regional Government of Extremadura (public servants), and the staff costs of the RIS3 Technical Office paid through ERDF ROP of Extremadura. No additional costs are foreseen.

4.2.7. Monitoring of the activities

FUNDECYT-PCTEX, as the RIS3 Technical Office, will be fully involved in the implementation of this Action Plan, facilitating the monitoring of the activities.

To do so, periodic meetings will be held to monitor the achievements of the activities foreseen.

Date:	12/07/2022
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