



**INDEPENDENT EVALUATION SERVICE OF THE REGIONAL
RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR THE PERIOD
2014-2022 OF THE LIGURIA REGION**

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ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT 2026 - Summary

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Edited by:

Virgilio Buscemi

Dario Quatrini

Ettore Barili

Giulia Porta

Foreword

The Annual Evaluation Report (hereinafter AER) relates to the state of implementation of the RDP 2014-2022 of the Liguria Region as at 31 December 2025 and it is structured in accordance with the provisions set out in the Tender Specifications, with specific attention to the knowledge needs that emerged from the coordination meetings with the Regional Administration. The document presents a description of the evaluation activities carried out in 2025 in implementation of the RDP Evaluation Plan (see Chapter 9), as a contribution to the drafting of Chapter 2 of the Annual Implementation Report (AIR).

This summary outlines **the methodological support activities provided to LAGs in the self-assessment** of Local Development Strategies (LDS) and describes the main findings arising from the implementation of the data collection tools.

1 Summary of Methodological Support Activities for the Self-Assessment of Local Development Strategies

LAG self-assessment process 2014-2022

Evaluation is a complex discipline with equally challenging objectives. The analysis of complex phenomena, even on a small scale as may be the activity of a LAG in a territory involving a multiplicity of other subjects, requires an evaluative maturity that is not always discernible among the competences of a LAG's internal working group. Moreover, considering the number of activities that staff must perform to fulfil all administrative and other commitments, the resources to devote to self-evaluation are limited. To try to comply with this, the IE, with the support of the Region, worked to stimulate the construction of a simplified methodology that could guide LAGs along this path. The aim has been to maintain a methodological structure that respects the principles of evaluation with the awareness of not wanting to place an excessive burden on the resources made available by the LAGs.

The process of supporting the Ligurian LAGs' self-assessment has reached an advanced stage. After identifying in a participatory manner the issues to be addressed and sharing the methodology to be used, the LAGs embarked on the self-assessment attempt. To support the LAGs, the Independent Evaluator (IE) provided a record of the various meetings and an *instruction booklet* for filling out the forms. The steps and events held so far are summarised below.

First meeting (2019) - The 'objects' to be evaluated in the self-assessment process

On 26 February 2019, an evaluation session was held at the headquarters of the Liguria Region to jointly identify the objects of the self-assessment. The session involved the use of different techniques summarised below:

A. Evaluative Brainstorming, in turn divided into:

- creative phase (freely all participants identified all the elements that characterise the daily implementation process of LDS);
- classification phase (the placing of each indicated element in a specific class, respecting in the aggregation of the different objects a principle of semantic proximity);
- reclassification phase (the identification in each class of further subclasses, the latter representing the final objects to be assessed).

B. Analytic Hierarchy Process the prioritisation of identified objects with respect to two dimensions:

- external effectiveness (what ensures greater impact of their strategies on territories);
- internal efficiency (what ensures a smoother implementation process of strategies).

For each identified object, a definition is described, an articulated definition that describes its meaning and underlies an evaluation question. The items classified in the brainstorming session were then prioritised to identify the LAGs' evaluation priorities. The meeting thus constituted the first step towards the establishment of a shared methodology. Once the topics had been identified, the IE proceeded independently to create self-assessment sheets that were presented at the next meeting.

Second meeting (2020) - Sharing the self-assessment methodology

On 5 November 2020, a meeting was held to enrich the process of co-construction of self-assessment activities. The meeting, which took place in "remote" mode due to the continuing restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, aimed to build on the results obtained and finalise the method to enable the LAGs to start the self-assessment activity.

After the 2020 event, the IE collected the LAGs' suggestions on changes to be made to the sheets and shared them again for the first self-assessment sheets. Together with the forms, the IE delivered a methodological support document so as to provide the LAGs with all possible indications for carrying out work that is exhaustive but above all useful. It is worth remembering that the purpose of the self-assessment is not only to serve as a moment of reflection for the LAG but also plays a fundamental role in communication. The self-assessment helps the LAG formalise any problems and achievements. This is intended to support the LAG both in a comparison with the MA and in the presentation of the achieved objectives to the partnership, the beneficiaries and the population. Moreover, self-evaluation has a natural outward projection because it is a classic example of the so-called "formative" evaluation, whose main purpose is improvement. It is therefore an exercise that must be carried out each year so that its results can be fed back into the LAGs' evaluation reports, into the AER and so that the IE itself can use them for its own analyses.

