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The Monitoring of European Territorial Cooperation Projects in Italy: Critical Aspects and Innovative Solutions¹

Il monitoraggio dei progetti di cooperazione territoriale europea in Italia: aspetti critici e soluzioni innovative

VIVIANA RUSSO, FILIPPO LA VECCHIA, AGOSTINA RITA ROCCA, SIMONA TRENTO, PAOLO GALLETTA

Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale, Rome, Italy

E-mail: viviana.russo.esp@agenziacoesione.gov.it; filippo.lavecchia@agenziacoesione.gov.it; agostina.rocca.esp@agenziacoesione.gov.it; simona.trento.esp@agenziacoesione.gov.it; paolo.galletta@agenziacoesione.gov.it

Abstract. One of the two Goals of EU Cohesion Policy is dedicated to European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), also known as Interreg. Italy is involved in 19 European Territorial Cooperation Programmes. In this article we will firstly present the status of the implementation of these Programmes in the current programming period 2014-2020 and in particular of the projects involving Italian beneficiaries with the role of lead partner or project partner. Specifically, data refer both to the financial implementation (commitments assumed by Programmes, total resources assigned to the projects and expenses declared by beneficiaries) and to the concrete implementation, with reference to the calls, the approved/financed projects, the beneficiaries involved and data at the regional territory level (NUTS 2). Technical Assistance projects are not considered for analysis purposes. The main source of information comes from Italian Managing Authorities of the ETC, ENI and IPA II 2014-2020 Programmes and from competent Regional representatives for Programmes with a foreign Managing Authority, as part of the 2018 survey carried out by the two National Authorities, i.e. the Agency for Territorial Cohesion (ACT) and the Department for Cohesion Policy of the Presidency of Ministries Council (DPCoe) for the definition of the annual Report on Italian participation to ETC, IPA and ENI Programmes (2019). Data hereby presented are related to the projects funded until December 31st, 2017. For some data we will also provide an update at the end of 2018. These projects had been approved by the Monitoring Committees and, before the mentioned date, a financing agreement between the Managing Authority and the lead partner had already been signed. The list of 10 ETC Programmes with funded projects at December 31st, 2017 is composed of: Italy-Austria; Italy-France Maritime; Italy-Slovenia; France-Italy Alcotra; Adriatic; Central Europe; Med; Alpine Space; Interreg Europe; Urbact III. With reference to the general level of implementation, although considerable differences remain in the performance of the different Programmes, during 2017 it was possible to witness a general significant progress. The spending commitments at December 31st, 2017 reached 48%

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of the total planned resources. All Programmes have launched at least one selection procedure thus bringing the number of cooperation projects approved to 771, 590 of which signed the agreement for the allocation of resources. In 2018, the number of approved projects raised up to 1.100 and the level of expenditure commitments grew to the percentage of 66%. What it is of absolute interest is the participation rate of Italian partners to ETC projects. In fact, all data presented confirm the great relevance of Italian presence within the cooperation partnerships equal to the 31% of the total number of partners. In addition, more than half of the funded projects with Italian participation have an Italian Lead Partner. After analyzing in detail information concerning Italian partners (typologies, NUTS, etc.), the first paragraph also highlights the financial overview of assigned resources and their thematic concentration on Cohesion Policy Thematic Objectives. The second part of the present article is focused on the principal critical aspects of the monitoring activities. Playing its role as national authority for the implementation of ETC Programmes and thanks to the experience gained in the last years in the fields of data collecting and of reporting at national level, the Agency for Territorial Cohesion puts in evidence some difficulties affecting nowadays monitoring and assessment processes. The negative elements concern: the lack of data, together with the delay for their updating and their low dissemination within the cohesion policy framework; the not adequate or not integrated tools (monitoring systems and open data platforms); the methodological approach too focused on quantitative and not qualitative measurement. The main result is the difficulty to verify the impact of these projects on the life of EU citizens. The conclusions remarks explore several recommendations for the upcoming programming period 2021-2027, suggesting some actions to be implemented immediately during the programming phase and others for the medium term. The next year represents a crucial moment to prepare and plan in a new way monitoring and evaluation tasks and it is fundamental to acknowledge their role since the beginning of the new programming period.

Keywords: ETC (European Territorial Cooperation), Interreg, impact, monitoring, evaluation.

Riassunto. Uno dei due obiettivi della politica di coesione dell'UE è dedicato alla Cooperazione Territoriale Europea (CTE), noto anche come Interreg. L'Italia è coinvolta in 19 Programmi di Cooperazione Territoriale Europea. In questo articolo presenteremo innanzitutto lo stato di attuazione di questi Programmi nell'attuale periodo di programmazione 2014-2020 e in particolare dei progetti che coinvolgono beneficiari italiani con il ruolo di capofila o di partner di progetto. In particolare, i dati si riferiscono sia all'esecuzione finanziaria (impegni assunti dai programmi, risorse totali assegnate ai progetti e alle spese dichiarate dai beneficiari) sia all'attuazione concreta, con riferimento ai bandi, ai progetti approvati/finanziati, ai beneficiari coinvolti e ai dati a livello di territorio regionale (NUTS 2). I progetti di assistenza tecnica non sono considerati a scopo di analisi. La principale fonte di informazione proviene dalle Autorità di Gestione italiane dei Programmi CTE, ENI e IPA II 2014-2020 e dai rappresentanti regionali competenti per i Programmi con un'Autorità di Gestione estera, nell'ambito

