

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What was the use of the Mid Term Evaluation?

The Mid Term Evaluation of the Operational Programme 2000-2006 for the Region of Murcia that was carried out during 2003 focused on the analysis of the continuing validity of the Ex Ante Evaluation, the assessment of the consistency between the previous analysis of the situation and the actions planned, and the appraisal of the programme continuous monitoring system, giving recommendations leading to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme.

The previous analysis of the situation highlighted the location of the region in the Mediterranean rim, an area of significant economic potential. Murcia could take advantage of its geographic position in order to consolidate the process of economic take-off, which was in its early stages. To achieve this objective it was necessary to make the most of the endogenous strengths of the regional agriculture, adding to fast growing service industries and a manufacturing sector specialized in medium-demand products.

The Mid Term Evaluation verified in 2003 the continuing validity of the analysis of the situation and the relevance of the development strategy, as well as the consistency of the internal structure of the programme. It has to be stressed the high degree of synergy between the different actions of the programme. The Operational Programme for Murcia develops eight of the nine strategic priorities established in the Community Support Framework, with the exception of priority number 8, regarding fisheries. The Mid Term Evaluation also confirmed the reliability of the monitoring system for most of the evaluation tasks, except for some physical indicators that make difficult to assess the scope of the actions carried out.

Finally, the Mid Term Evaluation developed an in-depth study of the physical and financial performance of the different priorities and measures after three years of implementation. It also highlighted that the development of the programme was conditional on problems of implementation by the Spanish administration of the priority regarding the water cycle (Axis 3) and the measure regarding railway networks (6.3).

What is the Mid Term Evaluation Update for?

Working Paper no 9 *The Update of the Mid Term Evaluation of Structural Funds Interventions* outlines the guidelines to follow for the update of the evaluation of the different forms of Structural Funds Interventions. Consequently, the update builds on the work carried out in the Mid Term Evaluation and focus on areas where it can add value, such as the performance of the programme, the likely achievement of the objectives outputs and results by the end of the period in the light of the programme objectives, and a review of the implementation of the recommendations made in the Mid Term Evaluation. Additionally, the update should outline preliminary recommendations for the next programming period.

Have the Mid Term Evaluation recommendations been put into practice?

The Mid Term Evaluation exercise laid down thirty seven recommendations (see Annex 2). Eleven of these recommendations are operational, while the other twenty six have a strategic or financial nature. In general terms, both content and applicability of these recommendations are considered right. The guidelines issued on these matters in the framework of the Mid Term Evaluation were properly disseminated through the Monitoring Committees. Printed copies of

the Mid Term Evaluation were also sent to the managers taking part in the implementation of the programme, and the document is also available in the web page of the Region of Murcia. This notwithstanding, changes in the staff of some managing centres have hindered a widespread knowledge of the Mid Term Evaluation recommendations, despite the efforts made by the managing authority and the intermediate body.

A positive appraisal of the recommendations contained in the Mid Term Evaluation has been made. Members of the Monitoring Committee and managers of the projects considered that the conclusions and guidelines issued are acceptable and useful for the improvement of the programme. It is nevertheless true that recommendations regarding the European Social Fund are viewed more as general reflections on the issues addressed than as specific operational or strategic guidelines. In any case, most managers involved in the implementation of ESF actions took these remarks into account.

The recommendations put special emphasis on measures designed to improve the financial performance of the Operational Programme, owing to the fact that, as it was stated before, the programme is considered consistent with the analysis of the situation and the targets set. Another group of recommendations aimed at improving the programme performance with the help of non-financial measures, such as the setting-up of new monitoring mechanisms. In compliance with these suggestions, specific technical meetings were held, particularly regarding environmental and railway infrastructures, because of the slow implementation pace of these actions.

Also regarding management issues, new management bodies have been set up and an easier access to the application *Fondos 2000* has been allowed to the regional administration in order to monitor the development of the whole programme. Progress also has been made in the staffing of managing bodies, though there is still a long way to go.

