



**CONTRACT FOR THE ACQUISITION OF  
SERVICES TO CARRY OUT THE MID-TERM  
EVALUATION OF THE 2014-2020  
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPERATIONAL  
PROGRAMME  
(TAOP 2020) - REG. 134/2022**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**MID-TERM REVIEW OF TAOP 2020**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# MID-TERM EVALUATION OF THE 2014-2020 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME (TAOP 2020)

### Technical Team

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## 1. OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The aim of the Interim Evaluation of TAOP 2020 was: "*to contribute to endorsing future management decisions, those allowing for the fine-tuning of the support instruments of TAOP 2020, in order to maximize the effectiveness of the use of funds and enhance the sustainability of the results, as well as to substantiate proposals for programmatic, strategic and/or public policy adjustments in the areas of intervention of the OP, also contributing towards the discussion and programming of the post 2020 period*".

The recipients of this Evaluation, as the main beneficiaries and users of its results, are: The Management Authority of TAOP 2020 and its Monitoring Committee and the entities represented therein; the policy makers (Inter-ministerial Coordination Commission of PT2020); the European Commission; the beneficiaries of the evaluated interventions and citizens in general.

The Evaluation had the following specific objectives: (a) to assess the degree of effectiveness and efficiency of the support provided by the OP, by identifying its contribution to the Specific Objectives pursued, taking into account the time when the evaluation is carried out; and (b) to evaluate the relevance and coherence of the configuration of TAOP 2020 vis-à-vis the requirements of its main recipients and the evolution of the context over the programming period, taking into account the effectiveness and efficiency of the OP.

An evaluation of a well-grounded policy instrument focused on "*ensuring gains in effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation of the ESIF*" is, by its nature, heavily dependent on an assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency (assessment criteria) of this implementation. At the same time, the issue is to understand the existence of links with instruments of a similar vocation to access technical assistance, made available via thematic and regional OPs (external coherence dimension).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The concern to adapt the methodology to the objectives and the subject of evaluation, bearing in mind the degree of maturity of the operations supported and the need to "*identify and explain the contribution of TAOP towards the expected results in relation to the Specific Objectives of its Priority Axis*" (from the point of view of the usefulness of the Evaluation), it was recommended that an evaluative roadmap be sought to ensure a balanced adjustment between:

- ✓ *Quantitative dimensions*, benchmarking of physical and financial implementation data, taking as a reference date that agreed with the TAOP Management Board (30 June 2022), being updated on 28 February 2023;
- ✓ *Qualitative dimensions* that allow for the verification of the impacts of the implementation of the OP, on the one hand, and the course of its performance (in terms of effectiveness and efficiency) and, on the other hand, the levels of adequacy achieved in responding to the problem dimensions and needs of coordination, management and control of the ESIF (particularly in terms of relevance).

The combination described made it possible to base an evaluative judgement on the logic and programming associated with TAOP and on the mechanisms for the production of implicit and associated results, by assessing the relevance and coherence (internal and external) of the programming at that level and on a reasoned basis, for which the nature of the documentary information on the operations existing in the SI TAOP databases is relevant.

The Mid-Term Evaluation was designed around the dynamic response to three Evaluation Questions guided by the criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, and internal/external relevance and coherence.

Measuring the Programme against the **criterion of effectiveness** made it possible to identify the results achieved through its implementation and what these results allow us to anticipate in relation to the potential for achieving the objectives set, in the short period between the time of the interim evaluation and the end of its implementation.

The evaluation of the **efficiency criterion** established the relationship between results achieved and resources available and mobilized, compared to similar programmes, which allowed the relative efficiency of the TAOP to be verified.

Finally, the assessment of the **relevance and internal and external coherence criteria** (with similar interventions, e.g. via the TA axis of the thematic and regional OPs), returned to the moment of programming and subsequent reprogramming, looking at the subject of the Evaluation with the results and the constraints of the context of the intervention to identify to what extent the Programme (in its priorities, specific objectives, measures, targets and distribution of resources), proved relevant in relation to the required action it aimed to address.