della ricognizione del 2018 condotta dalle due autorità nazionali, vale a dire l'Agenzia per la coesione territoriale (ACT) e il Dipartimento per la politica di coesione del Consiglio della presidenza dei ministeri (DPCoe) per la definizione della Relazione annuale 2018 sulla partecipazione italiana ai programmi CTE, ENI ed IPA. I dati qui presentati si riferiscono ai progetti finanziati fino al 31 dicembre 2017. Per alcuni dati forniremo anche un aggiornamento alla fine del 2018. Tali progetti sono stati approvati dai Comitati di Sorveglianza e, prima della scadenza indicata, per ciascuno di essi è stato firmato un accordo di finanziamento tra l'Autorità di gestione e il capofila. L'elenco dei 10 programmi CTE con progetti finanziati al 31 dicembre 2017 è composto da: Italia-Austria; Italia-Francia marittimo; Italia-Slovenia; Francia-Italia Alcotra; Adrion; Europa centrale; Med; Spazio alpino; Interreg Europe; Urbact III. Con riferimento al livello generale di attuazione, sebbene permangano notevoli differenze nell'esecuzione dei diversi Programmi, nel 2017 è stato possibile assistere a progressi significativi. Gli impegni di spesa al 31 dicembre 2017 hanno raggiunto il 48% delle risorse programmate totali. Tutti i Programmi hanno avviato almeno una procedura di selezione portando così il numero di progetti di cooperazione approvati a 771, 590 dei quali hanno firmato l'accordo per l'assegnazione delle risorse. Nel 2018, il numero di progetti approvati è salito a 1.100 e il livello degli impegni di spesa è cresciuto fino alla percentuale del 66%. È di assoluto interesse il tasso di partecipazione dei partner italiani ai progetti CTE. Infatti, tutti i dati presentati confermano la grande rilevanza della presenza italiana all'interno delle partnership di cooperazione pari al 31% del numero totale dei partner. Oltre la metà dei progetti finanziati con partecipazione italiana ha un Lead Partner italiano. Dopo aver analizzato in dettaglio le informazioni relative ai partner italiani (tipologie, NUTS, ecc.), il primo paragrafo evidenzia anche la panoramica finanziaria delle risorse assegnate e la loro concentrazione tematica sugli obiettivi tematici della politica di coesione. La seconda parte di questo articolo è focalizzata sui principali aspetti critici delle attività di monitoraggio. Giocando il suo ruolo di autorità nazionale per l'attuazione dei Programmi CTE e grazie all'esperienza acquisita negli ultimi anni nei settori della raccolta dei dati e della comunicazione a livello nazionale, l'Agenzia per la coesione territoriale mette in evidenza alcune difficoltà che riguardano il monitoraggio e la valutazione dei processi. Gli elementi negativi riguardano: la mancanza di dati, insieme al ritardo per il loro aggiornamento e la loro scarsa diffusione nel quadro della politica di coesione; gli strumenti non adeguati o non integrati (sistemi di monitoraggio e piattaforme di dati aperti); l'approccio metodologico troppo focalizzato sulla misurazione quantitativa e non qualitativa. Il risultato principale è la difficoltà di verificare l'impatto di questi progetti sulla vita dei cittadini dell'UE. Le conclusioni esplorano diverse raccomandazioni per il prossimo periodo di programmazione 2021-2027, suggerendo che alcune azioni siano immediatamente attuate durante la fase di programmazione e altre a medio termine. L'anno successivo rappresenta un momento cruciale per preparare e pianificare in modo nuovo le attività di monitoraggio e di valutazione ed è fondamentale riconoscerne il ruolo sin dall'inizio del nuovo periodo di programmazione.

Parole chiave: CTE (Cooperazione territoriale europea), Interreg, impatto, monitoraggio, valutazione.

1. The implementation of ETC Goal Programmes in Italy

1.1 Implementation Overview

During 2017, 10 *calls for proposals* were launched by ETC Programmes involving Italy. At the end of 2017, all the ETC Programmes published at least one Call. The total number of Calls reached the number of 31 and 24 of them completed all the selection procedures. The cumulated number of the approved projects by the Monitoring Committees was 771. Only in 2017, 353 new projects were selected for financing. Approved projects are related to 14 Programmes.

With reference to the financial progress, considering the 771 approved projects, there is an overall level of expenditure commitments assumed by the Programmes at December 31st, 2017 of € 1.410.195.783, equal to 48% of the total planned resources (€ 2.968.777.544). The table below shows the overall framework of the commitments undertaken and of the expenditure declared for each cooperation Programme.

It should be noted that only a part of the approved projects concluded the funding process by the end of 2017 (i.e. the formal allocation of resources to the final beneficiaries following the signing of the “financing agreements” between the Managing Authority and the lead project partner). The current state of the art and the comparison between approved projects and funded projects at the individual Programme level is summarized in the figure below, from which it can be observed that funded projects at 12.31.2017 are in total 590 for only 10 Programmes, as already specified in the previous paragraph.