The reprogramming and allocation of the performance reserve, the creation of new measures and the transfer of funds between measures have followed the guidelines given in the Mid Term Evaluation, but it will take time to assess their effects. Changes in the allocation of financial resources have led to the strengthening of port and road infrastructures.

Measures regarding the promotion of the knowledge-based society have had significant effects, though on this matter the region is still lagging behind, as it is analysed later on. More financial resources have been allocated to human resources development, especially to continuous training.

With regard to the horizontal priorities of environment and equal opportunities for men and women, some headway has been made as a result of specific actions on natural resources and disadvantaged groups, but there is still an insufficient integration of these priorities in the programme as a whole. These shortcomings are difficult to correct halfway through the programme and the problem should be addressed in the programming period 2007-2013.

The situation has not been substantially altered after the reprogramming process, except for changes in the schedule, delaying the construction of high speed railway infrastructure in favour of railway safety measures and enhancement of sea transport infrastructures.

At present, the Operational Programme develops actions classified into 54 measures, six more than at the beginning of the implementation of the programme. Ten of these measures are developed within the framework of the global grant. Eligible expenditure in the last Operational

Programme approved amounts to EUR 1,917,834,426, of which 52% goes to the five most important measures (3.1, 6.3, 6.1, 5.9 and 3.2).

Compared with the initial programme assessed during the Mid-Term Evaluation, its total amount has increased in EUR 199,040,034 due to the allocation of the performance reserve (EUR 50,132,218) and to the lower co-financing rate of some major projects.

Actions funded by ERDF have increased at a slightly higher rate than actions financed by other funds. In this respect it has to be highlighted the allocation of ESF performance reserve funds to the provision of infrastructures devoted to the promotion of equal opportunities between men and women.

There have been no changes in the typology of projects undertaken by the different managing bodies after the reprogramming process, but the share of the regional administration has significantly increased in projects linked to the environment and the water cycle (strategic priority 3) and projects devoted to the improvement of transport networks (strategic priority 6). In parallel, the central government has increased its financial contribution to projects of water resources improvement and modernisation of transport networks, though the fall in the amount of the financial resources managed results in a similar amount of funds..

The number and size of actions to be undertaken by the central government has to be increased in the final years of the programming period in order to fulfil the objectives set in the programme. About 38% of the amount allocated by the central government to the Operational Programme for Murcia has to be spent in 2005-2006. Besides this, there is a significant delay in actions that were planned for earlier years. This translates into a marked unbalance that demands strong correction efforts.

How the programme has performed?

Expenditures made have amounted to EUR 972,168,906 in the period 2000-2004, meaning a 73.23% of the amount initially forecast (EUR 1,326,297,695). This means that significant headway has been made comparing with the situation at the moment of the Mid Term Evaluation (54%). Resources mobilized fit much better to the commitments programmed to date, getting close to the optimum of resource mobilization in period 2000-2004. As for the commitments assumed, the level of execution is even higher though some differences exist. In some cases, this is due to the small amount of the quantities committed in comparison with the figures programmed (measures 2.54, 3.1, 3.2, 3.5 and 3.6). On the opposite side, expenditure committed is lower than expenditure programmed in measures 2.52, 2.7, 4.3 and 5.9.

The prototype of measure with high financial performance is co-financed by the European Social Fund (93%, compared to 90% in EAGGF and 60% in ERDF), is managed by the regional government (96% as against 46% in the case of the Spanish government) and is devoted to active labour market policies or to the promotion of the knowledge-based society.

On the whole, the analysis carried out shows that for most priorities and measures the physical and financial performance has been satisfactory. In all likelihood, the objectives set will be achieved, even in those cases where the funding has been increased.

Main implementation problems keep on concentrating on measures 3.1, 6.3, 3.2 and 3.6. In these four measures, expenditures corresponding to 2000-2004 but still not made plus expenditures programmed for 2005-2006 amount to more than EUR 563 million, meaning a 30%

of the total programmed for the Operational Programme and 60% of the financial resources that still have to be spent. In each of these measures pending expenditures amount to 75% of the total expenditures programmed.

