



EVALUATION OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF AXIS 6 "COMPETENCE 2020" TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE OBJECTIVES SET IN THE ERDF OP 2014-2020 "WALLONIA-2020.EU" INCLUDING THE ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PORTFOLIOS AND PROJECTS OF THIS AXIS

Executive Summary

The ERDF Operational Programme 2014-2020 must contribute to the sustainable economic development of Wallonia, enhancing the knowledge-based economy, enabling the revitalization of urban public space, ambitious in terms of reducing greenhouse gases and transitioning to a low-carbon economy.

In a logic of triple helix of innovation that links research and training actors, companies and public authorities, together with axes 1 and 2 of the ERDF Programme, axis 6 of the Programme, the subject of this evaluation, has been designed to **promote the adequacy of the Walloon workforce to the needs of companies, in particular SMEs, to meet the dual challenge of increasing the employment rate and productivity, which are the central points of the Walloon development strategy**. Through this axis, the aim is to support skills development and lifelong learning **by financing state-of-the-art equipment** (and adapted infrastructure) to meet the skills needs of Walloon companies. The acquisition of state-of-the-art educational equipment should enable competence centres and centres for advanced technology (CTAs) to deliver high value-added training in technical sectors for which regional entrepreneurs are looking for skilled labour.

The **potential direct beneficiaries** of the funding provided via axis 6 are the entities located in Wallonia offering training for the acquisition of new professional skills. They include:

- approved competence or training centres;
- advanced technology centres;
- qualifying education.

Indirect **beneficiaries** are people in training (regardless of their status: student, unemployed, employee, etc.) and companies.

Below we present the key messages of the evaluation in relation to the main evaluation criteria, as well as the recommendations made.

RELEVANCE

A strategy relevant to the realities of the Walloon productive fabric

The strategy for the acquisition of state-of-the-art equipment provides a targeted response to the shortage of labour in certain economic sectors or to the mismatch of The skills of the Walloon workforce to the needs of the labour market. Training using this equipment allows the necessary upgrading of learners in order to meet the specific skills needs of companies and thus facilitate recruitment. Improving the employability of learners saves training time within the



company and thus represents a gain in productivity. This has positive effects in terms of employment: the acquisition of a high value-added skill and/or a mastery of a state-of-the-art tool acts as the main trigger for the hiring of apprentices while entrepreneurs see their ability to create jobs facilitated.

A necessary strategy to meet the skills needs of companies, which are constantly changing

The productive forces and creative activities of Walloon companies follow technological developments, political orientations and market trends specific to their sector: their skills needs can fluctuate.

The strategy of acquiring state-of-the-art equipment makes it possible to increase the attractiveness of the centres' training courses vis-à-vis learners and companies and gives the training centres the necessary agility to adapt their training to these changes.

Competence centres, learners and companies welcome the process of integration into employment, facilitated by training using state-of-the-art equipment equivalent to that used in the workplace. Enterprises, thanks to a faster availability of the skills necessary for their productive activities, are better able to achieve productivity gains and remain competitive in their sector.

However, the strengthening and sustainability of companies' collaborations with the network of competence centres is necessary to ensure effective technological monitoring.

An essential strategy to enable training centres to finance state-of-the-art equipment

The investigations carried out make it possible to highlight the significant needs of training centres to acquire new equipment and in particular state-of-the-art equipment, but note the low availability of financial resources, other than the ERDF, to make these acquisitions.

COHERENCE

A very strong articulation of axis 6 with national policies to support training

- Training and employment are at the heart of various public policy strategies in Wallonia (Marshall Plan 4.0, Walloon Strategy for Sustainable Development, Get up Wallonia). These are also subjects of great importance at the level of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (responsible for education issues) and the Belgian government) (cf. Belgian recovery plan).
- The training centres, which are actors dependent on the public sphere and financed by the government, are intended to contribute to this policy and also express their great satisfaction at seeing vocational training placed at the forefront of political agendas.

Complementarity with axes 1 and 2 of the ERDF OP Wallonia 2014-2020 in a triple helix logic for innovation

- The complementarity between axis 6 and axes 1 and 2 is mentioned in the OP (link with S3, contribution to the development of competitiveness clusters), in a logic of triple helix for innovation (cooperation of actors in research, business and training).
- The investigations carried out make it possible to testify overall to good relations of exchange and coordination between the actors of a sector of activity in this logic of triple helix, particularly in the design sector which benefits from a portfolio of projects common to axes 1 and 6 of the ERDF OP.

A very strong articulation with the ESF OP (axis 2)



- The link between axis 6 of the ERDF and axis 2 of the ESF is provided for in the text of the OPs: complementarity is provided for with the assumption of training hours by the ESF and that of state-of-the-art equipment in support of these training by the ERDF.
- At programme level, the actors wanted to facilitate this coordination with the creation of a consultation body (joint ERDF/ESF monitoring committee). At project level, the project leaders (= the centres) coordinate the actions financed by the various EISFs.
- The main difficulty in linking the ERDF and the ESF applies to centres which have built a project with both grants but have had only one of the two: some centres have thus been able to acquire state-of-the-art funding without being able to recruit teachers providing the linked training.