From Figure 1 it can be seen that the Programmes with the largest number of approved and/or funded projects are the Italy-Austria Programme (79 funded projects) in the context of cross-border cooperation, the Central Europe Programme (84 funded projects) among the transnational Programmes and the Interreg Europe Programme (184 approved, of which 130 funded) among the interregional ones. These Programmes, in fact, have already completed 2 or 3 project selection procedures

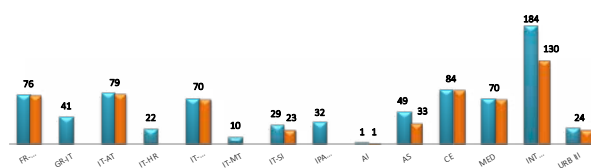


Figure 1. Approved projects vs funded projects per each Programme at 12.31.2017 Source: Agency for territorial cohesion.

since their beginning and have, as it will be shown later, a rather high level of financial progress.

The aggregate analysis for each cooperation component shows a greater number of approved (as well as funded) projects within the 4 cross-border cooperation Programmes (approximately 42% with reference to the total of both data), followed by the 4 transnational cooperation Programmes (26% of total approved projects; 32% of funded ones) and 2 interregional cooperation Programmes (around 27% of the total with reference to both data). External cross-border cooperation has registered 32 approved projects (5%) thanks to a single Programme (IPA-CBC Italy-Albania-Montenegro) and no projects funded.

Another important parameter is represented by the total number of partners: at December 31st 2017 the total amount was 4.629 units. The table below details the participations of partners for each Programme and highlights the average size of project partnerships. The project partnerships are composed, on average, of about 8 partners, with average minimum and maximum values per Programme fluctuating between the 4 partners of the Italy-Austria Programme and the 11 partners of the transnational Alpine Space Programme.

With reference to the categories of partners involved, based on the data collected on all the beneficiaries (Italians and foreigners) it emerges that 84% of the partners participating in the funded projects at December 31st, 2017, are bodies governed by public law (3.905 in absolute value) and the remaining 16% are identifiable as private law bodies (724 in absolute value).

During 2018, 12 new call for proposals were launched for the selection of project proposals which brought the total number of calls published to 43. The approval of additional 329 projects raised the total number of approved projects to 1.100. The overall level of expenditure commitments assumed by Programmes at December 31st, 2018, is equal to 66% of the planned resources for 2014-2020, for a total amount of € 1.966.250.679.

Finally, it should be noted that all 19 Programmes of the European Territorial Cooperation Objective in which

Table 1. Projects per year. Source: Agency for territorial cohesion.

Year	Calls (total)	Closed calls	Approved Projects
a) at 12.31.2016	21	12	418
b) 2017	10	12	353
Total at 12.31.2017 (a+b)	31	24	771

Table 2. Financial progress of ETC Programmes at 12.31.2017. Source: <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/>.

ETC PROGRAMME	PLANNED (€) (a)	COMMITMENTS (€) (b)	PROGRESS (b/a)	EXPENDITURES (€) (c)	PROGRESS (c/a)
France-Italy Alcotra	233.972.102	125.140.351	53%	9.147.413	4%
Greece-Italy	123.176.899	60.991.015	50%		0%
Italy-Austria	98.380.352	80.179.660	81%		0%
Italy-Croazia	236.890.849	36.062.169	15%		0%
Italy-France Maritime	199.649.897	144.683.165	72%	3.910.675	2%
Italy-Malta	51.708.438	1.646.912	3%	341.998	1%
Italy-Slovenia	92.588.182	44.367.504	48%	365.250	0%
Italy-Switzerland	117.907.611	3.436.948	3%	97.048	0%
INTERNAL CROSS BORDER	1.154.274.330	496.507.724	43%	13.862.384	1%
IPA CBC Italy-Albania-Montenegro	92.707.558	9.270.756	10%	533.771	1%
ENI CBC MED	234.549.558	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
ENI CBC Italy – Tunisia	37.023.850	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
EXTERNAL CROSS BORDER	364.280.966	9.270.756	3%	533.771	0%
CROSS BORDER COOPERATION TOTAL	1.518.555.296	505.778.480	33%	14.396.155	1%
ADRION	117.918.198	45.563.399	39%		0%
ALPINE SPACE	139.751.456	82.007.363	59%	13.809.653	10%
CENTRAL EUROPE	298.987.026	212.384.127	71%	17.453.280	6%
MEDITERRANEAN	275.905.320	158.233.238	57%	13.725.459	5%
TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION TOTAL	832.562.000	498.188.127	60%	44.988.392	5%
ESPO 2020	48.678.851	48.678.851	100%	4.226.547	9%
INTERACT III	46.344.229	46.344.229	100%	4.686.800	10%
INTERREG Europe	426.309.618	251.968.181	59%	37.111.579	9%
URBACT III	96.324.550	59.237.915	61%	7.820.351	8%
INTERREGIONAL COOPERATION TOTAL	617.657.248	406.229.176	66%	53.845.277	9%
TOTAL	2.968.774.544	1.410.195.783	48%	113.229.824	4%

Italy participates have reached the spending targets (N + 3) at 31 December 2018.

1.2 Analysis of projects with Italian Partners

In this paragraph the analysis is focused on the funded projects involving Italian partners, also through the examination of the degree of participation of the different eligible territories (at NUTS 2 level, as already specified) to the financed projects and the type of involved beneficiaries. Out of the total of 590 projects funded as of 12.31.2017, 549 projects see the participation of Italian partners.

To give significance to the data, attention must be focused on projects related to transnational and inter-regional cooperation Programmes (in all cross-border cooperation projects, in fact, Italian partners are nec-

Table 3. Partners of projects vs partnership average size at December 31st 2017. Source: Agency for territorial cohesion.