From an analytical point of view there is little likelihood that the total financial resources will be used, but it is possible in the light of the commitments taken on by the Ministry of Environment and ADIF (body in charge of railway infrastructure). Apparently, both bodies have adopted specific financial and management measures.

As regards the efficiency of the programme, the analysis of unit costs leads to forecast that some measures will exceed the objectives initially set because of lower cost per output and result. Within this group are included actions devoted to the promotion of the information society and others linked to rural development, as well as actions designed to improve the skills of the human resources through the provision of university places and the social integration of the young.

The analysis of unit costs of other measures such as those devoted to the promotion of self-employment or those seeking to promote investment in food and agriculture industries are achieving lower results than expected. In the field of self-employment it is necessary to improve the project selection process and strengthen the support to small companies to meet the objectives set. As for the growth of investment levels in food and agriculture industries it might be advisable to increase the number of enterprises supported, while reducing the amount of the average expenditure per company.

What has been the geographical impact of the expenditure made?

Expenditures corresponding to the global grant, environmental infrastructures and food and agriculture industries are evenly distributed throughout the region. This translates into a significant contribution to territorial cohesion and the achievement of a spatially balanced economic development.

It has to be highlighted that per capita expenditure has been higher in medium size municipalities. In this respect, it is generally observed that some policies regarding the demand and provision of basic services seek insofar as it is possible to meet criteria of spatial balance, even to the detriment of strict economic performance, consistently with the principle of territorial cohesion. Per head expenditure in the group of less developed municipalities subject to preferential treatment is 22 per cent points above the average. This is a positive trait of the programme considering the difficulties of these areas when it comes to generate or attract investment projects.

What is the likelihood of achieving the programme objectives?

The analysis carried out regarding the probability of achieving the programme objectives is a preliminary approach and not a rigorous prediction on the matter. Forecasts have been based on real unit costs of actions when the indicators were considered reliable, taking into account the amount of the expenditures to be made. The results of this exercise indicate that there is a high probability of achieving the objectives set for priorities 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and 9, while it is only moderate for priorities 3 and 6 (especially the measure regarding railways).

Similar considerations arise from the analysis of the physical performance achieved and unfinished in the current programming period. This is consequence of anomalous situations

arising from a slow implementation pace but has nothing to do with serious problems of project selection and high unit costs per output and result.

	Financial performance	Physical performance	Efficiency	Objectives achievement likelihood	Community Added Value
Priority 1	High	High	High	High	High
Priority 2	High	High	High	High	High
Priority 3	Moderate	Moderate	Not assessed	Moderate	High
Priority 4	High	High	Moderate	High	High
Priority 5	High	High	High	High	Not assessed
Priority 6	High	Moderate	High (6.1)	High	High
Priority 7	High	High	High	High	High
Priority 9	High	High	High	High	High

What are the main achievements and impacts of the programme to date?

Structural Funds seek to influence on a wide range of levels, from local to global. Although the different impacts will not be measured until the end of the programming period, some of them can to a certain extent be anticipated at the moment.

According to Working Paper no 9, of the European Commission, most interesting impacts are those enumerated in table below.

Working Paper no 9	Mid Term Evaluation Update	Value
Gross/Net job creation	Employment (created)	25,631
	Employment (safeguarded)	57,946
Placement rate of trainees	Placement rate after six months of occupational training	Aprox. 50%,
Increase in traffic flows	Increase in total road traffic	15,550 vehicles/day
Increase in environmental quality	Capacity improvement in purification plants	11,230.000 m ³ /year
	Increase in water treatment	8,424.500 m ³ /year

The Operational Programme for Murcia has a marked preference for the construction and upgrading of the existing regional infrastructures. Consequently, main successes of the programme have been achieved in this field. On the whole, Murcia has made a substantial headway and is climbing up the ranking of Spanish regions as regards a wide range of indicators. In this respect, the Operational Programme has strengthened the capacity of road infrastructures through the construction of 31 kilometres of new motorways, dual carriageways and conventional roads and the upgrading of 73 kilometres of existing infrastructures. Important investments in safety measures have also been made. Besides this, giving the importance of minor road networks for the organization of rural areas, the programme has financed the construction and/or improvement of 584 kilometres of country roads. The enhancement of the regional road network has translated into a traffic increase of 15,550 vehicles per day.

