

## Interreg V-A Italy-Croatia Programme

Summary of the evaluations

# REPORT ON THE FINDINGS OF THE PROGRAMME'S EVALUATIONS

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## 1. OVERVIEW OF THE EVALUATIONS

Following the principles set out in Article 54 of CPR, the evaluations carried out in the 2014-2020 programming period were aimed at improving the quality of the implementation of the Programme as well as assessing its effectiveness, efficiency and impact and providing crucial information for decision-making, Programme implementation bodies and for reporting.

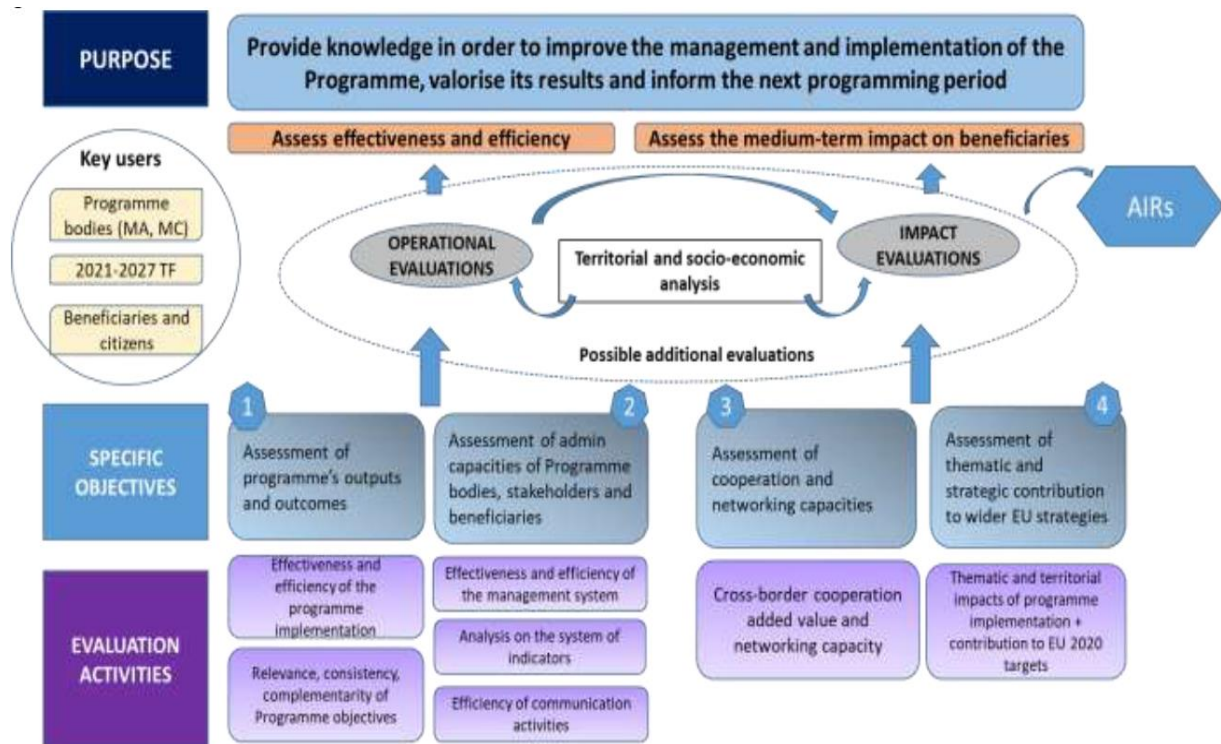


Figure 1 – Evaluations' Rational

During the 14-20 Programme's lifecycle, several evaluation activities have been carried out to assess efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, coherence, and impacts; and to tackle territorial needs to allow Programme bodies to make the best decisions for current and future actions as detailed in the Annex.

