

Executive Summary

This report has been prepared by Ernst & Young and presents the results of the first year of activities of the project “**Examination of the evaluation culture**”: after a description of the methodological approach (Chapter 1), the report provides the results of the analysis conducted to measure the level of diffusion of the evaluation culture within the Structural Instruments System in Romania (chapter 2) and to investigate on the appropriateness of KAI 1.2 “Evaluation” of OP Technical Assistance, in supporting its diffusion (chapter 3). Based on these results, the report provides conclusions and recommendations concerning strategic changes in the design of KAI 1.2 and future activities that may be undertaken in order to strengthen evaluation culture within the system (chapter 4).

The current level of diffusion of the evaluation culture is measured through **indicators** related to specific elements that define evaluation culture -**criteria** and **subcriteria**-, as resulting from a significant literature review and their personalization to the Romanian context (see ch. 1), and aggregated in 4 dimensions (demand side, supply side, dissemination/utilization of evaluation results, institutionalization of the evaluation culture). The analysis of KAI 1.2 has been conducted looking at the coherence of its objectives, target groups and financed interventions with such elements.

The results obtained, detailed in chapter 2, reveal a **good diffusion of the evaluation culture** within the Structural Instruments management system, with an average achievement of the Evaluation Culture Measurement Index based on all indicators, of 63.35% out of 100%.

The overall good performance comes from the different criteria/elements of the evaluation culture, with some elements and dimensions performing better than others.

More specifically, as regards the **demand side of the evaluation system**, the analysis shows that this dimension is generally performing well (75.14% of the index), with all criteria achieving a score over the average. Indeed, Evaluation Units, that are present at Programme level and are coordinated by the Central Evaluation Unit, work in close collaboration within the Evaluation working Group (criteria 1 *architecture of evaluation*), the financial and human resources allocated to evaluation are adequate and in line with the international levels (criteria 2 *financial and human resources*), the quality of the monitoring system is considered adequate and able to provide timely information, even with some areas of improvement at NSRF Level (criteria 3 *quality of the monitoring system*) and, finally, there are evaluation plans and assignments effectively managed by Evaluation Steering Committees (ESCs) set-up at Programme level, together with evaluation standards aligned with the EU Level and operational procedures for the design, implementation and use of evaluation evidence (criteria 4 *efficiency of the evaluation function*).

Although these criteria generally perform well, the analysis shows that there are some areas of improvement, also looking at the programming period 2014-20, for which some **recommendations** should be taken into account to enhance the diffusion of the evaluation culture in the demand side of the evaluation system:

- ▶ support analyses related to the reorganization of the evaluation function into compartments responsible exclusively for evaluation, revision of operational procedures for further linking evaluation to monitoring and programming, continue the professional development of staff at OP and NSRF level, while monitoring staff headcount, given a tendency towards downsizing of evaluation units.
- ▶ address further improvement of the system of indicators;
- ▶ support the kick-start of the planning process for evaluations under the period 2014-2020, aligning evaluation plans and data availability.

The results of the diffusion of the evaluation culture in the **supply side of the evaluation system** are still satisfactory, although a bit lower (67.53% of the index) than for the demand side: national and international companies providing evaluation services are present on the Romanian market and possess the required thematic and methodological expertise (criteria 6 *availability and quality of evaluation expertise*); also, in terms of information, socio-economic data are available in a timely manner, although micro-data at beneficiary level are only partially available (criteria 5 *socio-economic data availability and reliability*). Still, there are few recommendations to strengthen the diffusion of evaluation culture in the supply side:

- ▶ develop the statistical baseline of micro-data needed to carry out counterfactual analyses.

- ▶ revise the specific objectives and eligible activities of KAI 1.2 taking into account also rules on expense eligibility, as a pre-condition to carry out specific actions aimed at strengthening the supply side, especially of national companies.

The dimension of the evaluation system related to the **dissemination and utilization of evaluation results** is also performing adequately (66.45% of the index). Evaluation reports are publicly available, public debates have been organized in order to present and discuss evaluation findings and there is a positive tendency in organizing wide dissemination events for presenting evaluation evidence (criteria 7). Moreover, in order to support the use of evaluation results and make the best use of them, the system has put in place procedures to address them and defined actions for follow-up. This supports a use of evaluation results that is considered as having a considerable impact (criteria 8). Nonetheless, some areas of improvement have been identified to increase the effectiveness of the actions in this dimension and the report provides the following recommendations:

- ▶ support a study to identify the *most appropriate communication channels, tools and language use* to enhance the effectiveness of communication towards Structural Instruments stakeholders;
- ▶ continue embedding in evaluation projects wide communication events.

The last dimension of the evaluation system that has been considered, the **institutionalization of the evaluation culture**, is the least performing one (57.75% of the index). As related to the *mental framework* (criteria 9), evaluation is considered to some extent as an essential part for achieving success at institutional level, with a clear understanding and respect of the requirement of independency. Nonetheless, given that the number of evaluations triggered in response to a need of knowledge is lower than in other member states (criteria 12), there is room for improvement among policy makers, even if capacity building projects financed by KAI 1.2 are already addressing this goal.

The quality/expertise of the **human resources** involved (criteria 11) is in line with the average of the index, with the presence of some evaluation champions (i.e. persons supporting the evaluation process) both at OP and NSRF level. Nonetheless, the degree of participation of civil servants (other than those dedicated to evaluation) has room for improvement as well as the availability of training options (especially as concerns those provided by academia) on the market and the level of internalization of evaluation by institutional stakeholders (criteria 16).

The institutionalization of the evaluation culture is weak also looking at the **network** created with external stakeholders/players. Indeed, the contribution of the national organization of evaluators to the dissemination of good practices (criteria 13), as well as the level of participation of the civil society in evaluation related activities and the number of public events organized per year (criteria 14) are low. Even if a cooperation between Institutional stakeholders, the academia and the supply side has recently been established, up to date involvement of the academia is still very limited.

Of course, talking about institutionalization of the evaluation culture, the general legislative context and the general quality of the Public Administration, as facilitating factors for the diffusion of a common evaluation culture, have been investigated. From a **legislative point of view** (criteria 10), the national legal provisions regulating evaluation are the transposition of the EU Legal Framework and provide for the additional requirement of preparation of evaluation plans. There are though elements of the Romanian legal framework hampering evaluation, in particular public procurement rules, national ordinances on staff hire and rules on expense eligibility. As for the general governance (criteria 15), Romanian indicators of the World Bank Index position Romania above the average for most indicators but the **governance effectiveness**. According to evidences collected for this dimension, the report provides the following recommendations:

- ▶ continue performing communication activities especially targeted to policy makers and the civil society (see criteria 7).
- ▶ revise specific objectives and eligible activities of KAI 1.2 Evaluation of the Operational Programme Technical Assistance taking into account also rules on expense eligibility, to enhance educational options and capacity development actions with the involvement of the academia and of the different players/stakeholders of the evaluation system, including the national association of evaluators;
- ▶ promote capacity building activities to pursue the creation of an embedded bottom up demand for evaluation;
- ▶ address Regulatory Quality by supporting under KAI 1.2 Evaluation of the Operational Programme Technical Assistance Regulatory Impact Assessment studies.