The main instruments and techniques used in this methodological approach were: (i) Desk Research: document analysis and quantitative analysis based on simple indicators available in the SI TAOP/SI ESIF; (ii) Qualitative analysis based on information collected in interviews. The document analysis techniques are particularly relevant in the assessment of the pertinence and internal and external coherence dimensions, as well as the dimensions associated with the operationalisation that contribute to the evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency criteria.

## C. RESPONSE TO THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

### • EVALUATION OF EFFECTIVENESS

The TAOP is instrumental in supporting the coordination system of the management and governance of the ESIF; for this reason, 90% of its allocation finances the functioning of the structures and activities of management, coordination, control, monitoring, evaluation and auditing. Given this nature, the operationalisation of the OP is formalised around application notices that tend to be closed, i.e. a single application for a specific project and/or beneficiary entity. The concern of the OP was to meet the needs inherent to the implementation of a new system of governance of the ESIF that results from the creation of AD&C by merging the entities that held these competences in the NSRF, the options of territorialisation and multi-level governance.

The management and coordination structures and their organisation, the development of a common information system, the communication of Portugal 2020, the organisation of the monitoring and evaluation system, are the core objectives of the OP. The implementation dynamic throughout the life cycle of the OP was marked by the concentration around this feature, especially in the first phase. Despite the critical aspects that the evaluations continue to identify in some areas and that are points for improvement, it is undeniable that the OP has met its goals to support the structuring of the system, an aspect that is demonstrated by the levels of compliance with the output and result indicators.

In the last third of the implementation cycle the OP opens up, making the nature of eligible operations and beneficiary entities more flexible. This late opening was focused on types of operation in the fields of information and communication and studies and evaluation, marking a greater flow of applications and approved operations and an increase in the diversity of types of beneficiary entities. In this phase the OP is organized to respond to two objectives: to strengthen the information and dissemination of ESIF investments

and their results and to prepare instruments necessary for planning and implementation in the new programming cycle. It therefore funds operations aimed at the dissemination of projects financed under Portugal 2020 of the most diverse natures, the preparation of integrated territorial strategies for the 2030 cycle, and the most relevant types of beneficiaries are municipalities and supra-municipal regional entities. It also finances operations associated with the programming of the new financing cycle and its evaluation.

The logic of implementation of the OP thus has a common thread: it supports the structuring and organisation of the system in its various components, it disseminates the results, and it prepares the new cycle in the components that are cross-cutting. This logic has permeated the implementation cycle by way of the emergence of financed operations that are somewhat outside the nature of the Programme and resulting from specific financing needs for projects of different natures, some supporting public policies, which found acceptance in the TAOP. More paradigmatic examples, even for their financial expression, are the funding allocated to ANQEP for the development of the PIAAC, the funding to INE for the development of a set of indicators on aspects of territorial cohesion, or the funding allocated to the Mission Structure of Digital Portugal.

Despite the misalignment of some of the indicators that make up the system of indicators of the OP, the achievement of the established targets has already been or will be achieved, with the exception of the target of the result indicator referring to the % of evaluation recommendations met by the recipients. The implementation rate of the Programme stood at around 72% in February 2023, if the total amount of total approved fund in force is considered, or 85% if the allocation of the OP after reprogramming is considered, but as only 18 operations closed out of the 259 approved to date.

With many operations being implemented, especially those resulting from more competitive calls, some of which have already been reprogrammed, it is expected that there will be a drop in their implementation due to the difficulty in developing all the components of the operations during the period of eligibility of expenditure. This aspect covers more critically, due to its scale, some of the large operations financed. The causes of these difficulties are, in general, external to the OP and result from both the context and the implementation capacity of the projects by the beneficiary entities.

The objectives associated with the capacity building of the ESIF *stakeholders* fell short, primarily because they were not translated into an autonomous specific objective with a certain visibility. These aspects are highlighted in the ex-ante evaluation of PAT 2030 and in the Capacity Building Roadmap developed in the meantime.

The contributions of the TAOP to innovation in the production of indicators, in the dissemination and transparency of the ESIF, in the development of monitoring and evaluation tools and methodologies, may become very relevant when the financed operations are fully implemented and are translated into results that are disseminated and used. In terms of the **contributions regarding innovation**, the following stand out:

- (i) **Monitoring of the ESIF:** Portal developed by AMA using innovative methodologies for data collection and analysis and a new programming and analysis language for data science; Project under development by INE which allows for the provision of new information and indicators, not covered by the National Statistical System, geo-referenced and presented on a platform that gives greater usability to the information produced. In a context of investment in the territorialisation of policies, the contribution of TAOP to enriching the base of statistical

indicators with territorial declination and aimed at giving statistical expression to territorial cohesion problems is a contribution to be underlined.

