

1. Context of the evaluation

1.1. Objectives, scope and deliverables of the evaluation

1.1.1. Objectives

The general objective of this project is to analyze the way in which the principle of equal opportunities has been transposed / mainstreamed in all phases of Cohesion Policy Programmes in Romania under the European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund.

Conclusions and recommendations are aimed at consolidating the equal opportunities dimensions in the current and future programming period. Examples of best/faulty practices in mainstreaming the equal opportunity at Programme level and of successful targeted interventions have also been identified. The specific objectives of the project are supporting ACIS and MAs for:

- ▶ offering a framework of trends, policies and agreements, emphasized at European and national level;
- ▶ transposing legal obligations and policies, as regards anti-discrimination, accessibility and gender equal opportunities, into implementation rules and procedures coherent with the relevant regulations;
- ▶ mainstreaming European agreements and Cohesion Policy objectives in relation to anti-discrimination, accessibility and gender equality of vulnerable groups in implementing rules and institutional aspects;
- ▶ defining targeted/ special interventions focusing on improving the opportunities of vulnerable groups and on assisting the beneficiaries to comply with relevant norms, for the current programming period and for the future one.

1.1.2. Evaluation questions

The evaluation covers the 7 Operational Programmes falling under Convergence Objective in Romania and answers to the following evaluation questions defined in the Terms of Reference:

Table 1: Evaluation Questions from ToR

EQ1. EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL FRAMEWORK RELEVANT FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES	EQ2. MAINSTREAMING OF THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES PRINCIPLE IN SI PROGRAMMES
EQ1.1: Which are the areas / topics aimed at equal opportunities relevant for the Structural Instruments?	EQ2.1: How have the European and national provisions been mainstreamed into various stages of the Programmes related to the cohesion policy, co-financed through ESF, ERDF and the Cohesion Fund in Romania?
EQ1.2: Which is the national legal framework relevant for the equal opportunities?	EQ2.2: What other topics on equal opportunities have been promoted / mainstreamed in various OPs?
EQ1.3: Are there any European regulations or policies on equal opportunities which have not been mainstreamed into the national legislation?	EQ2.3: Are there any good practices in the mainstreaming of equal opportunities into the Structural Instruments framework?
EQ3. BARRIERS LIMITING ACCESS TO FINANCING	EQ4. TARGETED PROJECTS FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS
EQ3: To what extent have the existing programming and implementation mechanisms triggered access to financing for people in vulnerable groups?	EQ4.1: Which are the specific projects directed or dedicated to vulnerable groups?
	EQ4.2: Which of the specific projects directed or dedicated to vulnerable groups are identified as (having a potential of) good practices?

1.1.3. Deliverables

This Evaluation Report contains:

- ▶ a presentation of the evaluation methodology used to answer to each evaluation question, including the methodology for choosing best practices examples (Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Annex 1)
- ▶ an explanation of the concept of equal opportunities and an inventory of the relevant areas/ topics in the European context and in the one regarding Cohesion Policy (Chapter 1)
- ▶ an overview of the condition of Vulnerable Groups in Romania (Chapter 1)
- ▶ findings for each evaluation question, covering all operational Programmes and aspects: implementation rules, mainstreaming of subjects regarding equal opportunities, specific interventions targeted or dedicated to vulnerable groups; access to financing for vulnerable groups (Chapter 2)
- ▶ best practice examples: 3 best practices (and 2 faulty practices) related to the mainstreaming of topics relevant to equal opportunities through Structural Instruments programming and implementation arrangements (Chapter 2 and Annex 5) and 7 best practice projects targeting areas/topics relevant for equal opportunities or vulnerable groups (Chapter 2 and Annex 8)
- ▶ conclusions and recommendations pointing out a distinction between the current programming period and the future one (Chapter 3)
- ▶ a reference framework of trends, policies and agreements related to vulnerable groups (Annex 1)
- ▶ an inventory/ data base of the projects addressing the equal opportunities issues (per specific target groups) on different types of interventions (Annex 10)

Additionally, 3 best practices related to the mainstreaming of topics relevant to equal opportunities through Structural Instruments programming and implementation arrangements and 7 best practice projects targeting areas/topics relevant for equal opportunities or vulnerable groups have been provided in electronic and hard copy format suitable for dissemination to the wider public.