PROGRAMMES	FUNDED PROJECTS AT 12/31/2017 (a)	PARTNERS AT 12/31/2017 (b)	PARTNERSHIP AVERAGE SIZE (b/a)
FR-IT ALC	76	388	5,1
IT-AT	79	327	4,1
IT-FR MAR	70	543	7,8
IT-SI	23	120	5,2
AI	1	9	9,0
AS	33	386	11,7
CE	84	900	10,7
MED	70	641	9,2
INT EU	130	1065	8,2
URB III	24	250	10,4
TOTAL	590	4.629	7,85

PROGRAMME	FUNDED PROJECTS AT 12/31/2017	FUNDED PROJECTS AT 12/31/2017 WITH ITALIAN PARTNERS
FR-IT ALC	76	76
IT-AT	79	79
IT-FR MAR	70	70
IT-SI	23	23
AI	1	1
AS	33	33
CE	84	73
MED	70	70
INT EU	130	103
URB III	24	21
TOTALE	590	549

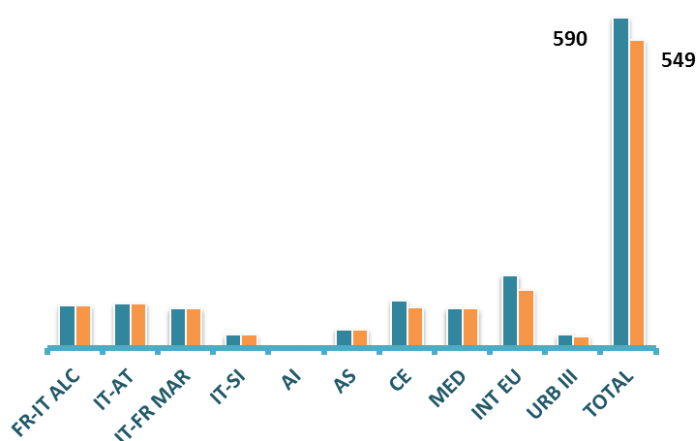


Figure 2. Comparison between total funded projects at 12.31.2017 and projects with Italian partners. Source: Agency for territorial cohesion.

essarily involved) for which there is a very high participation rate. As can be seen from the data shown in the previous figure, all funded projects by transnational Programmes Adrion (AI), Alpine Space (AS) and Med involve Italian partners and on the Central Europe Programme (CE) the participation rate is equal to 87 %. Also within the interregional component there is a participation rate of 79% for the Interreg Europe (INT EU) Programme and 88% for URBACT III.

The following are the charts related to the rate of participation of Italian territories in the projects financed by the Programmes, drawn up on the basis of the number of participations of Italian partners coming from the different territories. Data show that Italian partners participating in the projects come from all the territories of the Regions and PAs eligible for the Programmes, with a range that varies the maximum number of participations to projects in the single territory from a maximum of 112 to a minimum of 2. Specifically, the territories eligible for the highest participation rate in the projects funded as of 12.31.2017 are those of Northern Italy: Veneto (112), Piedmont (104), Liguria (94), Friuli Venezia Giulia (88) and Tuscany (87). The territories of the South Italy are in majority below 10 projects: Basilicata and Apulia (9), Molise (8), Marche (8), Campania (5), Calabria (2), as well as Umbria (6).

It should be noted that the sum of the participations in the projects of the single territories (equal to 911), does not coincide with the total number of projects in which Italian partners participate (549) because in the

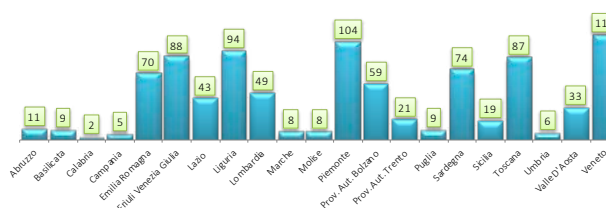


Figure 3. Italian regions involved in financed projects at 12.31.2017 – Number of projects. Source: Agency for territorial cohesion.

same project could participate a plurality of partners coming from different territories.

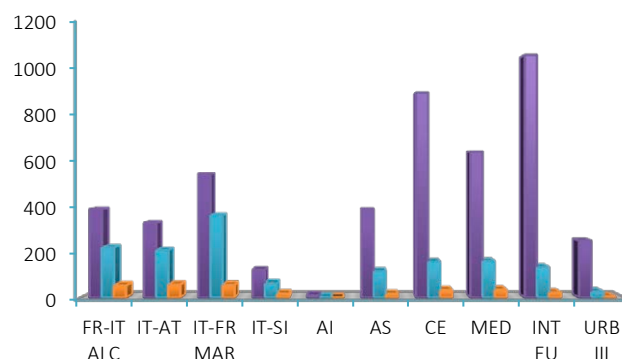
The number of Italian participations (as lead partners or project partners) in the funded projects at 12.31.2017 is 1.444, or 31% of the total number of partners involved (4.629). The projects in which the Italian beneficiaries have the role of lead partner are 287, more than half of the projects funded with Italian participation.

These data confirm the great importance of Italian participation in European Territorial Cooperation. The Programmes that see the largest number of projects led by Italian partners, as well as in general the most numerous participation of Italian project partners are Italy-France Maritime Programme (362 partners and about 79% of projects with Italian LPs) for the cross-border cooperation, the MED Programme (160 partners and about 49% of projects with Italian LPs) for transnational cooperation and the Interreg Europe Programme (133 partners and about 21% of projects with Italian LPs) for interregional cooperation.