The overall budget of the external evaluator's contract amount to 145.375,00 euros. The contract includes all the evaluations described in the annex and the ones still to be performed (in total, three operational evaluations, two impact evaluations, one to be carried out in 2023, two additional ones, and the integrated evaluation design). One still has to be drafted by the Independent Evaluator (IE); this is the second Impact Evaluation carried out in the first part of 2023. It is essential to highlight that the two reports for the impact evaluation will be complimentary. In 2022, the IE tackled only a few specific objectives on which the Program insists. The others will be treated in 2023, and this will help cover all relevant topics with the ultimate objective of answering all evaluation questions linked to the 4 AXES.

All the results of the evaluations have been published on the Programme's website as linked in the annex. Concerning communication activities, the effects of external services are now visible, with a general improvement of dissemination and visibility effects. There is still a general gap of dissemination outputs compared to other Programmes, but this is only because, for IT-HR, 2014-2020 was the first programming period.

Some lessons have been learned from the evaluation experience:

- The timing for starting the evaluation process shall be anticipated, and the approach shall be of continuous assessment with yearly fine-tuning of operative advancements and check-ups of obtained results;

- It is necessary to limit the number of EQs. The topics to be assessed by Evaluations shall not be numerous but limited to those of high interest for the Programme Bodies and capable of influencing their behaviour;
- The budget allocated for each evaluation shall be increased while reducing the number of evaluations to boost their visibility and the deepening of their quantitative aspects;
- The tender's evaluation plan and terms of reference shall be designed more flexibly, although they shall keep protecting the contractor.

A further major challenge derives from the difficulty in designing a sound scientific-based evaluation methodology given the lack of the independent evaluator's ex-ante knowledge of the monitoring and informative system of the Programme.

## 2. FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATIONS

The added value of participating in the Italy-Croatia CBC Programme, compared to projects funded in regional or national programmes, lies in the deepening of the knowledge about practices and/or techniques adopted to address a specific problem or valorize a joint asset. In fact, increasing knowledge and awareness about the operational, organizational, and, in several cases, technological implications that partners have encountered/experienced during the implementation primarily characterized the implementation process of the projects.

Another issue that has also emerged is the multiple participation of some partners and the under-representation of specific categories of partners. While the mechanisms of selection and assessment of the project proposals have generally been able to promote balanced partnerships from the territorial point of view and to involve partners with technical, professional, and scientific specializations functional to the success of the projects, they have not been equally effective in limiting the cases of over-participation by some partners. The average number of partners involved in funded projects is well above the minimum requirements of the calls for proposals, especially for strategic projects. These values can be considered the first positive result in the direction of increasingly including the cross-border dimension in the activities of public and private organizations operating within the cooperation area. In the 2021-27 programming period, a further step in this direction could be to reduce the amount of multiple participation by partner organizations. This objective should be pursued considering the different sizes and complexity of the organizations involved, trying to favour the participation of less complex subjects (such as SMEs or non-profit organizations).

Moreover, the added value of cooperation within the IT-HR Programme framework goes beyond the development of specialized knowledge or the sharing of best practices (i.e., "it was not a unilateral cooperation") but rather foreshadows the creation of a shared platform that will, in the future, be able to strengthen the network of relationships between the involved institutions that have been established during the project.

In fact, many beneficiaries highlighted that there is a strong complementarity between the Italian and Croatian partners, enhancing the typical viewpoint from which a topic is typically tackled. Actually, the independent evaluator spotlighted how the overall involvement of relevant partners has been deemed generally satisfactory, and a wide range of stakeholders is addressed by the current Italy-Croatia projects, while the selection of the most relevant ones is generally coherent and relevant concerning the different Priorities.

In addition, the first Operational evaluation underlined that despite the difficulties that characterized the start-up years of the Programme (and despite Programme bodies have been severely challenged by various aspects: staff turnover, difficulties of the information system, high level of participation to the Calls for proposals, Covid-19 pandemic), the current organizational structure had reached a complete organization. Therefore, the Programme management structure can be considered as adequate in its definition and in setting the framework for effective management.

