



**INDEPENDENT EVALUATION SERVICE OF THE  
REGIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR  
THE PERIOD 2014-2020 OF THE LIGURIAN REGION**

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**Thematic Report 2021 - The effectiveness of the  
Communication Strategy of the RDP 2014-20202 Liguria  
Region**

**Executive summary**

**Rome, February 2022**

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## Foreword

As highlighted by the European Commission, communication is the main tool through which to effectively promote the role of the European Union in rural development and agriculture to citizens, as it **actively and synergistically accompanies the implementation of Rural Development Programmes**.

Communication must also directly and clearly inform potential beneficiaries of the opportunities that Rural Development Programmes make available for farm development. With this in mind, the evaluation activity focuses on communication as a particularly important step in the implementation activities of EAFRD -funded programmes.

**The aim of the Thematic Evaluation Report "2021 The effectiveness of communication in the RDP 2014-2020 of the Liguria Region"** is to **verify the quality of the communication actions carried out by the Liguria Region within the RDP**, assessing the scope of the messages conveyed (in terms of clarity and perception) through the various channels and tools activated during the current programming period and **formulating useful suggestions to improve the implementation of the Communication Plan**, approved by DGR n. 1384/2015, **and to design more effective interventions for the future. Evaluating the effectiveness of the RDP communication strategy therefore means verifying the level of appreciation of the information addressed to potential beneficiaries and to the general public** and the capacity of the tools activated/information conveyed to make the various users more aware and autonomous in selecting the opportunities offered by the Programme. From this point of view, we proceeded to:

- to **analyse the content and the implementation of the Communication Strategy** linked to the RDP 2014-2022 of Liguria Region and to observe its implementation over time in terms of participation, as well as the loyalty to the different initiatives by the different targets/end users. In particular, the monitoring data collected for the main communication channels/tools activated by Liguria Region and the results of the surveys addressed to the General Public on the satisfaction and clarity of the Communication Strategy carried out in the years 2019-2021 have been examined.
- **To carry out a Customer Satisfaction survey focused on the beneficiaries of the RDP**. The survey was addressed to a sample of actual beneficiaries of the RDP (Operations: 4.1 - *Support for investments in agricultural holdings*, 4.3 - *Investments in infrastructure related to the development, modernisation or adaptation of agriculture*, 4.4 - *Support for non-productive investments linked to the achievement of agri-climatic-environmental objectives*, 6.1 - *Business start-up aid for young farmers*, 7.2 - *Essential infrastructure for rural populations*, 7.4 - *Investments for recreational, cultural and other services for rural population*, 8.3 - *Interventions to prevent damage to forests by fire and natural disasters*, 8.5 - *Interventions to mitigate forests and increase environmental value*, 8.6 - *Investments in forestry technologies*) in order to complete the framework of direct surveys among the recipients of communication activities, deepening a specific point of view and defining in a more detailed way the areas for improvement of the Communication Strategy, also in view of the next programming period.

These analyses made it possible to assess whether the efforts made in terms of visibility and awareness-raising in the territory and towards the different targets through communication, achieved the expected results as codified in the result indicators of the Strategy itself.

## 1 The communication strategy of the RDP 2014-2020

The fundamental principles of communication identified by the European Commission are inclusion, diversity and participation. In this perspective, the accessibility of information and events is an essential component for an institutional communication that is effective but above all capable of reaching the largest number of users. The main aim of the RDP Liguria Communication Strategy is to involve the entire regional population in communication activities in order to create a certain awareness of the role and competences of the RDP, the Region and the European Union in the field of rural development.

Also, the 3 identified targets are linked to different messages to be conveyed during the implementation of the Programme. The following table highlights this link and introduces the main channels/tools conceived by the Programme Manager to carry out the communication activity and to reach the different target groups.