Third meeting (2022) - Sharing the results and next steps

Considering that the methodology proposed by the IE is an experimental model defined through the participation and consultation of all the LAGs in two collegial events, it is important to verify whether it was adequate with respect to both the objectives and the knowledge and skills of those who implemented it. In the guidelines that accompanied the self-assessment forms, the IE explicitly clarified that each LAG could make its own choices and decide to gloss over some issues and focus on others, perhaps developing a more accurate analysis of the dynamics that significantly influenced the implementation of their strategies. Nevertheless, the LAGs preferred to evaluate all the items identified in the previous meetings.

At the event held on 19.04.2022, an attempt was made to highlight the importance of using all the elements in the self-assessment forms to argue and support one's judgements. The logical structure of the constructed methodology may seem superfluous but is instead the basis for the clarity and transparency of the judgement made. The completeness of an evaluative response passes above all through the intermediate steps between question and judgement.

For this reason, the IE had carefully selected evaluation criteria and useful elements to support the LAGs in arriving at the formulation of the evaluation response. The suggestions made by the IE were not always taken up by the LAGs and they often failed to follow the proposed and shared methodological thread. This does not mean that the judgements are unfounded or cannot be taken into consideration, but it has been noted that the LAGs often tend to formulate responses in an informal and discursive manner. Instead, the self-assessment can be a moment when a decision is made to address issues in a different way. LAG staff often have a very thorough knowledge of the dynamics of the context in which they operate and of the difficulties encountered on the ground in supporting development processes.

► Reflections on the effectiveness of the tested methodology and possible adjustments to it

The methodological criticalities identified are several and are presented below:

- There is a clear lack of collection or use of data, which instead are very important both to stimulate the involvement of the territory and the beneficiaries and to avoid self-referential judgements. The construction of a questionnaire, even a simple and unarticulated one, to be circulated among stakeholders, is recommended in the methodological support document provided by the IE.
- Time and resources of LAG staff to devote to self-assessment are limited and there is not much to be done on this factor other than to try to carve out time with timely planning of activities.
- The involvement of the territory was not envisaged by any LAG at this stage of the activities, but it is highly desirable for the future to have feedback on the activities carried out, to collect information and to disseminate the results.
- Most LAGs showed difficulty in moving from an informal and discursive approach to an analytical and punctual evaluative response.
- A fundamental point of self-evaluation is its use (e.g. to verify organisational and management choices, to disseminate progress, to share good practices, to represent problems and possible solutions to the MA) and it seems that for now this is simply an end.

► **Suggestions for improving the outcome of the self-assessment**

Considering what has emerged from the self-administration of the forms, it is necessary to modify one's analysis procedure given the resources available to devote to self-assessment, it may be useful to examine only certain elements from year to year. To improve the quality of the evaluation responses, it is suggested to select only a few topics in order to further deepen the analysis and make it clear and comprehensible. In this case, it is desirable to focus on data collection and the involvement of the territory. Imagining selecting only a couple of cards, the IE thinks that the LAGs might be able to provide more exhaustive answers and follow more rigorously the methodological structure of the evaluation. For the selection of topics, one could focus on specific aspects (e.g. of the strategy/goals set) or use what emerged in the various meetings with the IE.

Self-assessment activities in 2023

Self-assessment activities continue throughout the programme so that certain topics of particular interest can be checked periodically. Considering the limitations encountered in the self-administration of the forms in 2021 and 2022, for this year the IE has chosen to focus, in agreement with the MA, the self-assessment on the theme of added value. This choice was made for a twofold reason: on the one hand, the time can begin to be considered ripe to address the issue of added value and, on the other, the opportunity was taken to stimulate the LAGs to identify a project that can be considered representative of their work.

2024 activities and fourth meeting

On 16 April 2024, the evaluator organised the fourth collegial meeting with the aim of returning the results of the self-assessment exercise involving LAGs during 2023.