In the field of environmental infrastructures, annual capacity of water purification has been increased in 11.2 million cubic meters and the volume of waste water treated (tertiary treatment) has been increased in 8,424,500 m³. More than 3,400 containers for specific waste have been made available.

These successes have meant substantial achievements for the region in the fields of environmental infrastructures and road networks. On the contrary, little progress in comparison with other Spanish regions has been made regarding railway infrastructure, health and public services for tourism.

As for the economic fabric of the Region of Murcia, 11,883 companies have received financial support. A 88% of these enterprises are SME. These companies have benefited from economic development policies and continuous training programmes. The increase in productivity levels of SME is indirectly reflected in the significant amount of private investment induced (EUR 287,848,032). As a result of co-financed actions, the Operational Programme has benefited on average almost 4 businesses per day and has generated an average induced investment per enterprise and action of EUR 49,164.

It is worth highlighting the increase in induced investment in companies cooperating in projects intended to boost the knowledge-based society (Research & Development, innovation and Information Society). Induced investment in these projects jumped from EUR 12,237,725 to EUR 29,445,090. This area is fundamental for the future development of the regions of the European Union.

At the moment of the inception of the programme, the region of Murcia was lagging behind other Spanish regions in terms of development of the Information Society and investment in research & development and innovation. With the aim of getting over this negative situation, the Operational Programme for the Region of Murcia 2000-2006 focused on the promotion of the knowledge-based society. A significant increase in the number of technologically specialised companies has been attained, as well as in the number of households connected to Internet in the region.

Students receiving training for specific qualifications linked to the Information Society and food and agriculture industries amount to 3,494.

Actions designed to broaden advanced telecommunication services and networks in the Region of Murcia have translated into an increase of 9,877 users. Particularly important is the introduction in several municipalities of the region of centres for the development of telecommunications systems and application packages to be used in a wide range of services for the local populations. These centres, that have achieved a remarkable success, also develop training programmes on these fields.

It must be emphasized the large number of people involved in projects of research & development and innovation financially supported by the Operational Programme for the Region of Murcia, since 17,79% of the researchers and grant holders of the region have taken part in actions co-financed in the framework of this programme.

Rural development has been another of the main priorities of the Operational Programme for Murcia. Though most of the actions are developed within the framework of EAGGF-guidance, they are complemented by multi-regional programmes, Community Initiative LEADER + and some measures financially supported by ERDF and ESF especially devoted to rural areas. As a result, 202 food and agriculture enterprises have received financial support, 256 kilometres of forest paths have been upgraded, an area of 71,531 hectares have been subject to protection measures, 584 kilometres of country roads have been improved and 52 marketing projects of high quality food and agriculture products have been developed.

Manufacturing and marketing of food and agriculture products shows in general terms a substantial improvement as a result of the projects undertaken and significant progress has been made in health conditions of food, achieving quality standards much more strict than those pre-existing. It is necessary to note, however, that the protection of the environment in the processes of food manufacturing and keeping has not been not been viewed as an end in itself

in the Operational Programme interventions. Consequently, it is advisable to channel preferably the financial support to actions focused on alleviating the pressures exerted by the manufacturing processes on natural resources. Different actions devoted to the protection of forests and landscape have been developed, so contributing to improve the quality of the environment. These actions have had a positive effect on rural development, since forest fires have fallen as well as the effects of desertification, and the environmental quality of the wooded areas has been enhanced.

In the field of human resources, the development of active employment policies has meant a remarkable improvement in the situation of the region. Shortcomings in this respect, which were stressed in the Mid Term Evaluation, have been to a larger extent corrected. The Operational Programme for the Region of Murcia laid down the ultimate goals of encouraging job creation, increasing the employability of the labour force and making headway in equal opportunities for men and women, in order to meet the needs that had been emphasized in the analysis of the situation of human resources in the region. The achievement of the objectives set in the programme regarding human resources has been possible thanks to the financial support granted by the European Social Fund.