Table 4. Percentage of financed projects at 12.31.2017 with Italian lead partner vs. Programme. Source: Agency for territorial cohesion.

PROGRAMME	FINANCED PROJECTS WITH ITALIAN PARTNERS	FINANCED PROJECTS WITH ITALIAN LEAD PARTNERS	PROJECTS WITH ITALIAN LEAD PARTNERS (%)
FR-IT ALC	76	53	69,74
IT-AT	79	56	70,89
IT-FR MAR	70	55	78,57
IT-SI	23	16	69,57
AI	1	0	0,00
AS	33	15	45,45
CE	73	32	43,84
MED	70	34	48,57
INT EU	103	22	21,36
URB III	21	4	19,05
TOTAL	549	287	52,28

PROGRAMMES	ALL PARTNERS	IT PARTNERS	Of which IT LP
FR-IT ALC	388	220	53
IT-AT	327	208	56
IT-FR MAR	543	362	55
IT-SI	120	62	16
AI	9	1	0
AS*	386	115	15
CE	900	157	32
MED	641	160	34
INT EU	1065	133	22
URB III	250	26	4
TOTALE	4.629	1.444	287

**Figure 4.** Italian partners at 12.31.2017 per Programme (*excluding observers). Source: Agency for territorial cohesion.

Finally, in the following picture, a territorial analysis of the number of partners involved in the implementation of the projects is summarized. The picture shows that the participation average of partners coming from the same territory to a single project is approximately equal to 1.5 partners. The Regions/Autonomous Provinces that express an above-average participation are Piedmont (2 partners), Tuscany (1.9 partners), Friuli Venezia Giulia (1.8 partners), Liguria and Sardinia (1.7 partners). However, we have to point out that these data could be overestimated due to the possible multiple counting of some subjects that could not be uniquely identified.

Moreover, collected data on beneficiaries participating in the projects allow to analyze the typology of partners involved both with reference to their juridical nature and to the different categories to which they belong. From the analysis of the legal status it emerges, in line with the general data illustrated in the introduc-

tory section, that 81% of the Italian partners participating in the financed projects at December 31st, 2017, are bodies governed by public law (1.167 in absolute value) and the remaining 19% of Italian partners are identifiable as private law bodies (277 in absolute value).

Continuing with the analysis of the categories of subjects it can be pointed out that the main category to which the Italian partners belong is “Research centers, schools and universities” (245 participations), followed by “Regions” (218 participations), by “Municipalities” (176 participations) and by “Metropolitan cities” (23 participations). The “Other” category, in which 761 occurrences are identified, or “participations of partner subjects”, includes different types of partners related to both private and public subjects such as: SMEs, chambers of commerce, associations, agencies, NGOs and other public and territorial bodies. The weak participation of central administrations as partners (more frequently involved in cooperation pro-



Figure 5. Territorial distribution of Italian partners participating in the financed projects at 12.31.2017. Source: Agency for territorial cohesion.

jects as observers) should be highlighted. At December 31st, 2017, there were only 2 participations by central administrations in the Central Europe transnational cooperation Programmes (Ministry of Health) and MED (Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism [MiBACT]).

1.3 Financial overview of the assigned resources

The overall and individual Programme picture of the expenditure commitments made at 31st December 2017 (and the update at 31/12/2018), has total resources actually assigned to the 590 projects funded at 31.12.2017 which refer, as already stated, to only 10 Programmes. Overall, these resources amount to € 1.010.575.546,28 and represent 51% of the total planned resources programmed for the 10 Programmes analyzed and 34% of the total resources programmed for the 19 ETC Programmes in which Italy participates (€ 2.968.777.544).

In line with the data relating to the number of funded projects, the Programme that assigned the highest share of resources in absolute value is Inter-reg Europe (€ 210.545.975,00), followed by Central Europe (€ 189.740.428,77) and MED (€ 149.248.937,48) and the cross-border Programmes Italy-France Maritime (€ 132.704.172,18) and France-Italy Alcotra (€ 120.565.817,99). The highest performance rates are recorded for the Italy-Austria Programme that allocated 70% of the planned resources for 2014-2020, followed by the Italy-France Maritime Programme (66%) and Central Europe (63 %), Alpine Space and MED (both 54%).

The value, in financial terms, of the Italian participation in the funded projects at 12.31.2017 amounts to a total of € 362.603.217,00 equal to 36% of the total allocated resources.

The following table shows the analytical picture of the assigned resources to the Italian partners participating in the funded projects within the single Programmes. Also the financial data, in line with the quantitative analysis of the partners previously illustrated, generally shows a very high rate of Italian participation

Table 5. Financial progress for ETC Programmes at 12.31.2017 – Assigned resources. Source: Agency for territorial cohesion.