**Table 1 - Main targets of the Communication Strategy, content of specific messages and dedicated channels/tools**

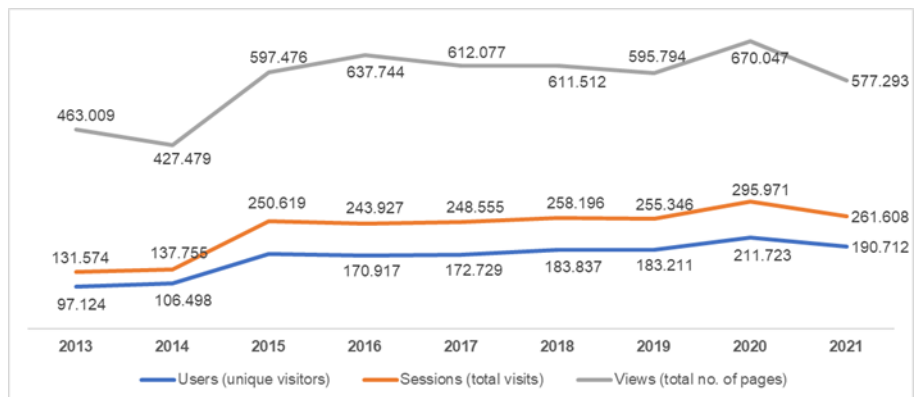
Target	Main message	Communication tool/ channel
<b>Citizens and the general public</b>	Raising awareness of the role played by the EU, the value of the EAFRD and its achievements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriligurianet.it website: section dedicated to RDP 2014-2020</li> <li>• Facebook, Blog and Youtube</li> <li>• Press releases (<i>mass media</i>)</li> <li>• Media advertising campaigns</li> <li>• Information material</li> <li>• Promotional gadgets</li> </ul>
<b>Partners and stakeholders</b> (public bodies, research institutes, universities, professional bodies, non-governmental organisations and others)	Specific communication to redirect information to potential beneficiaries about possible opportunities offered by the Region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriligurianet.it website: section dedicated to RDP 2014-2020</li> <li>• Facebook, Blog and Youtube</li> <li>• Press releases (<i>mass media</i>)</li> <li>• Information material</li> <li>• <i>Agriligurianews Newsletter</i></li> <li>• <i>Seminar, conference and workshop activities</i></li> <li>• <i>Media and multimedia products (videos, CD-ROMs, SMS services, smartphone apps, etc.).</i></li> <li>• <i>Monitoring (reports) and evaluation products</i></li> </ul>
<b>Potential and actual beneficiaries</b>	Clear information on eligible actions, methods and procedures for accessing funding, thus ensuring transparency, accessibility and impartiality in accessing resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriligurianet.it website: section dedicated to RDP 2014-2020</li> <li>• Facebook, Blog and Youtube</li> <li>• Press releases (<i>mass media</i>)</li> <li>• Media advertising campaigns</li> <li>• <i>Agriligurianews Newsletter</i></li> <li>• <i>Seminar, conference and workshop activities</i></li> <li>• <i>Media and multimedia products (videos, CD-ROMs, SMS services, smartphone apps, etc.).</i></li> </ul>

## 2 Analysis of the implementation of the Communication Strategy

The evaluator carried out a performance analysis of some of the main communication tools used by Regione Liguria to disseminate the RDP contents: Agriligurianet.it website, Agriligurianet Facebook page and Agriligurianews newsletter.

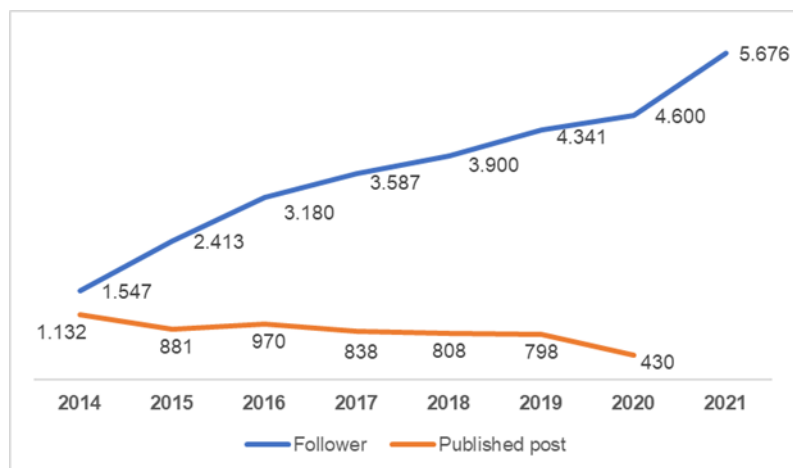
► **Agriligurianet.it: the portal for agriculture in Liguria**

The graph below shows the trend of three indicators from 2013 to 2021: the number of users and sessions is rather linear, except for the significant increase recorded between 2014 and 2015. On the other hand, the number of views is less homogeneous over the years: a plausible explanation is that in the years of transition between the old and the new programming (2013 - 2014) users visited the site in a less targeted way, browsing through the various sections, then focusing only on the thematic areas of their interest from 2015, the year in which the new RDP 2014 - 2020 became fully operational.