- (ii) **Information systems:** a one-stop shop for information/entry point for all applications, with interoperability dimensions, is an innovation compared to the past. A logical consequence of the change in the management and governance of the Funds between the NSRF and Portugal 2020, it opens a path for continued investment in the rationalisation of management support instruments and integration between systems, aimed at improving the system's response to the needs of multi-fund applications;
- (iii) **Communication and dissemination:** the TAOP operations allowed many of the beneficiary entities to innovate in the support instruments for communication and dissemination actions.

Finally, there are gaps associated with the qualification of the actors who manage the Funds at different levels and that the training carried out under PT2020 was not sufficient or sufficiently effective. In fact, capacity building did not appear in the Programme as an individual typology that corresponded to a specific objective, but rather emerged from among the many objectives of management support, coordination, monitoring and evaluation. The option to focus the technical assistance effort on the needs arising from the adaptation and adequacy of the structures and systems to the new governance model was not entirely compatible with the needs arising from, for example, the territorialised contracting where there are still inadequacies in the preparation and updating of the human resources allocated to the management, control and monitoring structures, along with information systems with poor robustness, agility and usability, and low effectiveness in terms of communication.

## C2. EFFICIENCY EVALUATION

The available information and the still reduced number of completed operations do not allow for an analysis in terms of average unit costs per type of activity, as specific information on the outputs associated with each operation is not available. The analysis of efficiency in relation to results is also hampered by this circumstance.

What can be seen is that the reprogramming that was carried out, which reduced the overall allocation for the OP, had no impact on the implementation capacity and the contracted implementation indicators associated with the areas of intervention most affected by the reduction in allocation (communication and evaluation) were exceeded.

The average cost of the operations approved in the TAOP, when taking into account the approved support in force, is comparable to the cost in similar programmes, particularly the TAOP in Spain. As in that case, this average cost is the result of the combination of a small number of large operations financing the structure of the system and its operation in the core functions, and a larger number of small operations with diverse beneficiaries with low allocations. The TAOP compares well with the other Thematic and Regional OPs and is the second OP with the lowest average eligible expenditure per operation.

The communication area that supports the most central dissemination campaigns of PT 2020 was the one that, together with the audit area, had a lower maximum approved support. The development of information systems, along with the financing of the management and control system had an important part of the allocation. If one considers a period of execution and the nature of the developments made in terms of information systems, the value/year is comparable to the value of investment made by public administration bodies in the maintenance and evolution of critical information systems.

The operations completed in the audit and management and monitoring area show the efficiency of the management, by considering the relationship between the final costs and those initially approved.

The competitive calls with a maximum value allowed per project helped reduce the average value of the operations. This contribution to the efficient use of resources may have been hindered by the acceptance, in the communication and information typology, of more than one operation per entity with a similar subject-matter.

### C3. ASSESSMENT OF (INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL) RELEVANCE AND COHERENCE

The diagnosis made in the formulation of the TAOP Programming identifies a set of needs to which the TAOP should address, considering that this Programme constitutes the instrumental support for the development of the global strategy defined for the management and control system of the Operational Programmes for the Programming period 2014-2020:

- continuous training for the development and consolidation of the capacities of the bodies with management responsibilities;
- training of beneficiary entities;
- reducing bureaucracy and increasing the transparency of processes;
- simplification of financing arrangements and proper use of resources;
- improving planning models and evaluation and monitoring procedures;
- adapting the information systems of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF);
- communication and dissemination of knowledge.

The main change compared to previous programming periods was **the creation of a single mono-fund Technical Assistance Operational Programme, in this case ERDF**: the CSF III TAOP represented the four structural funds of the period (ERDF, ESF, EAGGF and FIFG) and in the NSRF there was one TAOP per fund (ERDF TAOP and ESF TAOP). This option, given the dynamics of the OP, **was in line with the objective of simplifying management**.