Though the contribution of the Operational Programme to labour market actions is limited in terms of financial resources, it has had a significant effect on the levels of education and skills of human resources, since 160,000 people have been assisted up to date. An impact of 20% and a placement rate of beneficiaries into employment close to 100% has been achieved in vocational training. As for occupational training, impact attained has been of 7% and placement rate of 50%. Finally, an impact of 2% has been achieved in continuous training, accompanied by a stability rate in employment of 72%. In these fields, the Operational Programme supplements actions developed by the four multi-regional programmes of the European Social Fund. These four programmes amount to about 60% of ESF expenditure in the region. Particular importance is ascribable to projects managed by INEM. Consequently, the community added value of the multi-regional programmes is much greater than that attributable to the Operational Programme.

Human resources education and skills deficiencies in the Region of Murcia have been tackled by means of the educational actions developed, especially those regarding vocational training and occupational training. This notwithstanding, specific groups particularly in need of education, such as women, young people and those in risk of exclusion must be assisted in order to get an easier incorporation into the labour market, so meeting the objective of social inclusion and the demands of educated human resources of the regional economy. In this respect, main results achieved reveal that measures financially supported by the European Social Fund have had a particular impact on women, thanks to affirmative action criteria. Women participation rate in these projects amounts to 55%. However, this is still insufficient since activity rates among women are comparatively low and unemployment rates relatively high in the region, translating into a situation of dependency. This poses new challenges that demand the implementation of new supplementary measures in the next programming period, especially those intended to reconcile family life and professional life.

What has been the contribution of the programme to the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies, and to the European Strategy for Employment?

In the year 2000, the European Union strategic priorities for economic development were reconsidered. The so-called Lisbon Strategy seeks to increase employment, promote economic growth and strengthen social cohesion, within the framework of a knowledge-based society.

The Gothenburg Strategy established by the European Council in 2001 endorses the guidelines adopted in the Lisbon Strategy and strengthens the political commitment to incorporate the environmental dimension to the social and economic objectives previously set. In this way, the three dimensions of the strategy (economic growth, social cohesion and environment protection) are viewed in a general context of sustainable development.

The analysis of the situation and guidelines contained in the strategies of Lisbon and Gothenburg are applicable to the structural problems of the Region of Murcia. It has to be taken into account that the design of the Operational Programmes was prior to the setting of the guidelines outlined in the Lisbon summit regarding the regional policy. The economic model resulting from Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies proposes a new digital and knowledge-based economy oriented to new goods and services, that will be the driving force for the growth of employment and productivity, contributing in parallel to a better quality of life and the protection of the environment.

The Operational Programme 2000-2006 for the region of Murcia is a powerful tool for the development of the regional economic base. It is worth highlighting that the Operational Programme is, to a certain extent, in line with the Lisbon strategy. Since this strategy has been subsequently updated, the analysis of the interventions in the framework of the Operational Programme and their impact on the objectives set in the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies will take into account the new fields of intervention considered.

Key element of the new strategy is the promotion of the information society, the investment in research & development and innovation and its application to the economic and social fabric: enterprises, public administrations and households. In this respect, the Operational Programme has meant a major boost for the region in a wide range of fields, as it has been revealed in the analysis of the different areas of intervention. The region was lagging behind in the level of development of the knowledge-based economy on account of low public and private investment efforts in R & D and innovation, though some infrastructures for the promotion of innovation have been created (theme technological centres). Likewise, actions aimed at increasing investment in R & D and innovation and to disseminate knowledge from universities to the business community have been undertaken. All of them are aimed at spreading knowledge as a key factor for the increase in productivity and economic growth. Nevertheless, more emphasis has to be put on innovation and technology transfers from institutions to private enterprises.

The Operational Programme has had a significant impact on employment and economic growth, enhancing the attractiveness of the region for investors and workers. In order to develop a more competitive economy, future investment efforts should be directed to the alleviation of weaknesses of the regional economy and to the exploitation of its strengths.

