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COGEA
Consulenti per la Gestione Aziendale

Rapporto di Valutazione Annuale 2026
Programma FESR 2021-2027 Regione Veneto

Maggio 2026

SINTESI - INGLESE

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Executive summary (English)

Scope of the report

This annual evaluation of the ERDF Regional Programme (RP) 2021–2027 covers **the entire Veneto ERDF Programme** (version 2.1 approved by a Commission Decision on 16 November 2022, as amended by Commission Decision C(2025) 6916 final of 15 October 2025), which provides an ERDF co-financing rate of 40% across all five priorities, in addition to Technical Assistance.

The evaluation focuses primarily on the criteria of **efficiency, effectiveness, coherence and relevance, and identifies lessons learned to support improvements in programme implementation**.

The report first presents an update of the regional context. It then provides an overview of programme implementation in 2025, with particular emphasis on the use of financial resources, outputs, results, the implementation process, success and failure factors, implementation challenges, and governance aspects. In addition, this annual evaluation report includes an in-depth analysis of selected types of actions and implementation procedures that have reached a significant progress or are of particular interest to the Managing Authority (MA), through case studies.

Methodological approach

The methodological approach is based on the **triangulation of multiple sources**, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, and is designed to respond effectively and specifically to the needs of the reference context. It takes into account different perspectives - programme authorities, beneficiaries and the territorial context - through dedicated consultation activities. The evaluation follows a theory-based approach (Theory-based Evaluation), drawing on both primary and secondary sources.

Primary sources consist of data and information collected directly by the evaluator, mainly through **semi-structured interviews** with key informants and beneficiaries of the interventions examined in the case studies. In particular, consultation activities included interviews with regional departments responsible for implementation (SRA), representatives of the Managing Authority (MA) and intermediate bodies, as well as beneficiaries.

The main secondary sources used in this evaluation report include:

- the monitoring system. The evaluation concerns the **implementation status of the ERDF RP as of 31 December 2025**, based on data provided by the Veneto Region in accordance with Article 42 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, covering financial data, progress of selected operations, and output and result indicators. Additional monitoring information, particularly at the level of individual calls and projects, was shared by the MA and the Intermediate Body AVEPA. In all cases, the data considered are updated to 31 December 2025. In analysing programme implementation, the evaluator also made use of the publicly available calendar of calls and notices;
- **statistical data sources and socio-economic indicators** (e.g. ISTAT, Eurostat, the Veneto Region Statistical Office, the Bank of Italy), which made it possible to describe the evolution of the context in which the ERDF RP 2021–2027 operates, identify potential enabling or constraining external factors, and assess the programme's relevance;
- **regional strategic and programming documents** (e.g. the ERDF RP, the Administrative Capacity Building Plan (PRigA) of the Veneto Region, the methodological document on the selection criteria for operations approved by the Monitoring Committee, the methodological document on indicators, and the Veneto Smart Specialisation Strategy), as well as **documentation related to the case studies** (calls, regulations and rankings, where publicly available).

The evaluation applies a range of analytical methods and techniques, ensuring that triangulation underpins the theory-based evaluation approach.

Quantitative methods include procedural, financial and physical analysis of interventions using programme monitoring data provided by the MA and updated at the end of December 2025. This includes both physical progress (output and result indicators) and financial progress for selected and implemented operations, at the level of specific objectives and actions. The analysis addresses questions of effectiveness and efficiency in relation to the achievement of targets and allows the identification of specific objectives/actions experiencing delays. For projects under the integrated territorial strategy examined in the case studies, the evaluator also used **mapping tools to visualise the territorial distribution of funded projects**. Programme monitoring data are complemented by data available on the Cohesion Data Platform, enabling **benchmarking at the EU and national level**, with comparisons limited to more developed regions.

The report also incorporates **the results of previous thematic evaluations of the ERDF PR**, in particular the "Thematic evaluation of interventions for tourism and cultural sector enterprises financed under the Veneto ERDF RP 2021–2027", completed in October 2025.