Priority Axis	IP	Findings of evaluation and comments	Related output indicators	Related result indicators	Actions taken	Identifier(s) of evaluation
1	1B	The output indicators for this specific objective show the greatest progress, with the sole exception of the indicator recording the number of enterprises that received financial support, which was 4 out of 6 for a progress of 67%. However, it is possible that this indicator may have an increase in value following the completion of the Strategic Project activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CO04 Enterprises receiving non-financial support</li> <li>- CO02 Enterprises receiving grants</li> <li>- CO01 Enterprises receiving support</li> </ul>	1.1: Number of EPO applications	These achievements suggested Programme bodies to keep working in this direction and if possible reinforcing this priority.	Impact 1
		The number of companies that have benefited from the activities of the projects is quite significant and amounts to 930 companies. The largely prevalent support received concerns the specific knowledge and relationships that have been created in the field of training, research and development and in market relations which have been created thanks to the participation in the project activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CO42 Research institutions participating in CBC, transnational or interregional research projects</li> <li>- CO44 Participants to training activities</li> </ul>		Moreover, it has been appointed the SME FACILITY as Strategic importance Project (IP Annex 3).	



	<p>An important contribution that the Programme has made in the field of strengthening the framework conditions for innovation in the relevant sectors of the blue economy within the cooperation area consists in the strong presence of research institutions participating in the funded projects (as many as 84 research institutions). This is also confirmed by the assessments provided by the beneficiaries, all of whom consider the role played by universities, research and technology transfer centres to be central to innovation processes.</p>			<p>The Programme will continue to evaluate positively the presence of universities and research institutions in variegated partnerships.</p>	<p>Impact 1</p>
	<p>The presence of research institutions within the partnerships has fostered the dissemination of innovative techniques and practices also through a series of training and information activities that in the various projects have taken different forms, from advanced schools (Fairsea project), to technical meetings and seminars (AdriAquaNet), to crossborder training events (PrizeFish) and so on. The training activities reached almost 2,000 people.</p>			<p>Moreover, the Programme appointed research institutes in MC as advisory members.</p>	<p>Impact 1</p>
	<p>According to the beneficiaries the main enabling factors of the innovation processes were the activities focused on the development of human capital and in particular in the promotion of specialized skills in the new technologies. Projects aimed at the “joint development and testing of eco-innovative tools and</p>			<p>The Programme policy will foster complementarity of partnership in order to boost the found effect.</p>	<p>Impact 1 Operational 1 Operational2</p>

		processes” and those promoting “links and synergies between companies, R&D centers, education and the public sector” also appear crucial for the consolidation of innovation processes.				
2	5A	<p>The output indicators of this specific objective show that the realizations, although quite advanced, have not yet reached the targets and substantially lack the contribution that will be brought by the strategic project.</p> <p>The main achievements of the projects were: the monitoring systems related to the planning and implementation of interventions aimed at improving territories' adaptive capacity to climate change; the local action plans aimed at preventing or minimizing the negative effects of climate change on, e.g., water resources, urban environment, agriculture. These outputs are closely related to each other.</p>	<p>2.101 - Climate change monitoring systems put in operation</p> <p>2.102 - Plans of adaptation measures put in place</p>	<p>2.1: Inhabitants benefiting from planning of adaptation measures</p>	<p>The Programme for the second Programming period of its life will speed up the procedure of call design.</p>	Impact 1
		<p>The majority of the beneficiaries agreed that the actions focused on strategic and local planning support tools had the greatest impact in terms of strengthening the capacity to govern and manage the policies aimed at coping with the effects of climate change in the cooperation area. The adoption of downscaled climate data for the Italy-Croatia area was also of substantial importance.</p>			<p>The Programme decided to design ad hoc environmental indicators set in order to improve Programme's actions' externalities.</p>	

