I.3. Executive Summary

The following report is the final evaluation report of the Operational Program Administrative Capacity (POCA) 2014-2020 within OS 1.1 and 1.2 and it assesses the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of the use of ESF resources. The evaluation is divided into the five following themes:

- **Theme 1:** Evaluation of the measures taken to ensure a unitary approach to the strategic planning and programme budgeting (evaluation of the procedures and mechanisms implemented in this regard)
- **Theme 2:** Evaluation of quality and performance management systems (assessment of how these mechanisms are implemented and their impact assessment)
- **Themes 3:** Assessment of the measures taken to improve the legislative framework (evaluation of all the measures implemented to bring a change in this field)
- **Theme 4:** Evaluation of the support granted to NGOs and social partners (evaluation of mechanisms, tools and actions to improve the monitoring and evaluation of public policies as well as reform initiatives, training sessions to develop the capabilities of these institutions, networking etc.)
- **Theme 5:** Evaluation of the measures taken to reform human resources management

In order to evaluate the performance, the physical, and financial progress registered during the implementation of the program, the evaluation team used the following methodological tools:

- for collecting the information: desk research (literature, indicators, and documental review), interviews (with the Managing Authority and with the beneficiaries of the program), customer satisfaction and a survey targeting POCA beneficiaries.
- For analysis: case studies, statistics, bench marking, and panel of external experts.
- For validation: focus groups with the beneficiaries of each evaluation theme (to validate the findings and the recommendations formulated by the evaluation team).

The key findings of the evaluation are:

5) POCA is overall **relevant** in addressing the necessity of modernization and reform of the public administration in Romania. These needs are still present taking into consideration also the recent Country Specific Recommendations (2020) of the EC and the Council, as well as the National Reform Program. More important, in the light of the COVID-19 emergency and of the Next Generation EU, the rapid improvement of the capacity of Romanian Central Authorities becomes urgent. Therefore, supporting the strategic planning and budgeting, the adoption of quality systems, simplification, policy evaluation, involvement of civil society and the unitary management of human resources is crucial and POCA is the primary driver for the implementation of national strategies and in particular of SCAP.

6) Despite the severity of COVID-19 crisis and other problems (political instability, delays in procurement process, difficult interinstitutional relations, lack of internal human resources), POCA keeps its overall **efficiency** in the administrative management. It is less costly than similar EU and National Programs in

terms of administrative costs, while the overall management of the projects is considered by the final beneficiaries streamlined and functional. The support given by the Managing Authority to the final beneficiaries is perceived as extremely useful and prompt.

7) POCA is **effective** in producing results at the individual level, (personal soft/ hard skills) and organizational (design of new methodologies, set-up of innovative procedures – changes in modus operandi). To a lesser extent, POCA brings also results at the institutional level due to the dependency to external political factors (institutional stability, changes in the regulative framework and political commitment). The majority of these results would have not been reached without POCA. It is not only a matter of resources, but also of a strategic and methodological guidance. Even with limitations and margins of improvements, there is a favorable overall institutional environment where the high-quality support provided by the international organizations (e.g. the World Bank) is corroborated with the technical coordination provided by POCA and strategic direction provided by SCAP and CNISCAP.

8) The **sustainability** of the results achieved at individual and organizational level are assured through POCA projects. They set up adequate arrangements (ensuring an additional budget, staff, changes in procedures, etc.). But the sustainability at the moment is assured only at the level of the single projects and in the short-medium term. Due mainly to political factors, there are challenges in relation to full deploying of the results and their sustainability at an institutional level. Indeed, the lack of political commitment can endanger the overall embodiment of the project's results in the administrative and institutional routine. There also other threats related to cultural reluctance to administrative paradigm changes, lack of homogeneity for implementing CAF quality standards, lack of inter-institutional communication. In the next programming period, the absence of POCA could aggravate the situation. Therefore, the existence of an overall institutional framework providing technical-strategic guidance and coordination is an essential condition for the long term sustainability. In addition there is a need for a capitalization which would allow the consolidation of practices and methodologies not only at the level of the single project/ administration but at the national level as a whole.