1.2. Methodology

1.2.1. Evaluation Framework

The Evaluation has been carried out according to the plan presented in the Evaluation Framework included in Annex 1, which details for each question an evaluation grid consisting of:

- ▶ evaluation assumptions, that is the judgment criteria used to specify the meaning of the evaluation questions;
- ▶ analytical approach, that is the kind of analysis we will perform to answer the evaluation questions, given the judgement criteria;
- ▶ methodological tools, i.e. the tools we will use (e.g. desk research, interviews, questionnaires) in order to implement the analytical approach;
- ▶ primary sources of information, i.e. the sources (i.e. people) who can provide data and information on the specific issue;
- ▶ secondary sources, i.e. the sources we will use based in existing documents, publications, reports or tools, providing data and information already available.

Table 2: Structure of the Evaluation Framework

Evaluation question, as per the Tender Book	Evaluation assumptions	Analytical approach	Evaluation tools	Primary information sources	Secondary information sources	Evaluability
Q2.3: Can be identified cases of good practice in mainstreaming / integrating the subjects on equal opportunities into the Structural Instruments framework?	There are components of the OP management systems that are very effective in supporting equal opportunities	(1) Definition of criteria for the selection of best practices (2) Collection of relevant information for the selection of the best practices (3) Analysis of practices for mainstreaming the equal opportunities related provisions in the aforementioned stages, as compared to the criteria agreed with ECU for identification of good practices (4) Identification of practices in the implementation of the programme that properly address equal opportunities (in any stage of programmes implementation) (5) Benchmarking with practices used in other member states	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Desk analysis according to the check-lists presented in par. 3.3.3 ▶ Interviews with MA ▶ Focus group for selecting the relevant criteria ▶ Meeting with ECU to define the selection criteria ▶ Case studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Representatives of MAs, Social partners attending Monitoring Committee, Associations fostering equal opportunities, Trade unions MAs ▶ ECU ▶ MAs 	(1) Documents on Programmes as in Q2.1 (2) Best Practices/ bad practices in promotion/integration of equal opportunities at EU level	High

1.2.2. Evaluation tools

The following table provides a view of the evaluation tools used, with details on the stakeholders involved, the type of information collected and the correspondence with the evaluation question:

Evaluation Tool	Stakeholders involved	Information collected	Evaluation questions addressed
Desk Research		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Relevant documents at European level ▶ Relevant documents at national level 	▶ Q1
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Programming documents ▶ Implementation documents for selected KAIs/Operations ▶ Evaluation Reports (ex ante, thematic, interim) ▶ Monitoring (Monitoring documents, indicators, collecting and validating the data, reporting) ▶ Literature on best practices on mainstreaming equal opportunities in Structural Instruments in Member States ▶ Annual Implementation Reports 	▶ Q2
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Annual Implementation Reports ▶ SMIS and SIM-POSDRU data 	▶ Q3
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ SMIS and SIM-POSDRU data 	▶ Q4
Experts' panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ International experts on EO ▶ National experts on EO ▶ Representatives from the Ministry of Labour Directorates with competences related to Equal Opportunities issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Understanding of the National and European Framework for the implementation of the equal opportunities principle ▶ Definition of equal opportunities relevant for Structural Instrument in Romania, including a "list" of relevant areas/topics and vulnerable groups 	▶ Q1
Focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ MAs, social partners – members in Monitoring Committees of the OPs, representatives of the trade unions, representatives of the associations which deal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Criteria for best practice selection in mainstreaming the equal opportunities principle in Programme stages ▶ Criteria for selecting best practice projects, i.e. projects particularly effective in addressing equal opportunities issues of vulnerable groups 	▶ Q2 ▶ Q4