		There were many more adaptation plans than originally planned and each of them was developed in relation to the specific needs of the partner territories.			Bottom up approach in project design shall be empowered.	Impact 1
		The analysis of the completed projects revealed that the working method developed in this particular policy context required the design of important support activities for local administrations to manage stakeholder and citizen participation processes.			PPP and networks with local authorities shall be empowered.	Impact 1
		The participation of regional public authorities is considered crucial by the beneficiaries in order to consolidate the governance and management framework for climate adaptation measures in the cooperation area, along with the involvement of associations or nongovernmental organizations and national public bodies.			PPP and networks with local authorities shall be empowered.	Impact 1
		The main spillover effects of the participation in project activities, indicated by partners, are an increase in the specific knowledge possessed by their organization, an expansion of their networks.			Cross border cooperation and partnership, consolidation is very important for an effective Project's outcome.	
5B	n.a.		- 2.202 - People reached by initiatives	2.2: Inhabitants benefiting	n.a.	n.a.

			<p>for increasing awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2.204 Population benefiting from oil spills and other marine hazards protection measures</li> <li>- CO20 Risk prevention and management: Population benefiting from flood protection measures</li> <li>- CO21 Risk prevention and management: Population benefiting from forest fire protection measure</li> </ul>	<p>from risk management coordinated measures</p>		
3	6C	n.a.	<p>- 3.102 - Actors involved in actions aimed at promoting natural and cultural</p>	<p>3.1: Seasonality in tourism in</p>	n.a.	n.a.

			<p>heritage (including typical products, joint branding and tourism)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3.103 - Natural and cultural heritage destinations with improved accessibilities (e.g.: to disabled tourists, virtual tourists etc.) in place</li> <li>- 3.104 - Beneficiaries with ecolabel/green certification</li> <li>- 3.105 - Cultural and natural heritage sites (tangible and intangible) promoted</li> </ul>	the programme		
6D	The realisations of this specific objective are those that have reached the lowest level among the three considered so far.	3.201 - Natural ecosystems supported in order to attain a	3.2: Excellent conservation	The Programme is reinforcing the importance of these actions.	Impact 1	

	<p>Numerous operations (45) have been carried out to reduce the variables that influence a natural habitat and its typical species and that may affect its long-term natural distribution.</p> <p>Monitoring and data collection systems directed toward the protection of biodiversity are powered by systematic ecosystem observations and biodiversity data collections that aim to measure qualitative and quantitative changes in the variety and variability of living organisms and, consequently, to support concrete measures for their conservation and/or protection.</p>	<p>better conservation status;</p> <p>3.202 - Monitoring systems and data collections for protecting biodiversity and ecosystems put in place;</p> <p>3.203 -Restoration actions supporting endangered species;</p>	<p>status of habitat types and species of Natura 2000 sites in the programme area</p>	<p>The Programme foresaw mitigation measure to avoid interference in transport and touristic flows in Natura 2000 sites (</p> <p>See Environmental Report, Part IV - section VIII.I, and its addendum).</p>	<p>Impact 1</p>
	<p>The implementation of integrated natural resource management systems for wetlands and marine areas requires a particularly complex and time-consuming process. In spite of the fact that these realisations are typical of strategic projects that can rely on solid governance and usually on a broader time frame, one standard project (CREW) has promoted the signing of 7 "Wetland Contracts" supporting the coordination between different levels of spatial planning and authorities in charge for wetlands management, whilst limiting conflicts between preservation issues and economic activities</p>	<p>3.204 - Integrated management systems (sea, coastal and river environment) put in place.</p>		<p>The Programme fo2cus more on targeting projects to the right calls and realistic outputs.</p>	<p>Impact 1</p>