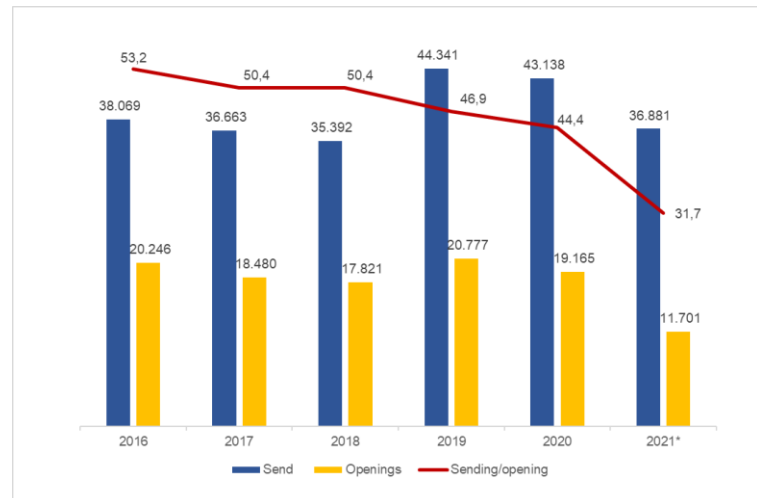
► **Agriligurianet: the Facebook account dedicated to the agricultural world and its territory**

As regards the Facebook page Agriligurianet, the data date from 2014. Over the years, the number of followers has continued to grow against a decreasing number of posts published. It is plausible to assume that behind the decrease in the number of posts there is a precise editorial choice: on the page there are both news related to rural development issues (technical meetings, in-depth analysis, news on the publication of calls for proposals, etc.) and news that tell and promote the territory (recipes, local festivals, promotion of local products, etc.).



► **Newsletter**

As can be seen from the graph below, the number of newsletters sent, which coincides with the number of registered users of the service, is quite variable over the period 2016-2021. In 2017 there was a decrease of 4% compared to the previous year, a figure that decreases more in 2018 with a further -3%. In contrast, 2019 marks a positive year with a 25% increase in mailings compared to 2018.



### 3 Results of satisfaction questionnaires carried out by Regione Liguria

Analysis of the results of the questionnaire addressed to the general public, in which 41 members of the general public participated, showed a general appreciation of the communication channels with a clear tendency for different users to prefer the **Facebook** page and the **Website** to stay informed about the various opportunities. After all, the two tools are also complementary and work synergistically due to their intrinsic characteristics: Facebook, like other social networks, allows to convey a lot of information in an instant way, while the Website allows to deepen and enter into the details of practices and actions to be undertaken to participate in the initiatives and opportunities offered by the RDP. Often Facebook posts also have a direct reference to institutional sites, through a hyperlink, thus allowing the user to deepen the topics of interest.

To complete the theme of complementarity of information channels, it is important to mention the role of the **newsletter**, which receives a rather positive opinion from respondents: its content provides a monthly summary of information on calls for tenders and opportunities, which allows users to keep up-to-date even if they do not actively follow the Facebook page and website.

The other information channels managed by the Region, such as **YouTube** and the **RDP blog**, seem to be less popular with respondents. There may be several reasons for this, but certainly the type of information that can be found on these two information sources contributes to this, less immediate as those returned by the Facebook page and less complete as those returned by an institutional website. Moreover, the blog, which should represent a place for the exchange of opinions, is used for the management of FAQs and is also rather outdated in terms of 'social' dynamics. To strengthen the exchange of opinions it could be very useful instead to develop a "chat bot" through the Facebook page or the website, which are the most used channels: this would allow users to formulate questions to obtain clarifications and report concerns and the Region to keep track of the main requests.

Here are some suggestions that emerged during the analysis:

- ▶ to improve the visibility of links and banners outside the institutional site: links to sites managed directly by the Region can be sponsored in institutional or commercial sites with similar contents in order to stimulate a greater number of subjects to visit these pages, including the "tourism" section of the Agriligurianet site in order to capture, for example, the potential interested in rural tourism;
- ▶ check the adequacy of users' interaction with the Region on the social pages, possibly providing a digital communication channel via instant messaging software to explore certain topics.

In general, the attention shown by the Liguria Region to the effectiveness of the Communication Strategy and to the satisfaction of its users was appreciated, as indeed the very subject of this report demonstrates.