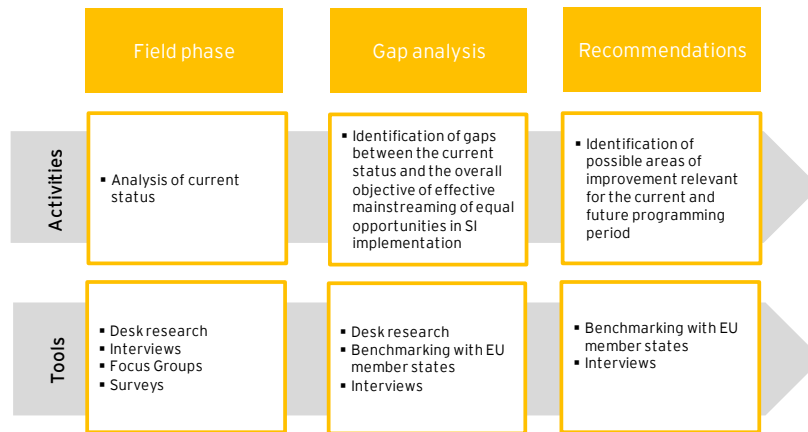
Evaluation Tool	Stakeholders involved	Information collected	Evaluation questions addressed
	with issues related to equal opportunities, social inclusions or vulnerable groups		
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Interviews with MA ▶ Interviews with ACIS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ General overview on how the principle of equal opportunity has impacted programmes ▶ Discussion about relevant Key Areas of intervention within the OPs 	▶ Q2
	▶ Interviews with Romanian organizations representative of vulnerable group	▶ Definition of the final list of barriers affecting access to finance for vulnerable groups	▶ Q3
	▶ Interviews with MAs and Project beneficiaries for case study finalization	▶ Collection of information for finalization of case studies	▶ Q4
Survey			
Questionnaire to key informants	▶ Interlocutors indicated by the Managerial Authorities with regard to good practices	▶ Request for comparable information about projects on the basis of selection criteria for best practices	▶ Q4
Questionnaire to beneficiaries	▶ Beneficiaries of the projects selected as good practices	▶ Request for detailed information about good practices with particular reference to vulnerable groups' needs	
Benchmarking with Member States		▶ Best practices adopted in Member States in order to mainstream the equal opportunities principle in different phases of the Programme lifecycle	▶ Q2
		▶ Best practices adopted in Member States in order to remove barriers in access to finance for vulnerable groups	▶ Q3

The methodologies for selection of best practices in mainstreaming topics relevant to equal opportunities through Structural Instruments programming and implementation arrangements and for selecting best practice projects targeting areas/topics relevant for equal are presented respectively under Section 2.2.1 and 2.4.2.

1.2.3. Structuring recommendations

In order to structure our recommendations for the improvement of the current approach to equal opportunities issues within the Structural Instruments system (in particular for EQ2, EQ3), we have analyzed the existence of possible gaps between the evidence collected during the field phase, and the objectives ensuring an effective mainstreaming of the principle. The approach has been functional to the identification of critical issues related to the Programme and functional for proposing possible improvements to the processes and procedures adopted up to date. The analysis was built upon the information collected from primary and secondary sources and ad-hoc elaborations enabling the comparison between evidences collected and expected results.

Figure 1: Gap analysis approach



Based on such findings, we have drawn conclusions on areas of improvement in terms of reducing the gaps between the ideal situation related to the effective mainstreaming of the equal opportunities principle and the current status.

