

Evaluation of the “Green and digital transitions in SMEs” axis

(based on extracts of the Terms of Reference for the “Evaluation of the operational programme “competitiveness and cohesion 2014-2020”)

Rationale

In the 2014-2020 programming period, Croatia implements, among others, the Operational Programme Competitiveness and Cohesion 2014-2020 (OPCC) co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF), with a total value of €8.16 billion. [...] The first adopted version of the OPCC had 10 priority axes, [...], but the European Commission decision of 3 June 2021 adopted version 10.0 of the OPCC, which added two priority axes (PA) to the programme among which the **PA 11: “Strengthening crisis recovery in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and preparing for a green, digital and resilient economic recovery”**

[...] The total allocation of priority axis 11 amounts to EUR 132,557,340.00.

Intervention

Under priority axis 11, the Call for proposals [...], reference number KK.11.1.1.01, was launched. [...] Its purpose is to revitalise and restart the growth and development of SMEs affected by the economic crisis in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which should be achieved by supporting the expansion of technological capacities and the improvement of business processes with a focus on business digitalisation, fostering the use of SOTA technologies, circular economy principles, energy efficiency and the use of energy from renewable sources.

Beneficiaries of the grants are small and medium-sized entrepreneurs (SMEs) affected by the economic crisis in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

[...] The intervention categories planned under the Call for proposals are:

- Generic investment in production
- R & I processes (including voucher systems, process, design, services and social innovation)
- Support for environmentally friendly production processes and resource efficiency

[...] 274 grant contracts have been signed, of which 231 are completed, 13 are ongoing and 30 contracts were terminated.

Evaluation

The aim of the impact evaluation of priority axis 11 is to assess the results achieved and the effects of financial support against the targets for the period up to the end of 2023, [...] to be able to better target investments in green and digital objectives in the future.

[...] The evaluation should answer some of the following indicative questions :

RELEVANCE

1. Are the key elements of intervention logic and/or theory of change in line with the needs, challenges and priorities of the Republic of Croatia? [...]
2. How are support measures tailored to the specific needs of SMEs affected by the COVID-19 crisis?

EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT

3. [...] Are there measurable differences between SMEs that have received financial support and SMEs that have not received support?
4. [...] Would greater impact on the green and digital transition of the economy had been achieved if the Call for proposals had not been limited only to companies registered in sector C manufacturing (NKD 2007)?
5. [...] did investments in improving and innovating SMEs' processes and business organisation have a different impact on business performance and business success (increased export and sales revenue) compared to investments in environmentally friendly production processes and resource efficiency?
6. [...] Has the investment enabled faster and better adaptation of entrepreneurs to contemporary and future eco and environmental (green) requirements? Has the implementation of digitalisation activities facilitated access to markets, reduced operating costs and improved adaptation to changes in the business environment?

EFFICIENCY

7. What risks, circumstances and reasons brought on the termination of the grant contracts (the contract termination rate in this priority axis is higher than the contract termination rate in priority axis 3 Business Competitiveness and priority axis 1 Strengthening the economy through research and innovation) [...]

Methodological approach and possible methods

The evaluation methodology should include a theory-based approach, and different qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods and tools that complement each other, including for example desk research, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, case studies, the counterfactual method.