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#### 4 Results of the Customer Satisfaction analysis carried out by the Independent Evaluator

Participation in this Customer Satisfaction (CS), as with those managed by the regional administration, was not very high. The number of responses was 57.

Entering into the specifics of the answers, the results of the survey showed that the **website Agriligurianet.it is the best known online channel** among the participants with 61% of the answers, followed by the Newsletter (33%) and finally by the Facebook page Agriligurianet with 8% of the total participants who said they knew and used the FB page.

With regard to the **Agriligurianet.it website, most of the** individual aspects were judged positively by 41% of the beneficiaries. In particular, it is particularly appreciated for the level of usefulness of the information it provides, for the quality of the information and updates on agriculture published and for the quality and completeness of the information conveyed. Less appreciated was the possibility to find specific information on the RDP and the usability on other devices.

With reference to the use of the **Agriliguriawebs Newsletter**, the second tool used by 33% of all participants, the specific aspects were judged to be good overall by an average of 59% of respondents. In particular, the clarity of presentation and the level of usefulness of the information provided were judged positively.

The specific features related to the **Facebook page Agriligurianet** - used only by 14% of the survey participants - have been evaluated as good overall: the Facebook page is followed in particular for the usability of the contents, the quality of the information conveyed and the easiness to share thematic in-depth analysis in addition to the RDP.

With reference to the **main areas/suggestions for improvement in the future for the individual communication channels, the participants requested a further effort to improve and make more usable the information on the calls**, with particular reference to the website and the Newsletter and the **detail and organisation of the published content**.

**The beneficiaries suggest to the MA to improve the effectiveness of the communication activities of the Liguria RDP through concrete actions, more targeted towards the**

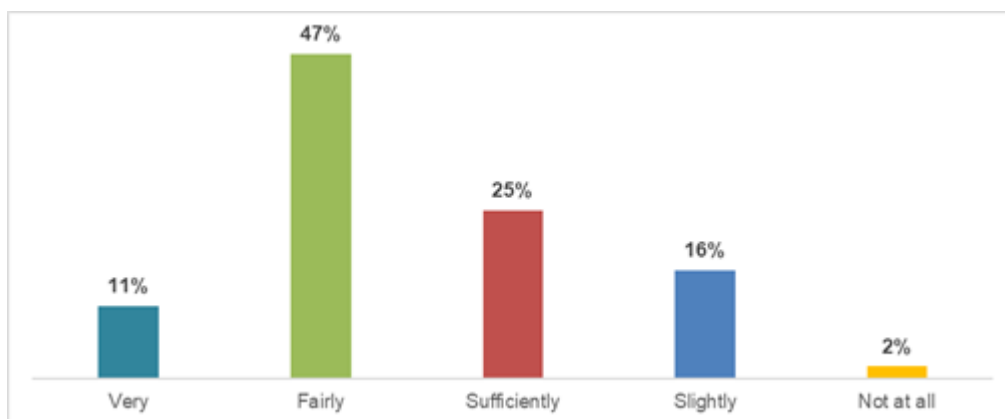
potential/actual beneficiaries and to intervene through "practical" solutions such as the introduction of an alert system on smartphones with regard to the main news published on the website (e.g. publication of a new call, availability of the ranking list, new youtube contents, etc.), as shown in the graph below. Among the suggestions that emerged from the survey, the beneficiaries also suggested **giving greater support to small municipalities in communication activities on the territory and disseminating clear and effective illustrative material on the support instruments.**

**Chart - CS Actual beneficiaries: What suggestions would you provide to improve the effectiveness of the communication activities of the Liguria RDP\*?**



With regard to the assessment of the "quality of the information acquired by the Administration", broadly understood also as the quality of the contents of the administrative documents and of the services offered by the Managing Authority (e.g. FAQ service), the **actual beneficiaries** responded positively in 83% of the answers.

**Chart - CS Actual beneficiaries: Was the information acquired by the administration (e.g. FAQ service) satisfactory?**



As emerged from the analysis of the answers to the satisfaction questionnaire carried out by the Liguria Region, as regards the most searched information within the web platforms, the section of the website most consulted by the respondents was the one related to the open calls and the deadlines for the planning/submission of the applications for support and/or implementation of the intervention. In this regard, the **beneficiaries participating in the CS suggest the MA to facilitate the availability of information on the Agriligurianet.it**



website, to carry out information events on the territory with the potential beneficiaries and to create guidelines that accompany the beneficiary in the compilation of the funding applications in a clear way. Therefore, among the beneficiaries, there is a need for greater clarity - with particular reference to requirements, constraints and obligations - and greater simplification of procedures. Many beneficiaries are also pushing for the introduction of an "alert" system, which informs beneficiaries directly on their smartphones or certified mail about the publication of new calls for proposals and how to find the relevant information, so that end users can operate as independently as possible during the application and management procedures.