The internationalisation of the regional enterprises is a basic factor for the economic progress of the Region of Murcia. The Operational Programme has put a special emphasis on this matter and has promoted international missions, seminars, meetings and similar events aimed at exploring new markets and to the launching of regional products. It also has sought to increase the level of trade relations and cross investments between Murcia and other regions. To achieve these objectives, the regional government has put into practice actions of economic, management and technical advice through consulting services. This line of action must be continued in the future.

The re-programming process has resulted in changes in the weighting of the different measures, leading to a loss of financial resources devoted to the objective of internationalisation. This situation must be reversed.

As for the effects of the programme on the ten fields of intervention set in the European Employment Strategy, the three Structural Funds have impacts on eight of them. The employment programmes developed have translated into the creation of 25,631 jobs, of which 57% come from education and training policies, 25% from promotion policies and 18% from investment in infrastructures. The programmes have also safeguarded and improved labour conditions of 57,946 jobs thanks to policies of business promotion (73%) and continuous training actions (27%).

All in all, impact on net employment created in the period 1999-2004 is of 31% of total employment and impact on employment safeguarded amounts to 12% of total employment. This reveals the significant importance of the actions developed in the Region of Murcia in terms of community added value.

In spite of these accomplishments, none of the targets set by the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies for the year 2010 will be achieved. In this respect, especially worrying are the difficulties faced by the region to meet the objectives regarding research and development and employment rates of people over 55. Future actions must focus on these fields.

What guidelines must be set for the future development strategy for the region?

In view of the changes that are experiencing the Spanish economy and the prospects regarding the geographic distribution of Structural Funds, the Spanish regions must face a change in mentality, shifting the emphasis of their development policies from the access to European Funds to the exploration and exploitation of the opportunities brought about by the enlarged Union.

It has to be stressed that the right identification of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the region is crucial for the definition of key areas of intervention and consequent allocation of financial resources. Taking into account the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Mid Term Evaluation (and its update) and after a close examination of other documents regarding the regional economy, some preliminary changes have been made in the SWOT analysis, that will be revised in the process of planning and programming for the period 2007-2013.

WEAKNESSES	STRENGTHS
D.1. Water shortages to meet the needs of the population and the economic system	F.1. Existence of a political, economic and social climate suitable for the economic development of the region
D.2. High pressure on natural resources leading to a decline in the quality of the environment. Insufficient water treatment and pollution of the river Segura	F.2. Rapid population growth and a substantial proportion of young people
D.3. Persistence of railway and air communication problems	F.3. High degree of adaptability of the economic system, specializing in endogenous industries where the region presents comparative advantages
D.4. Small average size of enterprises, limiting the scope of R&D and innovation projects and making difficult the access to markets	F.4. Progressive strengthening of a rich network of economic interdependences between tourist industries, food and agriculture industries, trade and logistics
D.5. Low degree of professional skills, especially among young people	F.5. Increasing modernization of the regional economy and introduction of technical and management innovations, especially in intensive farming and food and agriculture industries
D.6. Imbalance between the supply of training programmes and the needs of the economic system. Deficiencies in occupational and continuous training	F.6. Existence of large areas with a high potential for tourist and residential developments
D.7. Low presence of women and people over 55 in the labour market	F.7. Favorable mix of natural conditions for the development of food and agriculture industries, high quality tourism and renewable energies
D.8. Comparatively low development of the Information Society in the business community and in daily life of the population	F.8. High degree of international competitiveness of the Region of Murcia in a wide range of products
D.9. Relative weakness of the region in technology and research infrastructures	
D.10. Regional economy system with low productivity compare to other regions	
D.11. Existence of problems of social inclusion of particular groups	
D.12. Persistence of problems of territorial imbalances	
THREATS	OPPORTUNITIES
A.1. Growing competition from Mediterranean countries in intensive farming	O.1. Location of the region in one of the strongest European areas of development: the Mediterranean rim
A.2. Proliferation of new tourist destinations in the south of the Mediterranean Sea and increased competition to attract tourist flows	O.2. Easier access to tourist and food and agriculture markets as a result of the enlargement of the European Union
A.3. Growing competition of third countries in labour intensive industries as a result of the globalisation process and the enlargement of the European Union	O.3. Growing domestic and international demand for high quality food and agriculture products
A.4. Large flows of low-skilled immigrants with serious problems of integration	O.4. Shifting of the tourist demand toward more sophisticated products, in line with the strategy adopted in the Region of Murcia
A.5. Decline in the importance of the Port of Cartagena-Escombreras in the Mediterranean port system	