The evaluator carried out an in-depth analysis of the implementation progress and strengths and weaknesses of five programme actions, selected for their level of implementation and relevance for the MA. This involved the preparation of **five case studies** presenting the intervention logic of the actions, their implementation status, and findings from the analysis of selected projects for each action. Interviews with beneficiaries complemented information collected from other sources and provided additional insights that enriched these case studies.

Conclusions and lessons learned by evaluation criterion

Relevance

Despite the persistence of an uncertain international context, with potential repercussions for the regional economy, **the evidence collected shows substantial continuity in the needs identified during the programming phase**, confirming the overall relevance of the Programme's actions. This is also reflected in the strong interest of the territory in the available resources, as demonstrated by the high proportion of the financial allocation covered by selected operations (73.76% as of 31 December 2025).

Additional evidence from interviews and case studies confirms the relevance of the interventions, particularly in the areas of research and innovation and housing inclusion. In the case of Regional Innovative Networks (RIRs), public funding remains essential to ensure the functioning of the structures and the implementation of activities, as own resources (e.g. membership fees) are insufficient to cover operational costs. A strong complementarity with other programmes also emerges, enabling a broader impact of the interventions.

For territorial strategies (SISUS), the extensive co-design process has led to the identification of interventions aligned with local needs, reinforcing the relevance of the funded actions. The integrated approach has also helped overcome fragmented interventions across municipalities, promoting a more systemic vision of urban development.

- *Based on the findings, it is recommended to ensure greater continuity and predictability of funding, particularly for structural and network-based instruments such as RIRs and SISUS, in order to support stable planning of activities.*

- *At the same time, it is recommended to confirm and strengthen the role of territorial strategies, which can serve as tools for identifying and addressing local needs in future programming periods, ensuring continuity, stability and a bottom-up approach to regional development policy.*

Efficiency and effectiveness

As of 31 December 2025, the Veneto ERDF RP shows good progress in terms of selected operations, exceeding 70% of the total programme allocation, with 1,296 operations and 137 closed calls. The programme's commitment capacity—measured as the share of financial allocation covered by selected operations—is therefore overall strong. However, the capacity to use resources-measured as the ratio between eligible expenditure declared by beneficiaries and total allocation—remains more limited. Eligible expenditure reached 18.1% of the total allocation, corresponding to EUR 186.6 million. Nevertheless, both indicators are above the Italian and EU averages for more developed ERDF regions (i.e. those with GDP per capita above 100% of the EU-27 average, in accordance with Article 108 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060).

Specific Objectives 1.1 (Research and innovation), 1.3 (SME competitiveness), 2.1 (Energy efficiency) and 2.6 (Circular economy) indicate a more advanced positioning of the Veneto ERDF RP compared to EU and Italian more developed regions, both in terms of selection of operations and resource utilisation. Overall, the programme demonstrates strong commitment capacity, but uneven implementation, with more advanced progress on mature objectives and slower progress on infrastructure, territorial or recently activated interventions. In terms of physical progress, a high level is observed at the selection stage, while implementation remains partial, with differences across priorities and specific objectives.

As of 31 December 2025, the programme has identified **eight operations of strategic importance (OSI)**, in accordance with Article 2(5) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060. These relate to five programme actions, covering all priorities except Priority 5. **Overall, OSIs show heterogeneous progress, but generally in line with expected timelines and the lifecycle of funded interventions, with variations depending on the type of intervention and procedural stage.**

Despite the overall good procedural, financial and physical progress of the programme, some challenges have emerged. One concerns the **management of timelines and the calendar of calls**. For example, in the case of RIRs, uncertainty in funding affects the organisational capacity of networks, especially smaller ones. In SISUS infrastructure projects, tight timelines are combined with the need to coordinate ERDF funding with other financial sources. In this context, the possibility of requesting extensions is a key safeguard to ensure the completion of interventions within the programming period.

