

Evaluation study of European funds:

Operationalisation of the Northern Regional Programme 2021-2027

Evaluation objectives

Analyse the extent to which the Programme's implementation is proceeding as planned and whether it is contributing to the achievement of the expected results.

Context*

The Evaluation of the operationalisation of NORTE 2030 considered the criteria of relevance, operational efficiency and external coherence, which are broken down into seven Evaluation Questions (EQs).



135 calls for proposals



3,189 submitted operations



701 approved operations



€ 558.1 million approved investment



€ 271.6 million approved fund



€ 9.5 million fund paid

*Data reported as of 31/12/2024

Methodology



Data Collection



Surveys



Document Review



Focus Groups



Interviews

Main results

Relevance

The pace of NORTE 2030 implementation by the end of 2024 was below that foreseen for this phase of the programming period, with commitment (approved/programmed) and payment (paid/approved) rates at only 8.0% and 3.5%, respectively.

The current implementation dynamics thus suggest potential difficulties for the future achievement of the established targets, particularly regarding the N+3 rule. However, according to information provided by the NORTE 2030 Managing Authority in October 2025, there is currently validated expenditure and potential expenditure in the pipeline which, given the current regulatory framework, is expected to ensure compliance of this rule in 2025.

The composition of the different bodies and the working methodologies show some limitations in mobilising relevant actors and collecting significant contributions to improve Programme effectiveness and efficiency.

Operational efficiency

Merit criteria are generally adequate, although delays were observed in the application assessment process, especially in support types for business.

Despite the broad recognition of the advantages of the contract-based approach, the adoption of a common structure for shaping all contracting processes has reduced the capacity of the territories and Intermunicipal Entities involved to differentiate themselves, limiting the focus on their specific characteristics and needs and, consequently, the scope and effectiveness of the strategies defined. It should be emphasised that the ITI typologies and allocations stem directly from the required alignment with those set out in the Programme, which was previously defined and negotiated with the European Commission before the contracting process. This Programme, in turn, was structured on the basis of a set of priorities and objectives pre-established at European level.

Issues were observed with the new information system (SI3) adopted by the Managing Authority, including delays in making the contracts and payment/amendment modules available and the incorrect allocation of applications for analysis and decision-making to Intermediary Bodies. Some of these issues appear to result from delays in the operationalisation of modules or functionalities in the Funds Portal.

External coherence

NORTE 2030 has a broad thematic scope and shows strong convergence with both the Recovery and Resilience Plan (PRR) and the various Thematic Programmes.

There is only limited evidence of true synergies, in which combinations of the programmes generated benefits that exceed what would be achieved in the absence of such coordination.

Recommendations

- 1 Streamline the analysis and selection process for applications, particularly in areas with the greatest delays
- 2 Closely monitor the implementation of approved operations to ensure the achievement of NORTE 2030 targets
- 3 Consider creating financing lines to support the non-funded portion of approved operations
- 4 Ensure the full functionality of SI3, allowing the collection of information to support management, monitoring and evaluation
- 5 Accelerate the launch of calls for proposals across all action types under NORTE 2030
- 6 Speed up responses to support/information requests from potential beneficiaries
- 7 Assess the possibility of revising eligibility conditions for operations and beneficiaries (notably under OP2 and OP5) to avoid constraining applicants
- 8 Consider developing a Power BI-type tool providing access to relevant indicators to support monitoring and evaluation
- 9 Ensure capacity-building for intermunicipal and municipal structures, particularly regarding the innovative themes and concepts addressed by NORTE 2030
- 10 Ensure a better balance between private and public entities in the composition of the Monitoring Committee
- 11 Ensure greater engagement of Monitoring Committee members in discussions, implementing new working methods and reflection processes
- 12 Improve dissemination of available support and its complementarities with other national and/or EU instruments