## 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Theme	Conclusions	Recommendations
<b>Online communication channels</b>	The <b>Agriligurianet.it website</b> is the main showcase for agriculture in Liguria, both for those working in the field (technicians and trade associations), but also for direct beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries interested in the subject in various ways. The channel is appreciated and used both by the general public and by direct beneficiaries, demonstrating its ability to reach and inform the territory and to give visibility to the regional agriculture and rural development sector.	The web page is rather rich in contents, but not always immediately traceable and/or retrievable (e.g. document download area). It is therefore suggested to improve the organisation of the page contents, making the different thematic areas more recognisable.  It may also be appropriate to improve the usability of the site from a device.
	The <b>Agriligurianet Facebook page</b> is always up-to-date (the almost real-time update is very positive) and is appreciated by users for both technical information and information promoting the area. In this case the VI is intended to emphasise the commitment of the editorial team (2 people) to the quality and originality of the page content. On the whole, therefore, the updating and lively content of the FB page and website have achieved the objective of building user loyalty by overcoming the 'inertia of administrative time' thanks to the continuous and linear monitoring of communication activities.	Check the opportunity to strengthen interaction and exchange of opinions on social networks.
	The Agriculture <b>Youtube channel and the RDP Blog</b> are the least used online tools by survey participants due to their specific purpose and content (the Blog for example is basically a repository of FAQs addressed to the administration and therefore does not provide for interaction with users).	It is suggested to verify the possibility of widening and re-visiting the contents of the YouTube channel, for example by organising territorial marketing "theme days" on the FB page that refer to the video contents. By way of example, typical products, thematic festivals, good business practices could be publicised, exploiting local news and video content already present on the YouTube channel. This type of initiative could also be linked to the communication of RDP results in the strict sense of the term, an

Theme	Conclusions	Recommendations
		<p>opportunity for the administration to report on expenditure or material results achieved in a specific area or towards a specific sector.</p> <p>It should be noted that the Liguria Region has rationally chosen not to carry out a massive publicity campaign for the RDP in the region, given the high number of applications for the calls for tender recorded over the years, and has decided to defer to a campaign dedicated to the results.</p> <p>As far as the blog is concerned, it is mainly a repository of FAQs rather than a place open to debate. It might be appropriate to rethink the name of this communication channel.</p>
<p><b>Off-line communication tool</b></p>	<p>The <b>Agriligurianet Newsletter</b> has been published by the Rural Development offices for about 10 years, thus representing a constant and reliable communication tool. The public particularly appreciates the clarity of its presentation and the usefulness of the information it contains.</p>	<p>It might be advisable to historicize and index by theme the page on the Agriligurianet.it site that archives all the issues of the Newsletter to facilitate consultation over time even for non-subscribers.</p> <p>Given a certain negative drop in the ratio of mailings/open mails-open newsletters, the addresses to which the document is sent could be reviewed in order to verify those who are still really interested in the service and to have a correct account of the number of recipients.</p>
<p><b>Participation in satisfaction surveys</b></p>	<p>The participation of users is rather low compared to regional expectations. The IA would like to point out, however, that this may be due to the low appeal of surveys at a time when online surveys have greatly increased. However, the initiative launched to constantly collect feedback from users requesting information on the RDP (by phone, email, chat request, etc.) is considered very positive.</p> <p><a href="https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfiEEoxuE3XqyWwtKN-IJMsqACH5gKRZDczICbw_QzJDVmdGg/viwwform?usp=sf_link">https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfiEEoxuE3XqyWwtKN-IJMsqACH5gKRZDczICbw_QzJDVmdGg/viwwform?usp=sf_link</a></p>	<p>It is suggested to continue to encourage the direct and constant participation of users interested in various ways by the initiatives activated by the RDP. For example, it could be useful to develop a "chat bot" via the Facebook page or the website or an update "alert" system.</p> <p>Once the restrictions due to the COVID- 19 pandemic have been eased, it may be appropriate to consider a feedback detection system also during in-person events as already tested in 2019 (ref. QVC 19 AER 2021).</p>