'Methods and tools to support the public administration reform (RiformAttiva)'

Case study of Italian ESF project under the study 'Progress Assessment of the ESF Support to Public Administration' (PAPA)

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Operational Programme	OP Governance and Institutional Capacity – TO11: Better public administration – Governance and Institutional Capacity
	Priority Axis: PA 1: Development of administrative and institutional capacity for the modernisation of public administration
	Specific Objective: 1.3. Improvement of the performance of public administration (TO11)
	Action: 1.3.5. Rationalising public administrations to improve organisational efficiency and personnel management
Beneficiary organisation	Department of Public Administration
Target groups	Regions and local governments
Project duration	July 2017- July 2020
Budget	EUR 7,807,550.00 (ESF contribution: EUR 5,837,999.97)
Project manager (email address)	Claudia Migliore, project manager, Formez (cmigliore@formez.it)
Partners	-
Project/ organisation website	http://www.ot11ot2.it/dfp-organismo-intermedio/progetti/riformattiva

This case study was produced during the 'Progress Assessment of the ESF Support to Public Administration - PAPA' project that was contracted by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission. The purpose of this project was to present specific cases of ESF-funded public administration reform and capacity building initiatives, as well as to show the role of ESF financial support to public administration for accountability purposes. This report provides a story on the project **'Methods and tools to support the public administration reform'**, which discusses its context and purpose; characteristics of the team implementing it; main challenges faced and difficulties encountered during implementation; key developments during the implementation process; results and impacts achieved; as well as lessons learned and the contribution of ESF.

METHODS AND TOOLS TO SUPPORT THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM (RIFORMATTIVA)

Introduction: context of the project

Italy is considered as a country with an over-legalistic tradition of public administration[1]. It belongs to the Napoleonic administrative tradition, which is characterised by a conception of law as an instrument for intervening in society, rather than as a means of conflict resolution between different societal actors[2].

In line with this, the RiformAttiva project's rationale and its dynamics can be identified with two interrelated and key features of the political and administrative context in Italy: political instability and the 'implementation gap' in public sector reform. Both have affected the dynamics of the various public sector reform programmes and, in particular, their effectiveness. The short duration of political leadership represents a threat to the approval and implementation of policy interventions, irrespective of the political salience of the issue and the need for legal enactment. Furthermore, the Italian attitude to 'innovate by law' goes hand-in-hand with a serious 'implementation gap'[3]. In other words, Italian public administrations display two scenarios: either they have formally adopted management tools prescribed by reform laws but don't use them, or they do not comply with the law[4].

Therefore, the success of reforms in an unstable political context, characterised by frequent government turnovers, depends on meeting certain 'soft' conditions such as the ability of public managers to operationalise new reform laws, keep a community of practice alive, and effectively deal with the complexity of the legal process.

The regions are quite strong in Italy and this is especially relevant for understanding the motivations behind the launch of the RiformAttiva project. Public sector reforms are more difficult to implement than in unitary systems, because the different levels and types of administrations (over 9,000 in Italy) enjoy a high degree of organisational and management autonomy. There is 'evidence in Italy that reforms designed at one level of government and put into effect by other levels of government (…) have a more eventful path than reforms directly implemented by the central government'[5]. Regional and local governments in particular are often required to implement new reforms without additional resources and in conditions of austerity. Moreover, the local context is highly heterogeneous.

Based on the above, the 2014-2020 National Operational Programme (NOP) on Governance and Institutional Capacity focuses on the issue of institutional and administrative capacity building and includes a specific pillar on the 'Development of institutional and administrative

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[1] Barzelay and Gallego 2010; Ongaro 2008; Mele and Ongaro 2014

[2] Meneguzzo 2007; Kickert 2005

[3] Meneguzzo 1998; Gualmini 2008; Cepiku, Hinna, Scarozza and Bonomi, 2016

[4] Ongaro and Valotti 2008; Mele and Ongaro 2014; Cepiku 2017

[5] Ongaro and Valotti 2008

capacity for public sector modernization', which relies, among others, on the following priority: 'Investing in institutional capacity building and efficiency of public administrations and public services at national, regional and local level to implement reforms, improve regulation and good governance' and on specific objectives such as 'enhancing performance in public administration" and 'reducing regulatory burdens'.

