Evaluation Report

IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION AND PROMOTION OF STRUCTURAL INSTRUMENTS

Framework Agreement 23/2011 for the evaluation of Structural Instruments between 2011-2015
LOT 1 – Evaluations

SUBSEQUENT CONTRACT NO. 17

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geastrategy &consulting

NTSN CONECT

CPD

CONTENTS

List of acronyms

Acronym	Explanation
RDA	Regional Development Agency
MA	Managing Authority
PA	Priority Axis
ToR	Terms of Reference
IC-SI	Information Centre on Structural Instruments
KAI	Key Area of Intervention
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020
SCF	Structural and Cohesion Funds
WG	Working Group
PI	Programme Indicators
MEF	Ministry of European Funds
MPF	Ministry of Public Finance
VIM	Visual Identity Manual
IB	Intermediate Body
OPTA CP	OPTA 2007-2013 Communication Plan
OP	Operational Programme
OPTA	Operational Programme Technical Assistance 2007-2013
ROP	Regional Operational Programme
SOPIEC	Sectoral Operational Programme Increase of Economic Competitiveness 2007-2013
SOPHRD	Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013
ECR	European Commission Representation in Romania
ER	Evaluation Report
IR	Inception Report
SMIS	Single Management Information System
NCS-SI	National Communication Strategy for Structural Instruments 2007-2013
TC	Theory of Change
PCIU-SI	Public Communication and Information Unit on Structural Instruments
EU	European Union

Preamble

This document is the **Evaluation Report** of the project **"*Impact assessment on the dissemination of information and promotion of Structural Instruments*"** as per **Subsequent Contract no. 17/23/1453/DF/12.08.2015** (under Framework Agreement no. 23/22.08.2011, Lot 1 "Evaluation of Structural Instruments, 2011-2015") between the Ministry of European Funds (MEF) ("Contracting Authority" and "Beneficiary") and the consortium GEA Strategy & Consulting (lead), NTSN CONECT and CPD Ltd. ("Consortium" / "Contractor").

Summary data on the project

Project title	**"Impact assessment on the dissemination of information and promotion of Structural Instruments "**
Project number	Framework Agreement no. 23/22.08.2011/ Subsequent Agreement no. 17/23/1453/DF/12.08.2015
Beneficiary State	Romania
Beneficiary	Ministry of European Funds, General Directorate of Analysis, Programming and Evaluation
Contracting Authority	Ministry of European Funds
Budget	RON 258,469.82 (VAT included)
General objective	*The general objective* of the project is to: • acquire new knowledge on the impact of interventions financed under OPTA 2007-2013 and contribute to decision-making based on evidence; • analyse what were the effects of the interventions financed under OPTA 2007-2013 and assess the impact achieved, measured on the basis of indicators set according to each type of support; • make proposals regarding the appropriateness of the methodologies used and the databases required for future evaluations of such interventions.
Specific Objective	*The specific objective* is to carry out the impact assessment of PA3 Dissemination of information and promotion of Structural Instruments of Operational Programme Technical Assistance 2007-2013, according to the OPTA revised Evaluation Plan, approved by the Programme Monitoring Committee in October 2014.
Start date	12.08.2015
Term of the project	4 months (ending 30 November 2015, as per contractual provisions)

Abstract

This document is the Evaluation Report for the project "*Impact assessment on the dissemination of information and promotion of Structural Instruments",* whose main goal is to provide stakeholders with new knowledge about the impact of OPTA 2007-2013 interventions financed under Priority Axis 3 "*Dissemination of information and promotion of Structural Instruments",* defined to ensure the dissemination of information and the promotion of Structural Instruments in the 2007-2013 programming period.

Methodological aspects

The report provides a detailed analysis of the degree in which the objectives set for Priority Axis 3 have been met, whilst also identifying the net effect of the interventions, namely the part of this progress that can be exclusively attributed to the supported interventions under OPTA 2007-2013. It also sought to identify other negative and/or positive effects as a result of the PA3 implementation, which had not been directly targeted by the actions carried out. The extent to which the outcomes of the actions are sustainable in the long term, as well as the mechanisms that lead to sustainable effects provided other key-issues of the evaluation.

The evaluation analysis covers the entire programming and implementation period (2007-2015). **The evaluation methodology used** was appropriate in order to achieve the objectives of the assessment. It took into account the beneficiary's needs, as well as time and data availability constraints, which shaped the assessment process. The review of literature and best practices with respect to the **theory of change** provided major support for the evaluation process. Since the theory of change – as intervention logic, taking into account all elements and factors that may affect the achievement of the envisaged results – is not explicitly outlined in the programming documents, **and the assessment team reconstructed the theory of change for Priority Axis 3** based on the Ray Rist model described in the paper "The Road to Results".