Based on the above findings, it is suggested to:

- set-up an institutional mechanism similar to the existing one (SCAP-CNISCAP)

- establish a capacity development platform(s) described in the ACTION PLAN. It/they shall ensure the necessary visibility and sharing the acquired experiences and knowledge with a combination of on-line materials/ tools, as well as live event and activities.

- organize specific monitoring mechanisms and on line „lieu" to assure the follow up of results achieved by POCA

All these arrangements aim to build a community of practice to capitalize the results and the cultural changes within the Romanian Public administration.

For each specific theme, the main findings from the evaluation of the programme are summarized below:

Evaluation theme 1: Evaluation of the measures undertaken for the unitary approach of the strategic planning and program budgeting (evaluation of the procedures and mechanisms implemented for this purpose) - SO 1.1

The projects pursue SCAP's goals of providing an overall methodological framework for strategic planning and program budgeting as well as increasing the capacity of the line ministries to develop and coordinate national programs / plans and to strengthen the decision-making process, based on sound evidence. POCA works well from an administrative point of view: it is perceived as clear, coherent, and flexible.

COVID-19 will trigger some delays. Other main challenges are external, and are related to institutional reorganization and frequent legislative changes.

The projects are contributing to several results at different levels: increasing personal skills on strategic planning and program budgeting; introducing new methodologies and tools to improve the development of evidence-based policies; enhancing cooperation among the ministries and their subordinated Bodies. However, the full achievement of institutional results in relation to the development of legislative acts, policy strategy formulation depends to a larger extent on political commitment. There are also unintended effects such as, for example, the development of IT skills and the increase of transparency.

The projects ensure the sustainability of the results by developing internal activities to embed knowledge in the organization and making available resources (human and financial) after the completion of projects. However, sustainability largely depends on the interest and commitment of policy makers who can determine the continuity of results. To enhance the sustainability of the results is crucial to have in the future an institutional framework similar to the current one provided by SCAP-CNISCAP. In addition, it is crucial to enhance the capitalization process of. It will make possible the exchange of methodologies and professional experiences gained from POCA, also after the projects are finished and the consolidation of a community of practice.

Evaluation theme 2: Evaluation of quality and performance management systems (evaluation of the implementation of these mechanisms and analysis of their impact) - SO 1.1

POCA is a very relevant program to address the needs of the beneficiaries regarding quality management. The projects mainly aim to implement quality systems (ISO, CAF, BSC) in public administration. These systems will help towards a more efficient allocation of human and financial resources, flexible internal organization, a higher level of knowledge specific to the field of quality management in Romania's public administration. The funded actions are coherent with *SCAP* and *Action plan for the staged implementation of quality management in public authorities and institutions 2016-2020*.

The envisaged results of the funded actions are on all three levels, individual (such as the acquisition of professional skills), organizational (implementation of ISO and CAF quality systems, the introduction of new procedures/methodologies,) and institutional (new internal rules on quality management). There are, however, some positive unintended effects of the funded actions like improving transversal competencies

of the individuals and contribution to national sectoral strategies. It would have been difficulty to have the same results, in such a unitary approach without POCA program.

Mainly, the sustainability of the project results is to be ensured by integrating the quality management procedures into administrative procedures, and by the improved skills and availability of human resources. The results of the projects are important for improving the quality management at in Romania's public administration and can have a great impact as long as they are accompanied by political commitment and favorable administrative culture. One possible risk in relation to sustainability is the lack of political commitment and unitarian approach. Therefore, is suggested to adopt a monitoring system to keep constant the attention on certification (ISO) and self-assessment (CAF) processes. In addition, an on-line guidance can help in consolidating an unitarian approach on CAF.

Evaluation theme 3: Evaluation of the measures taken to improve the legislative framework (evaluation of all the measures taken to create a change in this area) - SO 1.1

The program is very relevant in connection to the needs of the central public authorities of improving the legislative framework.

The program was useful in funding important initiatives for modernizing the public administration in Romania, funding which would have been more difficult to find otherwise. Also, apart from funding, POCA also provided to the beneficiaries a strategic and guided platform, helpful in their path to improve the legislative framework.

The program contributes to achieving the objectives of SCAP, Strategy for better regulation 2014-2020 and Planul integrat pentru simplificarea procedurilor administrative aplicabile cetățenilor.