The approach in the programme:

a) On the one hand, it took reform actions beyond the policy cycle, identifying actions to address criticalities in the administrative and institutional context, starting from the gaps in the reform's implementation process;

b) On the other, it provided a large amount of resources, higher than in the past, to implement capacity-building measures in a multi-level perspective. The budget totals EUR 7,8 million and combines funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with national co-financing. The national funding decreased from EUR 2,439 to EUR 1,969 million, while EU contribution remained the same.

The Department for Public Administration promoted a number of coordinated actions to support implementation. Part of the actions were implemented directly by the Department, others were implemented by other administrations.

The RiformAttiva project was conceived to address the implementation gap, and in particular, to enhance the effectiveness of the public administration reforms approved by Minister of Public Administration, Marianna Madia during 2016-2017, which focused on[6]:

- Enhancing transparency and access to information through the approval of the Freedom of Information Act (FoIA);
- Rationalising government-owned enterprises;
- Simplifying administration in certain areas to attract strategic investments;
- Regarding public employment, addressing absenteeism, reducing precarious temporary employment, revising hiring mechanisms, creating a single pool of top managers and introducing criteria for personnel planning;
- Regarding performance evaluation, introducing general national objectives alongside specific objectives for single agencies, empowering citizens-based performance, and strengthening the link between financial and strategic planning;
- Revising (simplifying and streamlining) the Conferenza dei servizi (service conference), an inter-institutional board that decides on matters that affect different types and levels of government;
- Reforming the budget (Legislative Decree No. 90/2016); and
- Producing the Strategy for Digital Growth 2014-2020 and revising the Digital Administration Code.

While Minister Madia continued to serve in the Gentiloni Cabinet until June 2018, RiformAttiva was directly affected by its replacement by the Conte Government, which altered the political context considerably during the project's implementation.

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[6] Cepiku 2017

Notwithstanding the frequent political turnover, the needs that the project seeks to address still persist. Taking the country as a whole, high administrative burdens for businesses and a complex and unstable fiscal legislation, placed Italy in 51st place out of 190 countries globally in the World Bank's 'Ease of Doing Business' rankings in 2019.

Design and execution of the ESF-funded project

Purpose of the ESF-supported project

The framework for RiformAttiva is provided by the National Operational Programme (NOP) on Governance and Institutional Capacity.

Unlike in the past, the issue of administrative and institutional capacity building acquired a strategic importance and a peculiar visibility in the 2014-2020 programming period. This allowed the Department for Public Administration to adopt a number of measures aimed at promoting system actions and their implementation at local level.

RiformAttiva is one of these projects, but not the only one.

In particular, some specific projects under the 2014-2020 NOP 'Governance and institutional capacity building' are the methodological and strategic reference framework for the implementation of the actions under the project RiformAttiva. This is particularly true for the projects 'National Delivery unit' and 'Competence centre FOIA' that are aimed, among other things, at developing methodologies, guidelines and general support actions addressed to all administrations, respectively on the timescale of administrative simplification, transparency and generalized civic access.

The two projects will contribute to RiformAttiva by developing operational methodologies and strategies to support the implementation of reform actions that RiformAttiva will implement on the ground in a sample of local administrations, paying special attention to the organizational-technical conditions for effective implementation, so as to identify the enabling factors for all public administrations.

in general, past ESF-supported projects have contributed to creating a shared strategy of intervention in public sector reform and to develop a critical mass of competencies and people. The latter has ensured some continuity in the composition of thematic task forces (especially the one on simplification) that have survived political volatility.

The main actor of RiformAttiva is the Department of Public Administration; Formez PA was entrusted by the Department for Public Administration to carry out the project. Formez PA is an in-house private association / technical in-house agency of the Department of Public Administration and other partner administrations. Formez has normally been engaged by the Department of Public Administration to carry out national projects in support of governance and institutional building in the past two decades. In RiformAttiva, it played a coordinating role at the moment of the launch of the project

The governance of the project, entrusted to the Head of the Public Administration Department, was ensured by a working group (hereinafter the project's team) including the project

manager from Formez and representatives from the Public Administration Department's offices (experts of specific areas, officers responsible for programming actions funded under the ESIF and officers responsible for the administrative management of such funds). The working group had ongoing formal and informal interactions, coordination meetings, etc.