1.3. Context of the evaluation

1.3.1. The Romanian National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013

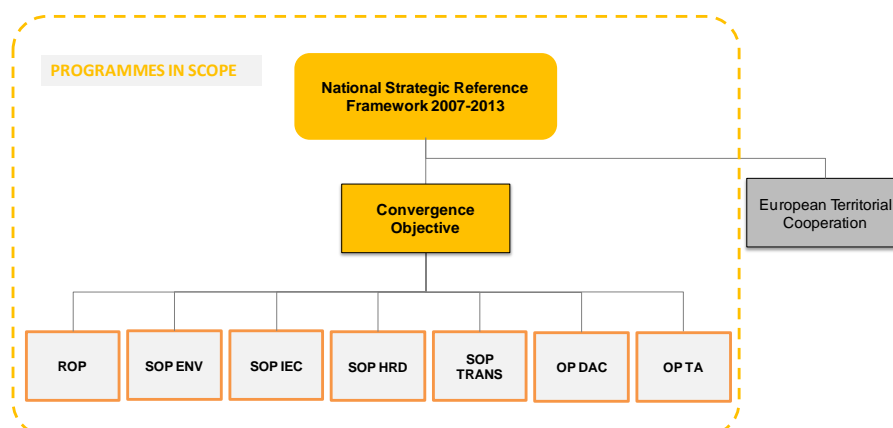
The Romanian National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013 (NSRF) is the strategic document, planning the medium-term use of the Structural and Cohesion Funds based on the National Development Plan 2007-2013, linking the national development priorities and the priorities at European level – the Community Strategic Guidelines (CSG) on Cohesion 2007-2013 and the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs 2005-2008.

The NSRF 2007-2013 envisages that EU Structural and Cohesion Funds will contribute to achieving the global objective of reducing the economic and social development disparities between Romania and the EU Member States, by generating a 15-20% additional growth of GDP by 2015.

This general NSRF objective is further detailed by four specific thematic priorities, respectively the development of basic infrastructure to European standards, Increase of long-term competitiveness of the Romanian economy, development and more efficient use of Romania’s human capital, development of an effective administrative capacity. Flanking these thematic priorities, Romanian NSRF contains a territorial priority, which addresses regional problem areas in order to prevent widening regional disparities.

The NSRF sets out the strategy that underpins the Operational Programmes which are co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund. For the Convergence Objective, Romania has translated the general priorities of the NSRF into 7 OPs, for which the total EU contribution for the period 2007-2013 amounts to EUR 19.2 bn.

Figure 2: NSRF Structure



In respect of the implementation of the Equal Opportunities principle, the NSRF provides that in accordance with Article 60 of the General Regulation, the OP Managing Authorities are responsible for ensuring that operations financed by the Structural Instruments shall be in conformity with the provisions of the Treaty, Community instruments, policies and actions.

Equal opportunities will be promoted by interventions under all the Operational Programmes. This will ensure the equitable participation of women and men in the operations and benefits that accrue from the implementation of the operations. Equality of opportunities will also focus on vulnerable groups, young people, ethnic minorities, especially Roma, the disabled people and people with learning difficulties. National Agency for Equal Opportunities will assist the MAs and the OP Monitoring Committees in properly addressing this key horizontal policy.

1.3.2. Situation of vulnerable groups at the time of drafting the NSRF

The socio-economic analyses included in the NSRF and SOP HRD identify the main social groups at risk of marginalisation as well as the problems related to their social integration, reintegration into the labour market and access to education.

In 2005 **women** accounted for 51.2% of the population and Romania was ranked 56th out of 175 countries according to gender disparity index measuring women's disadvantage in the three dimensions of reproductive health, empowerment and labour market.

During 2002–2005, female unemployment in Romania fluctuated between 7.7% and 6.4% constantly below the rate of male unemployment, lower also than the 9.8% registered in EU-25 and 8.9% in EU-15. On the other hand, the salary of women varied between 82% and 83% of that of men in the period 1999-2003, but rose to 87% in 2005.

Research in 2005 showed that 67.6% of women employed were working in industries, such as food and textiles and had salaries under the gross average salary. Violence and discrimination at work in Romania were higher than compared to acceding and candidate countries but below the EU 15 average.