	<p>The beneficiaries agree on the high relevance assumed by the actions aimed at the development of innovative models for the study and monitoring of the marine environment, along with those focused on feasibility analysis for setting up CB protected marine areas. Another crucial area of activity is the development of tools for integrated management of the sea, coastal and river environment and of crossborder natural resources (i.e., coordinated Maritime Spatial Planning and Integrated Coastal Management)</p>			IT-HR Programme will reinforce its halo of maritime Programme.	Impact 1
	<p>All the partners recognized the importance of the role played by universities/research institutions, along with that of local and regional public authorities in strengthening the management and the cooperation between public actors of the protected ecosystems of the cooperation area.</p>			PPP and networks with local authorities shall be empowered.	
	<p>According to the beneficiaries, the main effects of participation in Program-funded projects were an increase in the knowledge capital and networks of their organizations.</p>			Cross border cooperation and partnership, consolidation is very important for an effective Project's outcome.	
	6F			n.a.	3.301 - Environmental friendly technological

			solutions (and approaches) implemented; 3.303 - Knowledge systems put in place.	coastal bathing waters (according to the dir. 2006/7/CE		
4	7C	n.a.	4.101 - Improved multimodal transport services; 4.102 - New links established; 4.103 -Harmonized services for passengers put in place.	4.1: Goods transported by maritime mode	n.a.	n.a.



### 3. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The evaluations carried out in the current reporting period focused mainly on: the effectiveness and efficiency of the Programme implementation; relevance, consistency, and complementarity of the Programme objectives; the added value of cross-border cooperation and of networking activities; the effectiveness and efficiency of the communication strategy; the thematic and territorial impacts of Programme implementation and its contribution to macro-regional plans and EU 2020 targets.

#### Effectiveness and efficiency of the Programme implementation

- The Programme is achieving most of its objectives as displayed by Output indicators for the entire Programme's Specific Objectives. Some specific outcomes of the Programme activities, with particular regard to the Blue Innovation section, are the enabling factor of activities dedicated to the development of human capital and, in particular, the specialized skills in the new technologies as well as testing innovative processes and tools while promoting synergies between creative actors.
- The Programme in the experimentation of social innovation actions and specific integration in clusters and actors can display some improvements.
- Some lessons have been learned during the implementation of some projects: for instance, to increase the effectiveness of purposed actions, projects must involve and engage stakeholders in a very early stage, even before the project start.
- A need that arose from the beneficiary was to foster opportunities for exchange between the projects and national and European authorities, mainly so that many innovations emerging from experimental practices could come to the attention of the authorities that could bring on legislative changes. Therefore, this recommendation might be helpful to for Programme Bodies and European Institutions. Moreover, it is crucial to have Regional public authorities participating in strategies and local planning to make them effective.

## Relevance, consistency, and complementarity of the Programme objectives

The independent evaluator accounted as positive the tradeoff between timing and coherence/relevance due to the Secretariat's and Project's Officers' work in providing the proper assistance to those projects that presented difficult circumstances throughout the tendering and admission stages of the process also helped to ensure the coherence and relevance of the projects. The Secretariat adhered to the process for clearing conditions, which assisted several projects in aligning their aims and goals with those of the Programme.

One outcome of the evaluation is that beneficiaries with eco-label/green indicators suffer from a slow speed. Although this was not a typical indicator, it had substantial value and may have been slightly overly ambitious. Because it was thought to be a practical strategy for pursuing environmentally friendly and sustainable results, this indicator was added to the program.

The program has yet to manage to make an impact on the transport infrastructure in the cooperation area. This failure can be attributed to the fact that Interreg projects can only have a negligible influence due to their nature. There are structural barriers, such as time, money, and several authorizations. Infrastructure investments are frequently quite expensive and require more time than one programming period; hence, this Interreg must rely on something other than significant funding sources. The program can only stimulate and prompt the need for additional links. Therefore, cooperative efforts should promote demand for new transportation through the newly developed social capital and networks.

On the other hand, a positive outcome of the Programme's impact is the ability/possibility for projects to establish fruitful networks that go beyond the partnerships. It showed how creating links with decision-making institutions works as a multiplier effect. The dimension of this effect is although hard to measure.