From an operational viewpoint, the implementation of the project was carried out by a large working group including employees from FormezPA and experts specifically recruited for the project (hereinafter, the Formez team).

The intention of the project was to accompany top-down reforms and operationalise them through support interventions. The aim of RiformAttiva was to support regional and local governments in the implementation of the reforms and, more generally, in their efforts to modernise their organisational structures and procedures through their active engagement. Public administrations were to become protagonists of change, rather than subjects, and had to develop the necessary know-how to sustain change over time. By doing this, RiformAttiva contributes to specific objective 1.3, 'improving the performance of public administrations' and more specifically to measure 1.3.5 'rationalising public administrations to improve organisational efficiency and personnel management' of the 2014-2020 NOP 'Governance and Institutional Capacity'.

As originally designed, RiformAttiva included three areas of activity:

1. The pilot testing of a methodology for implementing the public administration reforms approved in 2016-2017;
2. Supporting the coordination of all Department of Public Administration's projects aimed at accompanying reforms; and
3. Creating a National Observatory on Public Administration.

Regarding the first area of activity, this refers to a methodology for pilot administrations to develop action plans that specify new roles, new procedures and regulations, and innovative organisational solutions that enhance the relationship between functions and services, in four fields:

- Administrative simplification (inter-institutional service conferences on administrative and environmental procedures affecting enterprises).
  The Legislative decree nr 126/2016 established a one-stop shop for new businesses or building activities and introduced a silence-is-consent clause (segnalazione certificata di inizio attività or SCIA; certified announcement on the commencement of an activity). The Legislative decree nr 127/2016 regulated the so-called *Conferenza dei servizi*, an inter-institutional board that decides on matters that affect different types and levels of government. The way it works was simplified and the time needed to complete processes was shortened by: reducing cases where the Conferenza is mandatory; reducing the amount of time needed for calling the meeting, encouraging the use of ICT tools; introducing the single representative for central administrations; introducing the silence-is-consent clause. In case of conflicts between state administrations, the Prime Minister, prior to a resolution of the Council of Ministers, makes the decision.
  In particular, the reform law differentiated the types of Conferenza dei servizi: there are now asynchronous and synchronous inter-institutional authorising boards. The former takes place on-line, yet complying with the maximum terms of 45 days (or 90

days, in case the object refers to issues such as environment, health or security among others) to complete the procedure.

- General civic access.
  The Legislative decree nr 97/2016, also known as the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), obliged public administrations to deliver information and documents requested by citizens within thirty days. This decree, which is to be implemented under the control of the anticorruption authority (ANAC), should also lessen the quantity of documents and information that administrations are obliged to publish under the previous legislation on transparency.

- Performance management.
  A key area of public administration reform in Italy in the past decade has been performance management. The implementation of the legislative decree nr 150 of 2009 on performance management in the public sector has been judged by both empirical studies and government reports as unsatisfactory. Pay-for-performance is a management tool that continues to be ineffective; bonuses are distributed uniformly without a real differentiation based on the performances achieved. The project focused on innovations to enhance the effectiveness of individual performance assessment systems and on external evaluation forms by citizens.

- Competencies assessment and human resources planning based on competencies.
  The so-called Personnel Requirement Plan is one of the key elements of the reform, initiated by the Delegation Law issued n. 124 on August 7th 2015, which was realised by the adoption of numerous implementing decrees, including Legislative Decree n. 75 of 25 May 2017, in force since June 22nd 2017. The personnel requirement plan, which must be approved every year and is valid for three years, takes the place of the previous 'planning of personnel needs' and its applicable indications are defined by the Guidelines that the Department of Public Administration has issued in the inter-ministerial decree on May 8th 2018.
  Among the main measures introduced there is the progressive overcoming of the actual personnel structure and the introduction of a new dynamic recruitment model, based on needs and strategic priorities and no longer on vacancies. It pursues the specific aim of recruiting those skills for which public services are mostly in need. The concept of needs exceeds the static criterion of the current structure of personnel and implies a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the needs of the administration, focusing on emerging and most innovative professional profiles, due to technological and organisational evolution.