The Roma population totalled 535,140 people at the 2002 census (2.5% of the population), representing the second largest ethnic minority group, however, independent estimates carried out by sociologists as well by the European Commission¹, estimated the actual number of Roma as up to 2.5 million. A WB Report stated that in 2000, about 68.8% of the Roma population lived with less than 4.3 USD per day.

The main identified problems faced by this group referred to poor education facilities leading to low participation in education and low educational attainments, lack of skills and experience on the labour market, insufficient participation in formal economy, large number of children, lack of housing and bad living conditions, lack of identity cards, as well as a state of health worse than that of the rest of the population. Only 22.9% of the Roma population were economically active and of these 71.5% were in employment. The other large ethnic minority identified within the NSRF is the **Hungarian population**, accounting for 6.6% of the total population.

The share of **persons with disabilities** out of the total population has maintained around 1.8-2.1% between 1999 and 2006, with fluctuations determined by the applicable legal framework. The number of disabled people in employment was low due to discrimination, lack of opportunities, education, professional skills and barriers to accessibility further reducing employment opportunities and the policy to integrate disabled children was still not working as effectively, with 30% of the disabled children between 6-18 years integrated in public schools

The number of institutionalized persons decreased steadily from 20,270 in 2003 to 17,560 in the 3rd quarter of 2006, whereas the number of non-institutionalized persons rose from 387,850 to 461,828 in the same period. The decrease in the number of disabled people living in residential centres and the increase in the state support granted to families to provide the disabled persons home care was still limited by the underdevelopment of community services in terms of coverage, diversity and quality.

Young people over 18 leaving state care institutions faced a lack of access to housing and difficulties in integrating into the labour market, due mainly to a lack of adequate professional skills. Other groups of vulnerable children included "street children", and the associated issues were social integration, child exploitation in the labour market, school drop-outs, children affected by trafficking and those involved in juvenile criminality.

¹ "2004 Regular Report on Romania's Progress Towards Accession"

1.3.3. Overview of current situation of vulnerable groups

In order to obtain an overview of the current situation of vulnerable groups in Romania we have reviewed the information contained in the socio-economic analyses for the Programming of European Funds 2014-2020 of the Social Affairs and Social Inclusion Technical working Group and of the Social Economy and Entrepreneurship Technical Working Group, the background analyses contained in the National Strategy for Equal Opportunities between men and women for 2010-2012 and the Report of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection regarding social inclusion in Romania in 2010.

Discrimination based on gender remains one of the main provocations faced by Romanian society, in virtue of a number of visible differences in what concerns access, participation and involvement of women and men in social, political, economic, cultural and labour market participation. The labour market continues to be characterized by gender segregation, in the sense that participation of women remains preponderant in economic activities such as health, education, public administration while male participation is higher in such domains as heavy industry, defence, thus resulting in gender pay gaps between men and women. Nevertheless, compared to the statistical data of 2004 according to which the pay gap between men and women was 14%, there is a tendency towards the reduction of such difference.

In 2004 the employment rate for women in the age group 15-64 was 52.1%, while for men it was 63.6%, a situation which is confirmed also by the most recent statistics of 2007. As concerns unemployment, in 2007 the rate for women was significantly lower for than for men (4.9% vs. 7.2%).

Gender participation in decision making is also characterized by a disproportion between the number of women and the number of men represented in parliamentary and government structures.

When analysing the level of poverty according to the indicator „gender of the head of the household”, it results that households ran by women are more affected by poverty than those ran by men, because of the fact that, in general, women designated to run the household are less active on the labour market.

Roma population is identified as one of the most vulnerable groups of the Romanian population, facing a risk of poverty 7 times higher (31.1%) than the rest of the population (4.4%), as per 2009, with determining factors being the low income of households, the low level of education of adults and prevailing black work. According to preliminary results of the Census made in 2012, there are 619,000 roma people in Romania, representing 3.2% of the population of the country. No detailed statistics were available at the moment this report was realised, in terms of employment situations of roma people in 2012.