The new Community guidelines laid down by the strategies of Lisbon and Gothenburg and the foreseeable loss in the share of the Region of Murcia in the financial assistance from the European Union makes it advisable to concentrate expenditures on the most efficient policies (taking advantage of the lessons of past experience) aiming at improving the competitiveness of the regional economy within the framework of sustainable development.

Consequently, four strategic lines have been put forward for the design and implementation of the programme 2007-2013.

- Concentrate on policies aimed at promoting investments on job creation and on the strengthening of the regional economic system. Expenditures should focus in the future on the specific needs of industries with a high development potential for the generation of employment and income.
- Reorient policies of assistance to the business community giving priority to the internationalisation of regional enterprises and to the introduction of innovations. The

assistance should focus mainly on the provision of customized and specific services to enterprises.

- To tackle the problems of desertification and depopulation from a global perspective, and not only from the point of view of farmers. Rural development should prioritise the generation of initiatives compatible with sustainable development.
- To persist in the implementation of policies aimed at the reconciliation of professional life and family life as a key element for job creation and a much higher degree of social cohesion.

On this basis, the model proposed for the design of a new comprehensive regional development plan for Murcia seeks to keep making headway towards greater social and economic cohesion. The model comprises four strategic goals and eighteen objectives.

STRATEGIC AXES	OBJECTIVES
STRATEGIC AXIS 1. To promote growth and employment in top priority regional industries	Ol.1.1.: Improvement of transport and communications networks (ERDF)
	Ol.1.2.: Incentives to the increase in investment levels in private enterprises (ERDF)
	Ol.1.3.: Support to the creation of high quality jobs (ESF)
	Ol.1.4.: Intensification of training efforts aimed at the strengthening of the knowledge-based society (ESF)
STRATEGIC AXIS 2. To increase levels of productivity and competitiveness in the regional economy	Ol.2.1.: Improvement of the structures linked to the promotion of R & D and innovation (ERDF)
	Ol.2.2.: To boost projects of R & D and innovation and strengthen public-private partnerships in R & D (ERDF + ESF)
	Ol.2.3.: Promotion of the information society in private enterprises, public administrations and population at large (ERDF + ESF)
	Ol.2.4.: Development of a wide range of services to support processes of innovation in private enterprises (ERDF + ESF + EAFRD)
	Ol.2.5.: Development of a wide range of services to support the sustainable internationalisation of private enterprises (ERDF + ESF + EAFRD)
STRATEGIC AXIS 3. To achieve the environmental and territorial sustainability of the Region of Murcia	Ol.3.1.: Intensification of water purification and waste treatment (ERDF)
	Ol.3.2.: To improve the efficiency in the use of water (ERDF + EAFRD)
	Ol.3.3.: Creation of enough water banks (ERDF)
	Ol.3.4.: Promotion of the generation and use of less polluting alternative sources of energy (ERDF + EAFRD)
	Ol.3.5.: Conservation and sustainable use of the biological diversity (ERDF+EAFRD)
STRATEGIC AXIS 4. To promote social cohesion	Ol.4.1.: To promote an increase in employment rates among women and people over 55 (ESF)
	Ol.4.2.: To improve the situation of specific groups and disadvantaged people, with special attention to gypsies, immigrants and other minority groups, and handicapped people, promoting their social inclusion, incorporation into the labour market and the prevention of school dropouts (ERDF + ESF)
	Ol.4.3.: To enhance educational, health and social infrastructures and equipments aiming to upgrade reconciliation of professional life and family life, social integration of immigrants and other minority groups, as well as prevention of school dropouts (ERDF + ESF)