For the pilot testing of the reform implementation method (first area), the main expected activities included:

- Promoting the project to the beneficiary public administrations;
- Selecting 17 pilot administrations and signing collaborative agreements with them;
- Implementing the support interventions consistently with the needs expressed by the selected public administrations and defining reform implementation instruments and methods;
- Extending the method of a further 108 public administrations at the second (post-pilot) stage, making 125 beneficiary administrations in total; and

- Validating and diffusing the method and instruments so developed, so that a further 100 public administrations benefit from the dissemination.

Area 2 was aimed at strengthening the coordinating role of the reforms by the Department of Public Administration. Such activities will continue to be carried out, but outside of the project.

Area 3 referred to the creation of a National Observatory on Public Administration and was no longer considered interesting by the new government. The resources that were planned for the two areas will be invested in the first area.

Due to the change in government, the second and third areas were abandoned in July.

However, the 'operational slant' of the project was confirmed as opposed to more research-based lines of activity (i.e. the one about the National Observatory on Public Administration). The implementation of the project, thanks to an increased number of administrations involved, was an opportunity to enhance, where possible, the additional demand for support in implementing the reform actions. In particular, in September 2019, the Formez team proposed two new areas of action:

a) Developing the ability to use social media, with the aim of facilitating:

- The promotion and dissemination of new public communication models to inform about, and make citizens and businesses aware of, the objectives and results of reforms;
- The participation of stakeholders in the administrative reform actions, in order, among other objectives, to customize implementation tools and receive feedback on achieved results, level of satisfaction, etc.;
- The establishment, development and consolidation of 'centers of competence' and 'networks' on the themes of the reform, fostering the exchange, sharing, creation and enhancement of knowledge among public employees and managers.

b) Planning the Professional System and, more specifically, a catalogue of professional profiles in the Sicily region to be developed in conjunction with other regions and complex administrations. It is worth reminding that the objective of the project *RiformAttiva* is not to provide assistance to individual administrations, but rather to develop, in the field, methods of intervention to be translated into 'system actions'.

Activities under a) and b) are about to be started.

Implementation of the ESF project: main developments

The implementation of the activities comprised in area 1 (The pilot testing of a methodology for implementing the public administration reforms approved in 2016-2017) included three different phases.

Within the narrower project scope, in the first phase, as planned, 17 pilot administrations were identified at the three levels, and their political leaders signed collaboration agreements:

- Regional (4) - Campania, Lazio, Piedmont, and Sicily;

- Provincial (3) - Modena, Pesaro Urbino, and Potenza; and
- Municipal (10) - Ascoli Piceno, Caserta, Grosseto, Pescara, Prato, Ragusa, Rimini, Savona, Udine, and Vicenza.

The collaboration agreements covered two years and did not include any funding or staff mobility. The pilot administrations committed to identify and nominate someone responsible for the project execution, define a working plan on the themes they have chosen, establish a dedicated working group for each theme, ensure the collaboration of all concerned internal units and external stakeholders to the project, promote the diffusion of the results achieved.

The role of the Department and Formez through RiformAttiva was to accompany all 17 pilot administrations in the preparation and the implementation of a working plan, putting at their disposal the necessary technical competencies through training and local meetings. Each of the pilot administrations could put forward its candidature for two project themes. A total of 25 plans were approved and 22 implemented. Of these, 17 plans of 13 administrations have been formally approved by the administrations. The plans included objectives, activities and resources.

Formez managed the interaction among actors through working meetings. The development of implementation methods and instruments occurred in parallel with the drafting of secondary legislation. The latter was informed by intermediary results of the project, especially those concerning performance evaluation and personnel planning.

In the second phase, a call was issued by Formez for regional, provincial and municipal administrations to participate in the pilot testing. A sponsorship role was played by the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI); the objective of the call is to select administrations that are interested in developing the issues of administrative simplification, general civic access, competencies assessment and human resources planning based on competencies) through the application of the tools and methodologies developed with pilot administrations during the first phase.

The call did not offer any financial incentive. The expected benefit was accompaniment in reforms that addressed areas which were new to Italian public administrations, which were not equipped with the necessary tools and competencies.