After retracing with the LAGs the main events that marked the self-assessment process, the Assessor introduced the participants to the objectives of the meeting; he then went on to recall the assessment matrix that guided the LAGs in the second self-assessment exercise, going into the merits of the assessment question and the assessment criteria into which it is declined. With reference to the presentation of the LAGs' judgements expressed by means of the self-

assessment form, the evaluator decided to summarise the elements of response for each criterion, trying to stimulate the participants' interventions through a series of questions, illustrated below, developed from their input.

1. *A very precise line of action of the Ligurian LAGs based on cooperation and well-defined upstream planning was identified. What have been the results and the effects on the territory of these choices?*
2. *Did such structured planning leave sufficient room to adapt to changes in the context that were inevitable over such a long period of time and which, moreover, saw the occurrence of extraordinary events?*
3. *What role did the specific action of the SM19.3 cooperation play in fostering integration and creating added value on the territory?*
4. *More than one LAG addresses the issue of the sustainability of projects over time, and in this regard, it is interesting to understand whether there have been any difficulties in maintaining the relationships created, considering that the centrality of partnerships in all LAGs' strategies clearly emerges.*
5. *Has the territory's response in terms of joining complex projects and/or participating in calls for tenders been adequate to expectations?*
6. *Were the management and administrative costs (e.g. related to the animation activities, the type of projects promoted, the number of small calls, etc.) high? Were they commensurate with the expected/achieved results? If and what would you redo? If and what would you improve?*
7. *Do you consider that you have the necessary human resources, in terms of numbers and skills, to develop the animation and accompanying actions needed to implement specific actions and best involve the territory with respect to the challenges/new features introduced by CSR 2023-2027?*
8. *The LAGs' assessment of their own work seems too positive; how do you plan to build on the experience gained in this programming within the new strategy for 2023-2027?*

► The projects identified by the LAGs

In the self-assessment form, the LAGs were asked to identify a project or initiative that best represented their work. The IE provided a form to be filled out to facilitate the collection of information: these projects could be the subject, following verification with the MA, of further in-depth study as part of the integration of the catalogue of good practices that is updated every two years. During 2024, the IE chose to deepen the projects presented by the LAGs by supplementing the information collected with direct interviews with the beneficiaries.

Self-assessment activities in 2025

Between March and April 2025, the IE conducted remote interviews with the Ligurian LAGs with the aim of drawing up a balance sheet of the evaluation and monitoring activities carried out during the 2014-2022 programming period, and of stimulating reflection on the knowledge needs that such activities could address in the new 2023-2027 programming period.

Self-assessment activities in 2026

In 2026, self-assessment activity focused on measuring indicator T23, which tracks jobs created through projects funded by LDS, expressed as Full-Time Equivalents (FTE). To this end, on 17 March 2026, the IE organised a video conference focus group with the Ligurian LAGs, with a twofold objective: on the one hand, to take stock of the monitoring activities already carried out by the LAGs with regard to the indicator, and on the other, to validate the methodological guidelines developed by the IE for its quantification.

► **Main findings**

Two of the Ligurian LAGs — GAL Provincia della Spezia and GAL Valli Savonesi — have already returned data on the number of jobs generated by projects funded under their LDS.

Between them, the two LAGs have created approximately 17 jobs expressed in FTEs, with additional units not countable under T23.

The projects funded under the LDS of GAL Provincia della Spezia generated a total of 6 FTEs, with an additional 3 units not countable under T23 (family collaborators and seasonal workers who were not yet active at the time of data collection). The jobs attributable to the indicator derive mainly from TI 6.4.4 (Progetto turismo attivo call for proposals) and TI 4.1.2, through hiring by an accommodation facility and a farm.

GAL Valli Savonesi recorded 11.2 FTEs and 2 non-T23 units, monitoring beneficiaries under SM 6.4, 4.1 and 6.2. SM 6.4 is the most productive SM in employment terms, with 9.7 FTEs created in the agritourism and hospitality sectors, complemented by 1 FTE from SM 4.1 and 0.5 FTEs from SM 6.2.