PROGRAMME	PROGRAMMED RESOURCES (€)	ASSIGNED RESOURCES (€)	PROGRESS (%)
FR-IT ALC	233.972.102,00	120.565.817,99	52
IT-AT	98.380.352,00	69.145.096,79	70
IT-FR MAR	199.649.897,00	132.704.172,18	66
IT-SI	92.588.182,00	34.008.306,06	37
AI	117.918.198,00	11.501.170,01	10
AS	139.751.456,00	75.538.710,62	54
CE	298.987.026,00	189.740.428,77	63
MED	275.905.320,00	149.248.937,48	54
INT EU	426.309.618,00	210.545.975,00	49
URB III	96.324.550,00	17.576.931,38	18
TOTAL	1.979.786.701,00	1.010.575.546,28	51

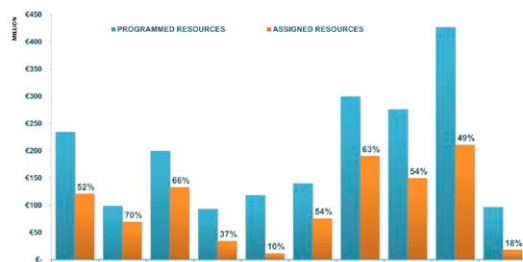


Figure 6. Comparison between total programmed resources and total assigned resources at 12.31.2017. Source: Agency for territorial cohesion.

in the transnational and interregional Programmes, as well as cross-border. Among the transnationals, in particular, Alpine Space is the programme that records the highest rate of resources assigned to Italian partners out of the total (30%).

The territorial distribution of the assigned resources to the Italian partners for NUTS 2 shows that the Regions / Autonomous Provinces that register the highest share of assigned resources are those belonging to Northern Italy, and in particular Piedmont (€ 54.424.876), Friuli Venezia Giulia (€ 46.802.343), Liguria (€ 41.651.285), Tuscany (€ 39.978.477) and Veneto (€ 35.986.722).

1.4 Coherence between ECT projects and priorities of the Cohesion Policy 2014-2020

This paragraph describes the correlation data between the resources assigned to the financed projects by the ETC Programmes and the Thematic Objectives (TOs), referred to Art. 9 of Reg. (EU) no. 1303/2013, and

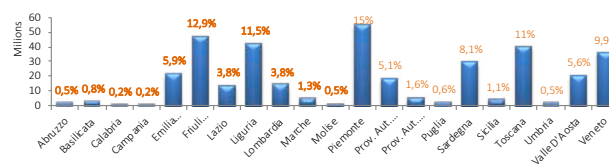


Figure 7. Territorial distribution of the total resources assigned to the Italian partners. Source: Agency for territorial cohesion.

the related Investment Priorities (IP), pursuant to Art. 5 of the ERDF Regulation (EU) no. 1301/2013 and art. 7 of Reg. ETC (EU) no. 1299/2013, selected during the planning phase. Analyzing the distribution by thematic objective of the total assigned resources at 12/31/2017, data show that the objectives on which the greater share of resources is concentrated are, in order, the TO 6 – Environment and efficient use of resources (33%), TO 1 – Research, technological development and innovation (23%) and TO 4 – Low-carbon economy (18%). As shown in the graph below, the implementation data show a picture for the distribution of resources tending to be aligned with the programming forecasts, with the exception of the TO 11 – Efficiency of the public administration that shows a level of concentration of assigned resources much lower than planned (only 6% compared to 11% expected). Please note that no ETC Programmes with Italian participation has selected the TO 2 – Improve access to information and communication technologies (ICT) and consequently no selected projects can be traced specifically to this TO and its IPs.

The chart below on the state of progress of the allocated resources for each thematic objective shows that the TOs with the highest programmed resources utiliza-

Table 6. Assigned resources to the Italian partners at 12.31.2017 per Programme. Source: Agency for territorial cohesion.

PROGRAMME	TOTAL RESOURCES ASSIGNED TO THE FINANCED PROJECTS (€) (a)	RESOURCES ASSIGNED TO THE ITALIAN PARTNERS (€) (b)	INCIDENCE (%) (b/a)
FR-IT ALC	120.565.817,99	70.401.167,10	58%
IT-AT	69.145.096,79	44.427.088,59	64%
IT-FR MAR	132.704.172,18	88.119.695,49	66%
IT-SI	34.008.306,06	23.546.788,60	69%
AI	11.501.170,01	3.153.099,51	27%
AS	75.538.710,62	22.813.044,03	30%
CE	189.740.428,77	39.465.372,25	21%
MED	149.248.937,48	40.089.561,32	27%
INT EU	210.545.975,00	28.455.095,00	14%
URB III	17.576.931,38	2.132.305,15	12%
TOTAL	1.010.575.546,28	362.603.217,04	36%