As a result of the call, 108 administrations were selected (almost twice as many compared to the estimated amount) to receive assistance in using the methodologies developed with the pilot administrations including through an external consultancy society in support to the project. A key role is played by pilot administrations that participated in the implementation of activities in this phase by sharing their experiences in meetings and conferences or through remote consultation.

To date, the activities included in this phase are still underway.

The third phase of the project, implemented with the support of an external consultancy society, includes the dissemination and provision of support for the use of methods and tools to implement the reform in additional 100 administrations, to be carried out through traditional or remote guidance (webinars, e-learning activities, MOCs – Massive Open Online Courses)

aimed at sharing knowledge and knowhow among public employees, especially those who are directly involved in the implementation of reforms.

Given that it is not possible to assess the impact of reforms in the aforementioned areas, first, because no formal evaluations have taken place and second, because it is too early to estimate an impact, considering the stop-and-go approach, due to the change of government, we can, however, identify the main implementing difficulties and the strengths.

The main difficulty the project has encountered so far has been the lack of adequate competencies, especially for some key reform themes such as access to information (under FOIA) and competency-based human resources planning. The working groups established in each pilot administration sometimes were inadequate in terms of skills, especially those on the themes of human resources competencies and assessment and on the theme of civic access. Indeed, the project aims at addressing precisely these gaps by developing the skills of individual employees and, more generally, administrative capacity; in any case, having selected pilot administration greatly lacking these skill, allowed both the Department for Public Administration and Formez to have a clear picture of the real conditions of public administrations (albeit not being a representative sample) that are having to implement regulatory provisions.

A slowdown was also determined by the change of local political leaders and by the heterogeneous levels of organisational maturity and competencies among the pilot administrations. Some administrations completed their plans ahead of the deadlines while others did not. Some themes were abandoned. However, this is an exogenous variable regarding the implementation of the project.

Another issue has been the commitment of the various administrations involved in the project and the competencies of the working groups. Both being exogenous factors, the main strategies adopted by the Formez team have been to strongly link the evolution of the project to the policy guidelines issued by the Department of Public Administration and to commit the administrations to formal work plans. Another strategy to keep the interest of the administrations alive during the change of government has been to provide them with 'accessory' support services in order not to lose touch with them.

A relevant obstacle during the project implementation has been carrying out the procurement procedures to consultancy organisations to be involved in the subsequent stages of RiformAttiva. One and a half years of procedures was considered a long time, considering that without the completion of the bid, activities could not proceed forward. For the future, greater project management capacities, as far as Formez is concerned, are deemed imperative for the effectiveness of such large projects.

The need to engage external companies to support dissemination activities in a significant number of administrations (108) shows another specific criticality, i.e. the lack in public administrations and in Formez, of a significant number of experts in the areas of the administrative reform (administrative simplification, transparency, civic access, etc.) who were able to support administrations strategically and operationally.

Another criticality is the slow pace of implementation, which is caused, among other things, by the time needed to select consultancy organizations, which, in some cases, caused the initial

interest of public administrations to fade. To solve this problem, the Formez working group, in agreement with the Department for Public Administration, decided to provide accessory support services to management problems encountered by the pilot administrations, communication events (May 2018 ForumPA convention in Rome, one in December 2018 organised at the National School of Administration presenting early results and one in March 2019 at the Department of Public Administration) and the redesign of the project (e.g. temporarily substituting the consulting society that was to be awarded the bid by Formez internal experts). Other tools employed were at-distance webinars and the circulation of checklists to self-diagnose the skills on each theme.

Context-related difficulties, in addition to those stemming from the implementation of the reform in a multi-level perspective, are clearly presented in the following box. It describes the project dynamics and results from the point of view of one of the beneficiary administrations.

Box 1. The experience of the municipality of Prato

The municipality of Prato participated at the RiformAttiva project committing to two themes: administrative simplification and human resources assessment. However, only the first one was brought forward.

The focus of the activities was on the asynchronous service conference (inter-institutional authorising board), a new formula introduced by the reforms to speed up and simplify authorising processes of entrepreneurial and building activities that involve more than two administrations. It was an innovation whose application was not well-understood by the municipality of Prato, as well as other Italian administrations. Simona Fedi, working group member from the Municipality of Prato stressed: 'Quite often the counsel or the request for integrations would arrive after the deadline or would not comply with the silence-is-consent form.'