EFFICIENCY

The use of the equipment and the additional reception capacity financed by axis 6 is varied, reflecting the diversity of the public having access to these investments, and takes place throughout the Walloon territory.

The evaluation verified that the projects allow for the acquisition of new skills and better employability as well as a better integration of apprentices within their company. There is great **satisfaction on the part of the** final beneficiaries, linked to the good post-training integration rates.

The effects of Axis 6 are most strongly marked within the training centres, which seem to have achieved all the expected effects (strengthening their attractiveness for learners and companies, providing quality training, etc.). For learners, the main effect of training with state-of-the-art equipment is the adaptation of their skills to the needs of the labour market.

Axis 6 responds globally to the needs of businesses but must further support the improvement of their competitiveness. The impact of equipment and the extension of the centres' infrastructure on businesses is difficult to measure. The centres do not have sufficient resources to follow the path of companies beyond their involvement during training. The effects on companies collected during the evaluation are largely anecdotal: there is an anticipation of electrification needs in the automotive sector thanks to the work of the centers, "punch" training organized urgently to respond to recruitment difficulties in the digital sector, as well as the opening of construction companies to new (public) markets through training on energy efficiency.

A problem of matching supply and demand partially persists in Wallonia. Overall, the SMEs that responded to the survey appear to face significant recruitment problems, particularly in terms of workforce training. ERDF equipment alone does not solve the problem of labour shortages in technical professions, but it does strengthen the image and attractiveness of training.

DURABILITE

For infrastructure, sustainability is ensured by the effort made by the training centres to organise the infrastructure so that it adapts to the changing needs of the centre (construction and development of multipurpose spaces, with movable walls, etc.).

For state-of-the-art equipment: the issue of durability is an inherent difficulty with state-of-the-art equipment due to very rapid technical, technological, regulatory developments, etc.



The equipment acquired thanks to the ERDF has made it possible to achieve a relatively sustainable technological leap (on the one hand by upgrading compared to previous equipment and on the other hand by achieving a technological advance of 5 or 10 years depending on the equipment). They are also accompanied by strategies to ensure the sustainability of this equipment (creation of maintenance funds for example).

Nevertheless, the question is recurrent because to remain state-of-the-art, the equipment must be regularly renewed. In this sense, the renewal of the measure in the next OP is welcomed by the actors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation n°1 – Support the financing strategy of training centres for the acquisition of state-of-the-art equipment and the development of infrastructure

- Secure the strategy of Axis 6, which covers both the acquisition and renewal of state-of-the-art equipment and the acquisition and development of training centre infrastructure.
- Enable training centres to contribute to public policy strategies in favour of training and employment and to meet the skills needs of all actors in the Walloon territory (and not to the specific requests of a few private actors)
- Promote, in the long term, the process of creation and renewal of training recognized over time by recruiters and learners.

Recommendation n°2 – Continue to finance so-called state-of-the-art equipment as well as a (minor) share of conventional equipment that complements state-of-the-art equipment

- Enable the continuous training of all worker profiles in Wallonia, in order to strengthen the workforce in its entirety and thus accelerate the technological transition of the sector. Continuing training must not only target highly qualified professionals but be accessible to different profiles of workers – as is already the case for certain training courses benefiting from equipment financed under Axis 6 of the ERDF.

Recommendation n°3 - Pérenniser the consultation of the actors around the global challenges of training and on the specific question of equipment and infrastructures

- Improve the relevance of training (and the acquisition of equipment and infrastructure) to the needs of learners and employers, in particular by ensuring that the needs and perspectives of companies are properly taken into account.
- Meet the competitiveness needs of companies by creating specialized training, through the acquisition of the appropriate equipment and the recruitment of expert trainers, up to date with the latest market trends.

Recommendation 4 – Increase flexibility in the selection and acquisition of state-of-the-art equipment during programming

- Ensure the alignment of the advanced equipment acquired with the most recent developments in technology.
- Reduce the time between the selection of equipment and its first use, in order to reduce the need to anticipate future trends.

Recommendation n°5 – Encourage the promotion of equipment acquired to strengthen the attractiveness of sectors, in particular to young audiences

- Strengthen the attractiveness of technical training, in particular to young audiences, in particular by highlighting innovative aspects (link to technologies, digital technology, etc.) and attractive aspects (employment in these sectors for example).

Recommendation n°6 - Strengthening coherence and articulation between the ESIF (ERDF and ESF) and within the ERDF OP in the implementation of projects

- Strengthening complementarity between the different European funds
- Strengthen synergies between projects and focus resources on key sectors of the Walloon economy