## Cross-border cooperation added value and networking.

The main non-OP-related impact of the Programme is the Cross Border Cooperation added value.

This dimension is amplified by the fact that out of 137 partners, 14.5% joined more than one project (20 subjects/partners): due to the high participation of the public (i.e., universities, public bodies, research institutions ...) and, in one case two private partners and more than half of beneficiaries participating in more projects are Croatian despite the smaller dimension of the country's cooperation area.

To reinforce the previous statement, Croatian are also a significant amount of SMEs mainly in the framework of SO1.1, aiming at exploiting innovation potential.

The evaluation's findings for Priority Axis 3 are entirely consistent with the intervention logic of the Italy-Croatia Program, particularly with the primary objective of enhancing ecosystem management and protection, as well as the cooperation between public actors/managers of protected areas to increase environmental benefits and provide economic and employment opportunities. Evaluator's analysis shows consistency with regard to the participation of the target groups seems to be of particular relevance. The most current partners already defined as target groups during the planning/formulation of the Program's strategy are local, regional, and national public bodies, along with research centers. Moreover, desk analysis highlights the general ability to promote vertical partnerships through central and local bodies. This enhances the effectiveness of interventions and their sustainability.

The Evaluator's desk analysis has detected the following conclusions concerning CBC added value:

- Most projects are very aware of the importance of CBC's added value, and their final report shows their awareness that the project could not have been developed without the cooperation component.
- The Italy-Croatia projects with a certain balance among the types have covered all types of CBC-added value.

- Learning opportunities and generating critical mass are the most popular CBC added value among SOs 1.1., 2.1., and 3.2 standard and standard + projects.
- Building structure for further cooperation and territorial cohesion is a type of CBC-added value in the standard + project.
- More than one project has been implemented CBC steering committee or management board. This is extremely important for the CBC project and for managing the partnership in a valuable way.
- The Partners' participation in the different phases of the stakeholders' involvement can be identified as a good practice to be transferred.

The Impact Evaluation's conclusions are so far partial due to the foreseen deadlines of the programmes and the evaluation service: the final Programme impact evaluation will be designed in 2023, when it will be possible to investigate concrete and long-lasting effects of Programme interventions on the targeted territories.

Annex: Evaluations undertaken in respect of the OP concerned

Identifier	Brief description of measures/intervention subject of evaluation	Title	Fund(s) concerned by the evaluation	TOs	Link to report
<b>Impact 1 - 2022</b>	<p>A first Impact Evaluation presents a preliminary analysis of the standard and standard+ projects results; it will include a comprehensive and conclusive set of evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. The EQs that have a direct reference to the analysis of the impact of the CBC Programme can also be distinguished into two further sub-categories that we define as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• referring to the thematic and territorial sectoral dimensions of impact, and</li> <li>• referring to the cross-sectoral dimension of impact (e.g. the added value of Italy-Croatia Programme, contribution to macro-regional strategies).</li> </ul>	Impact Evaluation Report 2022	ERDF, National Contribution	All	<a href="https://www.italy-croatia.eu/documents/20126/0/Impact+Evaluation+2022.pdf/6dfa5e01-1f40-2ab9-e6e6-7a18f4addfeb?t=1672229019619">https://www.italy-croatia.eu/documents/20126/0/Impact+Evaluation+2022.pdf/6dfa5e01-1f40-2ab9-e6e6-7a18f4addfeb?t=1672229019619</a>
<b>Operational 2 - 2022</b>	Focuses on additional dimensions of the Programme, in particular the Evaluator will answer to the evaluation questions related to the cross-border cooperation added value and networking, conducting additional analysis on the type of partners and on the implementing	Operational Evaluation 2022	ERDF, National Contribution	All	<a href="https://www.italy-croatia.eu/documents/20126/0/Operational_Evaluation_2022.pdf/0f97c69c-30b7-bbdc-aaf9-">https://www.italy-croatia.eu/documents/20126/0/Operational_Evaluation_2022.pdf/0f97c69c-30b7-bbdc-aaf9-</a>