The working group involved the one-stop shop on productive and building activities. The role of Formez was focused on training of the municipal personnel on the interpretation of the legislative framework and on training of other administrations often engaged by the municipality of Prato in authorising processes.

A key partner of the project is the Tuscany region, which was engaged in interpreting the legislative framework and in diffusing the information to other municipalities in the area. The region designated a private firm to develop a digital open source platform, available to all Tuscany municipalities, and a simulation of how the asynchronous process would work.

The main outputs of the project were the digital platform and a collaborative agreement on how the platform would operate. The latter was signed by all the administrations frequently engaged by the municipality of Prato in authorising processes (Tuscany region, superintendence on cultural heritage, prefectures, fire-fighter department, healthcare organizations, environmental protection regional agency, police stations, chamber of commerce, among others). It regulated the use of the platform, technical assistance through a free–toll telephone number, the timing of approvals, what is excluded from the silence-is-consent procedure, etc.

The project is now in an impasse for two reasons. The prefectures, in early 2019, have asked for the authorisation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs before signing the agreement for using the platform. Such an authorisation has not yet arrived. The Florence superintendence on cultural heritage has asked a counsel to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage on how to interpret the legislation on silence-is-consent of 12 days when cultural heritage is concerned (*nulla osta monumentale*). Again, such a counsel has not yet arrived. As Simona Fedi puts it: 'We developed an innovative online platform where all institutions involved in authorizing an entrepreneurial or building activity would convene. It is months we are waiting national level institutions to sign the formal agreement to adhere to it, although all other administrations have signed it and the tool is operational. This is very frustrating.'

The results have been presented and diffused to other public administrations. The role of Formez has been crucial, not only for accompanying the development of the two tools with its experts, but also in interacting with the Department of Public Administration making sure that doubts were clarified in subsequent circulars and guidelines.

The impact of the project on the municipality has been significant especially in terms of process reengineering in some units (environmental office, city planning office, construction office). It has also affected the other administrations collaborating in authorizing processes as well as the other municipalities of the Tuscany region.

In addition to specific difficulties, general ones also emerged. All interviewees mentioned informative and administrative burdens – a combined effect of both ESF procedures and the Italian procurement code – as elements that slowed down the project.

Regarding the strengths, instead, the key success factors were commitment of the participating administrations and stability of the working groups. The real interest of the public administrations involved to get support in implementing a complex reform was crucial; and this interest is due to the 'operational slant' of the project which does not rely on an abstract and top-down definition of methodological and technical tools, but on creating and testing them on the ground, in the specific organisational contexts of administrations and taking into account available resources.

Another key factor was the role of Formez and of its experts that provide stable external competencies.

Conclusion

Main results

As already mentioned, the project has not yet been concluded so it is early to assess an impact in terms of effectiveness of reforms. So far, it has produced results only for the 17 pilot administrations. The project outputs, not always material, could be distinguished between the national level (overall project) and the pilot administration level.

At the national level, it is not yet possible to understand the impact of the project on the effectiveness of reforms. However, the project activities have had a feedback or bottom-up impact on the secondary regulation issued by the Department of Public Administration.

Two areas of RiformAttiva (administrative simplification and FOIA) have a great and direct impact on citizens and businesses. On the former, the project has developed a standard set of forms, guidelines for one-stop shops and for interoperability. The other two areas concern internal management systems and, as such, have an indirect effect on the society by enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector.

Another benefit refers to the positive effects deriving from the socialisation of civil servants responsible for implementing reforms in different public administrations (professionals of similar areas – digitalisation, procurement, transparency, etc. – but working in different organisations, establish a community of practice sharing their knowledge and experience in implementing the reforms).

In each reform area, the RiformAttiva project has developed implementation methods and tools. For instance, regarding the competency-based human resource planning, a needs plan and a framework including 6-7 steps were provided to the administrations, which chose which to apply. Regarding administrative simplification, operational guidelines have been defined. A model of collaborative agreement has been developed that could be used by public administrations acting in the role of coordinator of the new inter-institutional board (Conferenza dei servizi). In the area of general civic access, instruments – such as digital tools and training – were designed to help administrations deal with access requests from citizens. Guidelines on how to develop the organizational regulation and the internal helpdesk unit were developed. On performance evaluation, guidelines on how to update the system have been issued. For human resources planning, a model of estimating professional needs, integrated with the strategic planning process, has been designed.