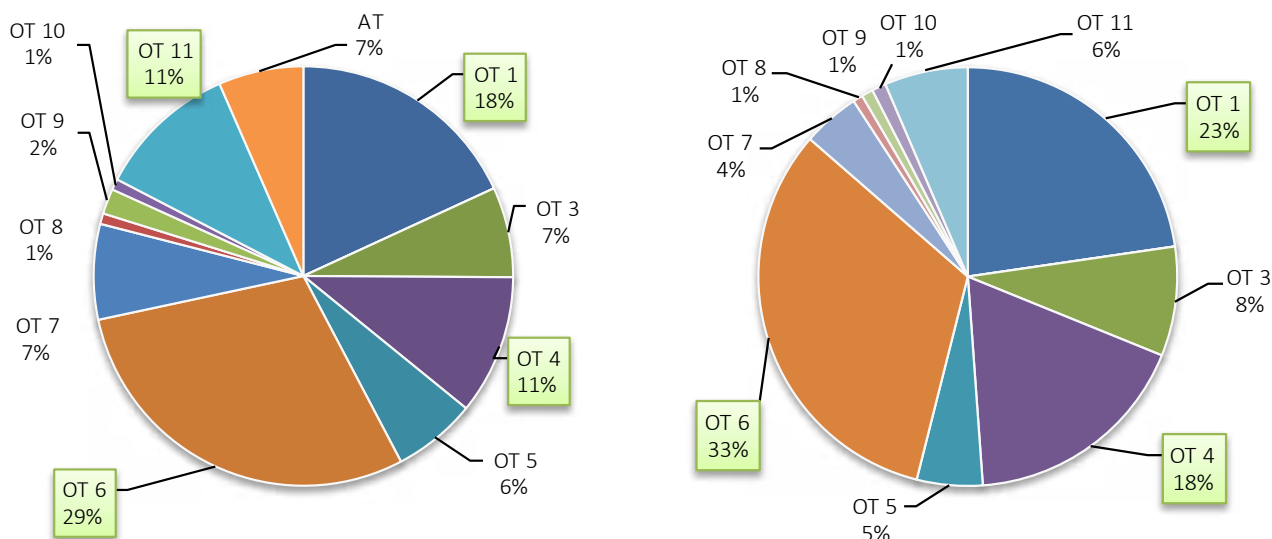


Figure 8. Distribution of the total assigned resources by ETC Programmes per Thematic Objective – Comparison with the planning data. Source: Agency for territorial cohesion.



Figure 9. Distribution of the resources assigned to the Italian partners per thematic objective. Source: Agency for territorial cohesion.

tion rates are the TO 4 – Low carbon economy (mainly selected by transnational Programmes, with the exception of Adrion) with 64% of resources allocated out of the total, followed by TO 10 – Education and training with 50% (objective selected exclusively by cross-border programs) and by TO 1 – Research, technological development and innovation with 49%. The lowest values are instead recorded on TO 9 – Inclusion (18%), on TO 7 – Sustainable transport and on TO 11 (23%). Taking into consideration the projects financed with Italian participation, it is possible to collect the data concerning the concentration by thematic objective, based on the indication of the prevalent TO selected by the projects. The graph below shows that almost 70% of projects focus on TO 6, 1 and 4. There is a trend in data on the distribution by thematic objective that is consistent both with that relating to total resources and with the data on the concentration of projects and, as can be seen from the

below figure, it is confirmed that among the objectives with the highest rate of absorption of resources can be found TO 6 (35%), TO 1 (17%) and TO 4 (12%).

However, the comparison of the detailed data on the distribution by TO of the total resources assigned and those assigned only to the Italian partners, summarized in the table below, shows that the level of concentration of the latter ones is lower both on the TO 1 (17% < 23%) than on the TO 4 (12% < 18%). On the other hand, the TO 5 – Adaptation to climate change (an objective selected exclusively by cross-border Programmes) has a concentration of resources assigned to Italian partners by 9%, almost double that referred to total resources (5%), and also the TO 11 and the TO 7 record concentration levels slightly higher than the general ones.

To complete the analysis, we have to consider the territorial detail of the distribution by TO of the resources assigned to Italian partners at 12.31.2017. Reading the data it emerges that:

- all the eligible regional territories (21 NUTS 2) see shareholdings in projects falling within the TO 6 and in the TO 4, and most of them in projects related to the TO 1 (18 NUTS 2), TO 3 (16 NUTS 2) and TO 11 (13 NUTS 2);
- the only Region that has a distribution of resources assigned to partners from its territory on all 11 thematic objectives is Liguria;
- on the other hand, a particular orientation or trend of the territories towards specific thematic objectives is not clearly detectable;

- with reference to the thematic objectives that present the highest concentration of resources assigned to the Italian partners (TO 6, 1, 4, 5, 3 and 11), the following can be highlighted among the territories that absorb the greatest share of resources: Piedmont (19%), Friuli Venezia Giulia (14%), Veneto (13%) and Val d'Aosta (11) on the TO 6; Friuli Venezia Giulia (17%), Veneto (16%), Piedmont and Emilia Romagna (11%) and Province of Bolzano (10%) on TO 1; Piedmont (21%), Emilia Romagna (17%), Friuli Venezia Giulia (12%) and Veneto (10%) on TO 4; Liguria (30%), Piedmont (23%), Tuscany (21%) and Sardinia (14%); Tuscany (30%), Sardinia (28%) and Liguria (27%) on the TO 3 and finally, on the TO 11, Friuli Venezia Giulia (43%), Province of Bolzano (20%), Veneto (14%) and Marche (11%).

2. The monitoring of ETC Programmes at national level

ETC projects mainly produce a local impact and not a sufficiently strategic one. The added value of European cooperation is still underestimated and even if it is influenced in a negative way by the low percentage of financial resources and by the weak visibility of results, this is also due to the lack of a deep and open knowledge base evidence on this topic.

In its activity of ETC Programmes monitoring, the Agency for territorial cohesion has experimented several obstacles. The first one concerns the persisting difficulties in data collecting and harmonization of 19 Programmes with so specific characteristics (Italian or foreign Managing Authorities; crossborder/transnational/interregional component; internal and external cooperation; maritime or land areas; covering macro-regional strategies or not) and a so wide range of languages, territories (NUTS 2, NUTS 3, no EU areas), typologies of projects (standard, strategic, integrated or thematic plans, ITI, CLLD, technical assistance) and so on.

Another difficulty affecting ETC monitoring activities at central level is the fact that each Programme has adopted its own specific Monitoring System, working in an independent way and not directly linked to the national monitoring system for cohesion policy investments set by the Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance. Moreover, the national monitoring system should be implemented by the ten ETC Italian Managing Authorities and it is not able, at the moment, to cover the whole data of all ETC Programmes in which Italian partners are involved.