Based on the needs identified for programming, it can be said that the **design and articulation of the domains and objectives of the TAOP respond to the diagnosis**. There is also consistency between the proposed actions and the baseline situation, given the high coverage of the needs of the actions to be carried out in each of the four strategic objectives. The assessment made in the meantime, based on the operationalisation options, through the calls for proposals launched and the types of operations in which the OP was focused, as well as the fields of action within these typologies, shows that the **field of institutional capacity building fell short of the needs**, particularly with regard to the capacity building of beneficiary entities in areas of intervention that were identified in the text of the OP: territorialisation of instruments, simplified costs, state aid, revenue-generating projects, among others.

**The external coherence** and respective complementarity with other Operational Programmes were assessed in two aspects: (i) one in a formal sense (the Technical Assistance Axis of each Thematic and Regional OP); and (ii) another, in a substantive sense, which derives from the existence in these OPs of a Priority Axis resulting from the presence in the programming of Thematic Objective 11 that refers to Capacity Building *lato sensu*.

In fact, the Thematic OP COMPETE and the Regional OPs for Mainland Portugal have "accommodated" Thematic Objective 1.1 (Strengthening the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and

the efficiency of public administration) in the programming architecture, namely through the inclusion of priority axes of their own. At the same time, each Thematic or Regional Operational Programme has a technical assistance axis, and the TAOP aims to complement the technical assistance actions of these OPs by supporting cross-cutting actions.

## C. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Conclusions and Recommendations focused on aspects that are more useful to implement TAP 2030 and were organized in relation to each of the three evaluation questions. Only the Main Conclusions and Recommendations are selected here.

### EFFECTIVENESS - Conclusions

- The Programme focused the bulk of its action on responding to the need to structure a new institutional architecture for the ESIF governance model, a programmatic and implementation arrangement that was combined with a perspective of continuity in relation to previous programming cycles.
- The **relevance of the indicators for measuring the effectiveness of the OP is uneven**, since not all of them allow direct measurement of the fulfilment of the objectives, and concern aspects that do not depend on the direct capacity of the OP or the beneficiaries of the operations, making it difficult to establish the boundary between the results attributable to the action of the TAOP and those resulting from the combination of the results of all elements of the ESIF governance system.
- The OP's **implementation is slow as a result of the small number of multiannual operations with a high volume of funding associated with the fields of management, monitoring and auditing.**
- The **consolidation of the role of AD&C** sustained by strong support from the TAOP to the management of Portugal 2020, constitutes one of the main contributions of the TAOP to the consolidation of the system.
- **The contribution of the TAOP to the development of the information system is also a result of the OP to be highlighted, with the One-Stop Shop - the 2020 Shop being one of the elements valued from the point of view of the simplification of the system, despite the needs in terms of interoperability, which are greater due to the existence of a single-entry point.**
- The **dynamics of implementation and launch of calls for proposals reveal a cautious and sustained progression of the OP**, starting by focusing on the aspects that are most strategic for the development of the ESIF governance system throughout the life cycle of Portugal 2020, making occasional exceptions for operations financed "on request" with a greater or lesser contribution to the Programme's objectives.
- The contribution of the TAOP for innovation in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of policies may be very relevant through the financing of a **set of innovative operations both within the scope of the single beneficiary and competitive calls for proposals**. The expected result of these operations **is the strengthening of the monitoring and evaluation system for the next programming period**, as well as the production of instruments that contribute to improving the design of public policies.

### Recommendations

- **To improve the conditions for monitoring the implementation of the OP by** explaining the contractually agreed indicators, namely with regard to their meaning, calculation method, regularity of reporting and sources of information.



- **To define result indicators** (even if not contracted) for the various types of TAP 2030 Action that allow for evidence of the OP's contribution to the fulfilment of its goals.
- **To create conditions to increase the usefulness of the evaluations and the capacity to take on board their recommendations.**
- **To carry out an impact assessment of the communication and information actions** that will help identify the different objectives and target audiences of the most effective means and actions in order to ensure the recognition of the role of the ESIF.
- **To ensure the effectiveness of the information system and simplification** both through investment in interoperability between systems associated with the governance of the ESIF and by reviewing processes during the application design phase.
- **To promote the dissemination and use of the results of the operations financed by the TAOP**, particularly the larger operations, which seek to support innovation and the development of policy planning, monitoring and evaluation activities.
- **To ensure that the TAP takes on the role of innovation promoter** by supporting pilot projects or innovative projects in areas of high relevance to its field of intervention, namely in the field of evaluation and monitoring and in the development of instruments that promote better planning and programming conditions.