	unit locations. Moreover, the report will present an additional analysis of the output indicators and its targets.				20c014816a8b?t=1672228827389
<b>SCOs Report - 2022</b>	Assess the use of the SCOs during the current Programming period, their strengths and weakness and to estimate the possible impact of the adoption of Simplified Cost Options on a wider scale within the Interreg Italy-Croatia 2021-2027 Programme.  For Programme Bodies' use only.	Report on the evaluation for a more extensive adoption of Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) in programme implementation	ERDF, National Contribution	All	n.a.
<b>Projects of limited financial volume/Small projects funds Report - 2021</b>	Assessment on how effectively projects of limited financial volume have been managed in the 2014-2020 period in other Interreg programmes (direct funding vs. small project funds) and it included conclusions and recommendations about the possible adoption of support to small projects.  For Programme Bodies' use only.	Projects of limited financial volume/Small projects funds Report	ERDF, National Contribution	All	n.a.

<p><b>Operational 1 - 2021</b></p>	<p>Assesses the Programme’s outputs, outcomes, and the administrative capacities of its Programme bodies. First snapshot of the implementation of the Programme by analysing some key elements including the management system, the result indicators system and the partnerships created.</p>	<p>Operational Evaluation 2021</p>	<p>ERDF, National Contribution</p>	<p>All</p>	<p><a href="https://www.italy-croatia.eu/documents/20126/1854287/Operational+Ev+aluation+2021_20211001.pdf/89d7eb6b-b75d-68db-18cd-3fb98e98e0bd?t=1636114912715">https://www.italy-croatia.eu/documents/20126/1854287/Operational+Ev+aluation+2021_20211001.pdf/89d7eb6b-b75d-68db-18cd-3fb98e98e0bd?t=1636114912715</a></p>
<p><b>T&amp;S Analysis - 2021</b></p>	<p>Territorial analysis designed to provide a comprehensive, updated overview on the situation of the cross-border area and its developing challenges in the framework of the global, European and macro-regional strategic framework;</p> <p>Socioeconomic analysis that is strictly connected with the previous one and as the previous one produced with a methodological mix of quantitative and qualitative tools.</p> <p>They contained a comprehensive and up-to-date identification of the main challenges, needs and potentials of the foreseen Italy-Croatia Programme area, intended as the area covered by the Programme 2014-2020.</p>	<p>Territorial and socio-economic analysis.</p>	<p>ERDF, ESF, National Contribution</p>	<p>All</p>	<p><a href="https://www.italy-croatia.eu/documents/20126/152084/20211115_Territorial+Analysis+Ita-Cro.pdf/8aa19588-54fc-8741-12ca-24a7421c248c?t=1642410516009">https://www.italy-croatia.eu/documents/20126/152084/20211115_Territorial+Analysis+Ita-Cro.pdf/8aa19588-54fc-8741-12ca-24a7421c248c?t=1642410516009</a></p>

<b>IED -2021</b>	A first Integrated Evaluation Design and its annual updates designed to describe the overall methodological approach of the set of ongoing evaluation activities, which are further refined during the implementation of the Evaluation Service in order to adapt them to each deliverable. Its update are to fine-tune the Programme needs and areas of interest to investigate in the upcoming evaluations that are further refined during the implementation of the Evaluation Service in order to adapt them to each deliverable.	Integrated Evaluation Design	n.a.	All	<a href="https://www.italy-croatia.eu/documents/20126/5183536/Integrated+Evaluation+Design+2022_FINAL.pdf/181eac75-b875-e767-40e6-4d48c6f21968?t=1648724641344">https://www.italy-croatia.eu/documents/20126/5183536/Integrated+Evaluation+Design+2022_FINAL.pdf/181eac75-b875-e767-40e6-4d48c6f21968?t=1648724641344</a>
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