In addition to the abovementioned elements, some other relevant factors must be taken into account. Self assessment is still considered as a binding fulfillment instead of an opportunity to verify progresses and to improve performances. It can be observed that the relevance assigned to the impact assessment – by managing structures, policy makers, beneficiaries – is still too low. Finally, there is an evident lack of capitalization which could be used to disseminate and transfer projects results.

Another crucial aspect regards the absence of an evidence about the real quality of the funded projects and their impact on the involved territories. Currently it doesn't exist a system or a tool that consent to verify the correspondence between project proposals and what have been definitively implemented in terms of outputs and results.

In the meantime, we can also recognize some favorable conditions that may change monitoring context in a positive manner. Firstly, the relevance of Impact Assessment has been clearly acknowledged in the new post 2020 Cohesion Policy Draft Regulations. The new rules proposed by the European Commission (COM (2018) 375) also foresee to delete the submission of the Annual Implementation Report and assign much more importance to the electronic data exchange and to the frequent reporting. On the methodological side, a diverse monitoring approach is spreading out, aiming at capturing the relevant changes produced by the funds and not merely checking their financial implementation. A very useful innovation is the diffusion of open data platforms – such as Cohesion Data at EU level or Open Coesione at national level – one of which specifically dedicated to ETC Programmes in Europe called “KEEP”².

Within the presented framework, the Agency for territorial cohesion, playing its role as national authority for the implementation of ETC Programmes and in order to fill the existing informative gaps related to its tasks, has designed a new tool helping to collect and manage all the data concerning the implementation of Cooperation Programmes in which Italy is involved and related funded projects. The tool has been named SMART CTE. In a parallel way, the Agency has started and is continuing to stimulate a continuous dialogue and coordination among national and regional administrations on the monitoring issues, supporting information and data transfer.

² Open data platform: (EU level) <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/>; (Italian level) <https://opencoesione.gov.it/it/>; (ETC level) <https://www.keep.eu>.

3. Recommendations for the future

On the basis of the above mentioned considerations, It is possible to suggest several recommendations, concerning, on the one hand, indicative proposals to put in place in the forthcoming months during the preliminary phase of post 2020 programming, on the other hand, orientations for the medium term, to be considered for the new implementation phase.

A deeper knowledge base evidence of ETC data and in particular of those feeding the territorial analysis, represent the fundamental step to assess the impact of 2014-2020 programming period and to better define the priorities and actions to be included in the new generation of 2021-2027 Programmes.

For this reason, it is important to start as soon as possible with collection of data coherent with the Strategic and Specific Objectives indicated into the Cohesion Policy draft regulations, in order to have the availability of the needed set of information since the beginning of the programming phase.

With reference to monitoring tools, progress should be done in terms of accessibility, transparency, coverage and updating frequency of data. These characteristics represent a relevant administrative burden for the competent administrations, asking for more simplification. Measures for cutting the red tape may include ready-to-use interoperable monitoring systems and their direct link to open data platform. A better harmonization among the systems adopted by the Programmes, for example through the use of E-MS³, could be helpful in terms of inter-Programmes information flows and their connection to the national monitoring system. Each 2021-2027 Programme will surely modify or integrate its informative system. Before starting this adaptation, an important aspect is the clear and correct definition of the informative needs, whose accuracy reduce the complex work of adjustment after system delivery.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, monitoring activities should be focused not only on the quantitative and financial aspects, but also on a qualitative and narrative approach. The result and output indicators chosen by 2014-2020 ETC Programmes and even those proposed in the ERDF and Interreg draft regulation for 2021-2027, don't represent measuring instrument taking into due account the specific characteristics of cooperation projects. To this intent, an additional common indicators' set for ETC Programmes, much more able to

capture the changes produced by cooperation projects, could be identified.

It is also fundamental to increase investments in capacity building and training about monitoring activities and the use of informative systems, for example extending to ETC the experience of Italian capacity building plans⁴.

With specific reference to evaluation, a suggestion is to increase the efforts in communication of evaluation results, integration of evaluation through cross-Programmes evaluation reports or plans, better alignment of timeline of the evaluation exercise compared to knowledge needs of the programme cycle.

Another important recommendation is to widen and improve the quality of communication both at Programme and at project level, promote a more effective capitalization of results, with a demand-driven approach.

The need to focus the attention on the verification of the concrete implementation of the approved projects and on the real correspondence between what presented in the project applications in terms of objectives, expected results, indicators, outputs and what effectively achieved in qualitative terms must be reaffirmed. Looking at the new Cohesion Policy programming period 2021-2027, it is fundamental to start, as soon as possible, all the discussions and the consequent actions for planning in an adequate way monitoring and evaluation activities. These topics must be faced in the imminent period, without making the error to postpone them only after Programmes approval. The keywords should be interoperability, transparency, openness, frequency, integration. If we really include these words in our daily language, we will get a concrete improvement.

Monitoring is what exists between "before" and "after". Monitoring what we are doing, we know what we are in the present compared to the past and we can better increase our chances to change our future.

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³ E-MS is the harmonized informative system designed by Interact Programme. Currently, in Italy, only 4 Cooperation Programmes use E-MS and among them different versions of the software have been adopted.

⁴ <http://www.pongovernance1420.gov.it/it/piani-di-rafforzamento-amministrativo/>

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