Compared with the situation in other Member States, Romanian roma population registers a lower participation in the labour market, showing however a proactive attitude towards informal integration opportunities. The 2002 census of households showed that 22.9% of the roma are part of the active population and that out of this share 28.5% were unemployed persons searching for a job, 41% persons were occupied in agriculture and 31% workers without qualifications. More generally 70% of the roma population had no qualification and was engaged in activities that did not require any professional training.

The Report of the Presidential Commission for Social and Demographic Risk Analysis in 2009 showed that 53% of roma men and 23% of roma women do paid work. Of these, only 36% on the working men are employed, as compared to 77% of the working men that are not roma. As a ratio of the entire adult roma population, only 19% of the men and 11% of women are employed, compared to 40% of men and 31% of women of other minorities.

According to the most recent “Social Inclusion Barometer” (2010), roma population is the most exposed to the risk of social exclusion, it is discriminated and does not have equal access to education, labour market, social services and health system. The rate of occupation of roma population remains very low, while the risk of dismissal from work is ten times higher than for the rest of the population. For the above reasons 60% of the roma households sustain themselves with a salary that is 60% of the minimum legal salary. Furthermore, the early drop-out from the education system characterizing roma youth is associated to a life trajectory according to traditional models, resulting for approximately 60% of women in giving birth to the first child before the age of 18.

The National Organisation of People with Handicap in Romania reveals that in the last 10 years the number of **disabled people** in Romania increased from 420,000 to almost 690,000 people (by 60%), out of which approximately 9% are children and 91% adults and overall 97.5% of them are institutionalized. The share of disabled people in the total population has, however, increased even more, given the fact that the actual population of Romania decreased from 21.6 mn. in 2002 to 19 mn. in 2011.

The main factor affecting employment of persons with disabilities is education. From this perspective the Romanian education system creates major disadvantages for persons with disabilities, thus leading to a rate of illiteracy n and

early drop-out that are respectively 7 times and 2 times higher than the one of the general population. In 2008 the number of persons with disabilities with an occupation amounted to 12% of the total number of persons with disabilities between 18-60 years dependent from families. Trends in employment presented by the Romanian Academic Society in 2009 (in the paper: *Diagnosis: Excluded from Labour Market. Difficulties in employing disabled people in Romania*) show also an overall increase in the number of persons with disabilities that have an occupation which rose from 9,600 in 2003 to over 27,000 in 2009.

In Romania there are approximately 3.8 million **children** under the age of 18 affected by risk of poverty and social exclusion, that is much higher than for all other groups of the population. **Children and youth** (18-23) represent the group with the highest probability of facing absolute poverty also as a result of the economic downturn with the toughest conditions being faced by children growing in rural areas and those or roma ethnics. In terms of employment, the labour market offers few possibilities for young people in the age group 15-25 and shows a more worrying tendency than in other Member States, with the unemployment rate growing from 18.6% in 2008 to 23.9% in the first quarter of 2012.

The absence of employment opportunities has hit youth (including university graduates) and **persons over 45 years** more than any other age group, especially in rural areas and smaller urban centres where employment opportunities are extremely limited. According to the Social Inclusion Barometer (2010) these two age groups have faced the most severe challenges in finding an occupation, resulting in young people immigrating abroad and in older people relying, where possible, on subsistence agriculture.

In terms of religious segmentation, out of the total population of 19 mn. people, 16,367,000 people are orthodox, 870,000 are Romano-Catholics, 160,000 are Greek-catholic, 600,000 are reformists, 118,000 are Baptists, 368,000 are Pentecostals, 86,000 are Adventists, and 344,000 have a different religion. Overall from the above picture, it results that most of the issues related to vulnerable groups addressed within the National Strategic Reference Framework remain actual, some of them having also worsened in relation to the effects of the global economic downturn.