The reconstruction of the theory of change outlines the elements as they were considered at the time of programming, to which the changes during the programming period have been added, so as o capture the programme's impact and the causes of the recorded developments.

Based on the reconstructed Theory of Change, a series of assumptions were formulated, as a way to test the manner in which the originally-proposed actions for implementing the strategy contributed to achieving the set objectives, given the factors of influence and the established implementation mechanisms. The identification and analysis of related best practices have also been key-elements in the evaluation process.

TC Reconstruction → TC Interrogation → Providing answers to EQ and ER development

The answer to each evaluation question is based on the findings of the assumption testing phase. The evaluation process took into account a mix of tools and techniques for quantitative and qualitative research. All evaluation questions require the use of at least two

tools, so that the results may back up each other (in other words, to ensure confirmation from at least two sources).

The reconstruction of the Change Theory was complemented by a counterfactual analysis, applied specifically in order to determine the contribution of the actions funded from PA3 in providing the population with SI-related information. For this purpose, the evaluation team opted for the method of correlating SME beneficiaries who turned to the SI Information Centre, as a pilot exercise in identifying the contribution of this service in providing information to potential beneficiaries.

Documentary review, consultations with stakeholders (MEF, MA, IB) on the communication and information activities, as well as discussing and agreeing on the TC reconstruction, testing assumptions, findings and recommendations were very important aspects for the overall evaluation process. In this regard, interviews were conducted and focus-groups were held with relevant stakeholders from MEF, MA and IB.

The findings of assumption testing and documentary review, validated through consultations with stakeholders, helped provide answers to the evaluation questions and draw conclusions and recommendations.

Progress in implementing Priority Axis 3

Progress in implementing PA3 is modest. Thus, in financial terms, the PA3 absorption is a mere 24% of the allocation for KAI 3.1. and 10% of the allocation for KAI 3.2.. These low values calculated for the absorption of available funding refer to the allocations reduced following the redistribution of almost 70% of the KAI 3.1 financial resources to PA1 (62%) and of KAI 3.2 (8%), respectively, carried out in 2014.

OPTA PA3 absorption, 31.12.2014 (EUR)
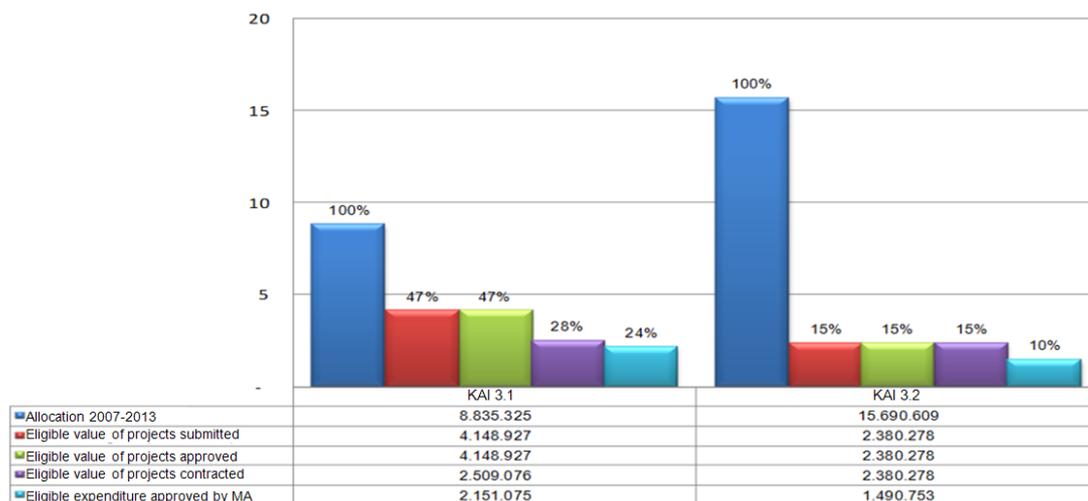
	KAI 3.1	KAI 3.2
Allocation 2007-2013	8.835.325	15.690.609
Eligible value of projects submitted	4.148.927	2.380.278
Eligible value of projects approved	4.148.927	2.380.278
Eligible value of projects contracted	2.509.076	2.380.278
Eligible expenditure approved by MA	2.151.075	1.490.753

* Differences in value relative to AIR 2013 are due to the exchange rate used for the conversion in EUR (December 2013 – 4.4361 RON/EUR, December 2014 – 4.4205 RON/EUR).