The projects related to theme 3, mainly encompass actions aiming at systematization and harmonization of existing regulation, simplification of regulation, adoption of e-Government solutions, establishment of an analytical system to assist policy development, establishment of an analytical system to policy monitoring and evaluation, development of public policies/strategies/national plans. Since the processes of modernization and improvement of public administration can be done by personnel, most of the projects also encompass a training component.

Sustainability will be ensured through the allocation of adequate resources; more important, the beneficiaries are closely follow up of the policy proposals formulated in the projects. They range from national strategies, public policies, initiative to simplify and systematize legislation and systematize procedures. However, this will be possible only if there is support from decision-makers.

Evaluation theme 4: Evaluation of the support granted to NGOs and social partners (evaluation of mechanisms, tools and actions to improve the monitoring and subsequent evaluation of public policies, as well as reform initiatives, training sessions to develop the capacities of these institutions, networking, etc.) - SO 1.1

POCA is relevant to achieving greater involvement of social partners and the so called 'civil society' in the policy making progress. POCA attracted participation of a high number of NGOs and other social partners, whose need to have a role in the national political scenario is clearly addressed by the programme. The advancement of the funded interventions is remarkable, many projects are successfully completed and several NGOs have been able to formulate and present legislative proposals in various fields, such as healthcare, security, employment, education, energy efficiency and others.

POCA is also allowing NGOs build their capabilities and competences mainly in the analysis and creation of policies, as well as allowing negotiation/dialogue with other NGOs and social/economic partners. The funded projects implemented several training activities for a large number of NGOs that improved capacities at individual, organisation and institutional level. Moreover, projects allowed to create stable partnerships among different organisations, working together for a period of time for the same objectives. The legacy of the trainings on individuals and organisations, as well as the continuation of the established partnerships also beyond the end of the POCA funded projects, might contribute to the sustainability of the interventions.

On the other hand, the resistance on the part of public authorities to accept a new role of NGOs and social partners in a more open decision-making process in the main risk for the future. Indeed, for the Romania administration, having alternative solutions in the field of public policies to the governmental initiatives is a considerable cultural shift. An additional challenge comes from political instability. These main risks for the future are enhanced by the combination with the emergency situation generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, that could direct the priorities of policy makers towards other fields. Also, the discontinuity of a specific programme on capacity building with specific actions targeted at NGOs, as POCA, is a theme of concern: against this background, actions are required to capitalize the extremely positive results that POCA is achieving under theme 4.

Evaluation theme 5: Evaluation of the measures taken for the reform of the human resources management - SO 1.2.

The need of the Romanian public administration for a systemic enhancement of the human resources management is fully addressed by POCA, whose coherence with the SCAP and the SDFP is also very clear and tight. There are 5 projects funded under this theme, still under implementation, with a lower level of achievement of indicators so far if compared to other themes. The non-competitive calls were directed to the most relevant actors at the central level in the public administration, either as beneficiaries or as partners. These are the subjects that hold responsibilities and/or competencies in managing the human resources policy, regardless of whether it is a public function or contract staff. The size of the projects funded is generally significant and so is their complexity: without POCA, the beneficiaries would carry out the activities with great difficulties, especially in what concerns the adoption of IT systems for the human resource management.

The complexity of the projects caused delays from the beginning, attributable partly to issues to comply with the ex-ante conditionalities and to the reception and implementation of public procurement

procedures. Then delays were incremented by factors closely linked to the COVID-19 emergency situation: projects had to face the rescheduling or cancelling of face-to face training courses, or the unavailability of project team members.

Despite such difficulties, that took to the rescheduling of the end-deadlines for some projects, interventions are advancing and there is a general confidence that the activities are being effective: in particular, the impact of the large training schemes and the fruitful collaboration with qualified external experts (such as the WB) are seen as an extremely positive factor for the enhancement of the individual and organisational capacities and, therefore, for the sustainability of the new of HR management that are being adopted. There are risk factors linked to the emergency situation generated by COVID-19, whichare undeniable, but they can be tackled through various methods by the beneficiaries of the evaluation theme 5. The capitalization of the results and ensuring the sustainability of projects can also be addressed, inter alia, by raising awareness of policy makers and senior management of key organizations from public administration.