Besides these project-level outputs, each of the 17 administrations has developed tailored tools that have been presented and diffused to others. Results for the pilot administrations are highly diversified. Best practices include the province of Potenza (identification of professional profiles and management of the single environmental authorization) and the province of Pesaro Urbino and of Modena (on civic access). These have become reference points for municipalities of the same territories. Other pilot administrations have proceeded more slowly (for instance, the Campania region is still attempting to define a system of professional profiles). All pilot administrations have benefited in terms of strengthened competencies.

Tables 1-3 report some figures on activities, outputs and results as measured by the monitoring and control system of RiformAttiva. After each of the four project remodelling, the targets were revised. As you can see, all mid-term targets for the year 2018 were achieved proving the attractiveness of the project and a genuine interest in the issues addressed. Of course, the objective of the project is to assist administrations in implementing the reform, notwithstanding the responsibility of administrations themselves to translate the actions into administrative acts, new organizational or operational procedures, etc. This explains the difference between the number of completed pilot actions planned and completed by 31 December 2018.

At the same time, while carrying out the project's activities, it was possible to involve a high number of participants in the events, significantly higher than what was initially expected.

Table 1. Indicators on activities and progress of the project

Progress indicators	Actual value (2018)	Target value (2018)
Number of completed pilot actions	18	22
Number of partnership agreements signed	125	125
Number of documents, guidelines, technical notes issued	6	5
Number of working plans	39	39
Number of reports on the results achieved by pilot administrations	21	21
Number of bid procedures activated	2	2
Number of workshops and meetings at the national and territorial level	225	198

Table 2. Indicators on project outputs

Output indicators	Categories of regions	Actual value (2018)	Target value (2018)
Number of administrations / units / structures involved in reorganisation and rationalisation processes in change of service delivery modes, and in adoption of quality management systems	Less developed regions	43	43
	More developed regions	75	75
	Regions in transition	7	7
Number of participants involved in the events	Less developed regions	85	24
	More developed regions	190	24
	Regions in transition	8	20

Table 3. Indicators on project results

Result indicators	Categories of regions	Actual value (2018)	Target value (2018)
Number of administrations that have undergone reorganisation, completing the plans	Less developed regions	4	6
	More developed regions	9	5
	Regions in transition	1	4

Lessons learnt

The main lesson for the Department of Public Administration is a confirmation of the validity of an interactive approach in which practical concerns of administrations are met with as practical solutions and these, in turn, shape future legislative interventions by the Department. Moreover, the usefulness of pilot experimentations before scaling up reforms has been demonstrated.

Next steps include, first of all, the (especially financial and political) sustainability of the results over time. Future actions supporting the implementation of public administration reforms should be more stable and more general in terms of the number of administrations involved. RiformAttiva is a symbolic project considering the involvement of roughly 225 public administrations out of more than 9,000. According to one of the interviewees at the Department of Public Administration, the delivery unit approach that is now diffusing in Italy should become transversal to thematic reforms (interview with Giovanni Xilo).

A lesson learned at the local level is the need to have working groups that are not only highly competent on the issue addressed but also authoritative and able to ensure organisational commitment throughout the project implementation (for instance, in two pilot administrations, the change of the secretary general meant the end of the project).

Role of ESF support

The ESF-support role was considered fundamental by all the interviewees. To say it with the words Giovanni Xilo, external expert involved in the reform: 'it is a more unique than rare funding opportunity in support of implementation'. Without the ESF support there would not have been adequate funding specifically addressing the implementation of reforms.

Another important element, connected to the availability of resources, concerns the possibility to approve a significant number of coordinated and related projects, i.e. on the issues of administrative simplification and generalized civic access; this possibility led to two results which proved to be very useful for the RiformAttiva project:

a) Developing general methodological tools on single issues;
b) Reaching out to a significant number of administrations that were offered many different opportunities and timeframes to develop their administrative capacity in order to make reforms effective.

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