The experience of RIRs highlights significant diversity in their organisation and functioning, reflecting their bottom-up nature and local needs. At the same time, in some cases, there is a need to strengthen their capacity and ensure access to sufficient resources to improve operational effectiveness. Moreover, despite numerous networking and animation activities, it remains difficult, based on available information, to fully capture and communicate their contribution to the regional research and innovation system. The analysis suggests considering:

- *possible rationalisation of the number of RIRs and/or stronger regional coordination, particularly for internationalisation activities and improved visibility of results (knowledge management and communication);*
- *alternative implementation approaches, including possible adjustments to governance and/or the aid scheme, also drawing on models from other regions (e.g. Emilia-Romagna);*

- *strengthening the evaluation dimension, including more systematic stakeholder involvement and better use of available data (e.g. S3 monitoring platform).*

Regarding **administrative simplification**, the most effective elements include standardised call templates, clarity of documentation flows, and the use of shared tools, which have reduced uncertainty and complexity. However, some challenges remain. **Reporting** requirements vary across beneficiaries, although cooperation with the intermediate body AVEPA is generally considered effective and has improved over time, helping to overcome initial difficulties linked to the transition from the SIU to the FONDI.RVE platforms.

In contrast, the experience of Action 2.1.1 (energy efficiency of public buildings, non-residential) highlights challenges in reporting due to the volume of required documentation and the lack of interoperability between databases. The transition to a new IT platform, combined with changes in public procurement regulations, has further complicated implementation, particularly for municipalities. Despite this, several projects have already been completed, and the new call for energy efficiency in public buildings has attracted strong participation from local authorities.

The experience of this programming period also shows that **administrative capacity, especially for smaller municipalities, remains a key challenge**. At the same time, lead municipalities in urban areas often provide support and guidance to smaller ones. In this context, SISUS has contributed to strengthening local administrative capacity and promoting strategic reflection beyond the implementation of the ERDF RP, while also serving as a key resource framework.

The analysis highlights the importance of structured training and capacity-building activities for administrative staff, beyond informal exchanges. In particular, dedicated training sessions at the beginning, mid-point and end of the programming period could improve operational effectiveness, especially on technical aspects such as call management and procedures. Peer exchange alone is not sufficient to address these needs. Training could also include contributions from other urban areas or beneficiaries sharing their experiences and solutions to challenges. Overall, the programme's governance system appears complex but collaborative, with recognised strengths in coordination and operational support. While there is room for improvement in procedural simplification, IT system stability and administrative capacity, no systemic weaknesses have been identified.

Coherence

The evidence shows a **good overall level of coherence and complementarity between the ERDF RP and other instruments**, both at the programming stage and, in many cases, during implementation.

First, integration between ERDF and ESF+ is structurally embedded, particularly in cultural, tourism and social sectors. This integration is achieved through both financial mechanisms and alignment of selection criteria (e.g. S3). In research and innovation, strong complementarities emerge with EU and national programmes (Horizon, Interreg, RRF), with RIRs playing an enabling role. For territorial strategies (SISUS), complementarity is a core feature: these strategies ensure alignment with sectoral planning and integration across funding sources. This often results in interventions linked to broader projects or shared areas, financing complementary components (e.g. cycling infrastructure, urban regeneration, green spaces, co-housing initiatives), thereby amplifying their impact. However, some operational challenges emerge: (a) complexity in coordinating different funding sources, particularly with the RRF, due to differences in management and reporting systems; (b) the need for better timing alignment between complementary interventions (e.g. ERDF infrastructure and ESF+ services); (c) uneven levels of integration, depending on local administrative and planning capacity.

Overall, *complementarity is most effective when there is a clear definition of intervention boundaries and strong coordination between funding sources*. To further strengthen complementarity, future programming should ensure better temporal alignment between complementary interventions (e.g. infrastructure and services), to maximise the effectiveness of investments.



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