Source: OPTA AIR 2014

In terms of funded contracts, OPTA PA3 provided support for two major projects, the beneficiary of which was the Public Communication and Information Unit on Structural Instruments. Apart from these, an application (MySMIS code 5424) to conduct communication activities in 2014-2015 was also submitted under OPTA.

The OPTA PA3 physical progress is reflected in the following values of the programme indicators:

Programme indicators as per the latest version of OPTA	OPTA target*	Val achieved in 2015 (incl. baseline value)	% achievement of the target in 2015
Studies, analyses, reports, strategies	4	4	100%
Supported events (conferences, seminars, workshops) for promoting SI interventions / Information and publicity events	98	36	37%
Information and publicity materials	36	29	81%
Media campaigns	4	3	75%
Number of hits on the SI site / Web page hits	1,763,732	2,128,313	121%
Number of requests received by IC-SI	40,000	5,647	14%
Level of awareness of SI	50	53**	106%

The main findings and conclusions of the evaluation are provided below, structured as required by ToR, in the form of answers to the evaluation questions.

Evaluation Conclusions

Q1: What is the progress in achieving the objectives of PA3?

In order to provide an appropriate answer to this question, the evaluation team sought, at an initial stage, to ensure a clear understanding of the objectives set for PA3. Thus, the following three objectives pursued under this Priority Axis have been identified:

- Increasing awareness of SI;
- Increasing awareness of OPTA amongst the target-groups of the OP;
- Nationally coordinated dissemination of general messages regarding SI.

The assessment of the progress in achieving PA3 objectives covered all three levels and involved a countrywide survey, as well as an analysis of the outcomes of the projects implemented under PA3, as well as consultations with relevant stakeholders.

The first level – **awareness** – targeted the broadest range of audiences, the less specialised and showing a low level of interest, in the initial phase. It does not seek to achieve more than a level of awareness and familiarity with the area of reference. As interest grows, the different audiences are more willing and open to make efforts in order to gain knowledge, so as to attain the stage called **information**. At that stage, the audience pays attention to information transmitted in the public space or even seeks information in certain media, which they use frequently and trust.

The progress in terms of increasing SI awareness is very good, as this indicator saw a significant evolution in time, particularly in the first part of the programming period (rising from 5% in 2006 to 30% in 2010 and 40% in 2011), in the context of the communication actions implemented, but also of the interest shown by the public and potential beneficiaries.

Thus, the results of the study conducted in 2015 within this assessment indicate *a very good progress, of 51%, in terms of increasing population's awareness of Structural Instruments*, in

connection with the awareness of certain visual elements, such as the EU flag (95%) or SI logo (34%). Thus, the target set for 2015 at the beginning of the programming period, i.e. 50% level of awareness among the population, has been reached.

The level of SI awareness among the population

At target-group level, **increasing OPTA awareness** is reflected by the beneficiaries' and potential beneficiaries' good level of knowledge on the financing opportunities provided by OPTA and on how to access the funds.

This objective envisaged to increase the access to OPTA funding, which in November reached 72.72% of the total allocation. Specifically, the information actions mainly addressed OPTA beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, mostly represented by public institutions (including MEF/ACIS, institutions with duties in SI management and audit etc.).

The national coordination of SI-related messages mainly involved tying in the communication actions carried out by ACIS / MEF, as responsible institution for *"general communication"* (providing general information, e.g. types of funding sources available, the institutions managing the funds, funds absorption rate, generally-applicable procedures, the role of SI, outcomes etc.)**,** and those implemented by the Managing Authorities, who are responsible for *"specific communication"* (providing specific information, such as: calls for proposals, conditions for access, documentation relating to a specific operational programme), so that the information provided to target groups do not overlap and, most importantly, to avoid any information gaps.

National guidelines regarding SI-related communication were established by the National Communication Strategy for SI 2007-2013 and sought to support the achievement of the highest absorption rate possible. The responsibility of implementing the National Communication Strategy was entrusted to ACIS and MAs, whilst the actions to be implemented were detailed in the Communication Plans specific to each Operational Programme.

In this context, the evaluation showed that the task of **ensuring a coordinated dissemination of general messages regarding SI at national level has been partly fulfilled**. Coordination was more effective in the first part of the programming cycle, but could not be sustained throughout the implementation period. The reasons for this included the difference of vision between the Managing Authorities, changes in decision-making, issues related to the need and desire of each institution to conduct promotion independently and to present the achieved results in an independent and visible manner.