### EFFICIENCY - Conclusions

- The analysis of efficiency is hampered by the **low number of operations closed** and the limited information available on the achievements and specific activities included in the multi-annual operations supporting the major activities of management, monitoring, auditing, information and communication systems, for which no information on targets is available.
- The **financial reprogramming and the change in the eligibility of beneficiaries contributed to the overall efficiency of the Programme**, measured mainly in terms of the cost/output ratio.
- The average cost of operations relating to auditing, management and monitoring, having globally met the targets, shows remarkable levels of efficiency.
- **The average cost of operations approved by the TAOP is comparable to other technical assistance OPs**, e.g., Spain's TAOP; in national terms, the TAOP compares with Compete 2020 in terms of scaling of total eligible expenditure, but presents a lower average value per operation, i.e., with less effort the TAOP was able to meet the objectives.

### Recommendations

- In the next programming period **a shorter life cycle of operations should be promoted** in order to create conditions for a better monitoring of the achievements of the OP. The large multi-annual operations, associated with management and monitoring components, audit and control, communication and information system, should be organised in thematic activities with annual reporting linked to targets defined in the application.
- **Improve the monitoring of the implementation of operations by ensuring that those materially concluded are closed** within a maximum period that allows a real picture of the implementation of the OP with the ability to assess the efficiency of operations.
- **In the information and communication operations, an impact evaluation component** of the implemented communication strategies **should be established** in order to identify the most efficient means and strategies to enhance the recognition of the contribution of the ESIF.

## RELEVANCE, INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COHERENCE - Conclusions

- The TAOP is **instrumental in supporting the governance structures of Portugal 2020** and its initial formulation consistently substantiates the needs that could be addressed by the cross-cutting technical assistance component under Portugal 2020. However, the results achieved have allowed us to note the TAOP's poor response to the capacity-building needs of the actors and *stakeholders*, particularly in view of the demands posed by the territorialisation of the ESIF intervention.
- **The programming and allocations associated with each of the objectives resulted from the need to respond to the requirements of adapting the management and coordination system of the ESIF to the new governance model.** This initial focus proved adequate, allowing, in the middle of the programming period, for a greater openness and flexibility of the OP, in terms of beneficiaries and type of operations.
- The **mono-fund option** proved to be appropriate and contributed to the simplification objectives.
- The **reprogramming of the OP made it possible to leverage implementation** in the fields of studies and evaluation and information and communication on the one hand and, on the other hand, to meet needs not covered by the other OPs and, above all, the need to prepare for the new programming period. **The OP was, in this context, a promoter of innovation in terms of planning, monitoring and evaluation instruments.**
- This greater openness of the OP **did not always ensure that there was complementarity and no overlapping with other OPs. This aspect is mainly related to the operationalisation mechanisms and** not so much to the programming aspects, in which the external coherence in relation to the other OPs was evident: the TAOP focuses on measures of a cross-cutting nature and on actions involving all or several OPs, and each thematic or regional OP focuses on what is specific to the operation of that particular OP.
- The **creation of functional articulation networks during the operationalisation phase of the OP made it possible to strengthen governance and promote articulation and complementarities between OPs.** This aspect was compensated for by the implementation of the Capacity Building Roadmap, which should make it possible to overcome the shortcomings in this area for the next programming period.

## Recommendations

- **To reinforce the intervention of the OP on capacity building of *stakeholders* of the ESIF ecosystem,** thus contributing to the implementation of the Capacity Building Roadmap and ensuring adequate complementarity and functional articulation with the other OPs.
- To promote the evaluation of results and an adequate dissemination of the operations financed under the typologies of operation information and communication and studies and evaluation aimed at the promotion of innovation in order to **strengthen the role of the OP in the field of qualification of planning, monitoring and evaluation instruments.**
- Strengthen articulation work in the field of information and communication, ensuring adequate complementarity and investment commensurate with the need to ensure visibility for the contribution of the ESIF.



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