Q2: How much of this progress can be attributed to OPTA?

In order to determine the influence of OPTA in achieving PA3 objectives, during the evaluation process, the assumptions set out in the TC reconstruction phase were tested,

thus providing an answer regarding the net effect of the interventions supported by OPTA, separately from the interventions supported under sectoral OPs or from other public or private initiatives.

For this purpose, an inventory and analysis of the results achieved under the implemented projects, as well as of the influence of external factors on achieving objectives have been carried out. Projects implemented under KAI 3.1. and KAI 3.2 aimed to support the implementation of ACIS' Communication Plan through various communication and information actions (e.g. conferences, press conferences, information campaigns, production and distribution of promotional materials, advertising campaigns, billboards etc.) and the development of the Information Centre for Structural Instruments, with the role of disseminating information on SI to the various categories of audiences targeted by the OP.

The analyses showed that, **in terms of increasing awareness of SI**, **the recorded progress was triggered by the actions under OPTA 2007-2013 only to a small extent**.

The reasons for this evolution include the fact that *the communication tools used, although properly chosen according to the needs identified and the defined purpose, were insufficient in order to cover the need for general information*. At the same time, *the communication tools were not implemented on time* (e.g. delays in rendering the Information Centre operational, lack of coordination of MA and ACIS in preparing the visual identity manual, carrying out further general information caravans when specific information was needed etc.).

Polls, although representative of the level of awareness of SCF and comparable in time, have not been used consistently in order to adapt communication tools to the needs of the different target-groups in order to increase the effectiveness of communication. Whilst providing information on the respondents' level of information on SI, surveys did not include data on the level of knowledge and information needs among the main target-groups.

At the same time, the www.fonduri-ue.ro website, *only had an average contribution to raising awareness of SCF and increasing transparency on the use of funds during the observed period*. Surveys and interviews with relevant stakeholders indicate that the visibility and notoriety of the website has improved steadily, **but further efforts are still needed**.

The Information Centre, throughout its operation, has addressed a total of 5,647 requests, reaching approx. 14% of the 40,000-request target set for OPTA. The analyses carried out showed that the Information Centre *has failed to fulfill its role as hub of information on SI*, given that the contribution of the centre's helpdesk service to increasing awareness among potential applicants for grants could not be accurately determined.

OPTA-funded publicity campaigns, although effective, have only partially led to increased information and awareness of SCF among the population. This result is due to various factors, which led to significant time fluctuations in applying these tools, such as suspending purchases for communication in 2009-2010, the focus on communication with the media and engaging in other activities upon the set-up of MEF, as well as low administrative capacity within the unit responsible for communication and information activities aiming to ensure a proactive approach, generated by the needs of the target groups.

Another factor behind this low contribution is the fact that *the selected institutional mechanisms to coordinate communication activities, although appropriate, could not be optimally implemented due to external causes*, related to the general institutional

framework of the SI implementation. The effectiveness of the mechanisms (e.g. Communication Working Group) was significantly impacted by the lack of levers required to implement the decisions within ministries.

Furthermore, *MEF/ACIS involvement in communication activities organised by other entities, although providing added-value and legitimacy to the information conveyed, did not contribute to maximizing or enhancing the effects of these actions* (thus, the absence of a multiplier effect of information).

Q3: Are there other effects, positive or negative, of the PA3 implementation?

This question aims to identify the unintended effects of interventions supported under PA3. Their identification was considered throughout the evaluation process, especially during the reconstruction of the Theory of Change, as well as during the analysis of influence factors and assumption development. However, the literature review, identification and analysis of best practices and lessons learned from implementing similar interventions have provided support to this process.

Following the analyses and interviews conducted by the evaluation team with those concerned, a number of effects arising from the PA3 implementation have been identified, as follows:

The **positive effects include the development of alternative, private sources of information/initiatives**, in the context of growing information needs among beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries (due to insufficient coverage of these needs by MEF/ACIS and delays in implementing the communication actions set out in OPTA 2007-2013).

Both due to the institutional framework, which allowed for the development of individual actions, but also due to the insufficient coordination on the part of ACIS, certain managing authorities have implemented their own communication strategies, with significant success (i.e. mechanisms and actions promoted under ROP).

The multitude of information sources sometimes led to **adverse effects**, **such as confusion among the public about the official sources of information** (the www.fonduri-structurale.ro website was/ is still regarded by part of the beneficiaries as the official MEF/ACIS information website), and **the provision of incorrect/incomplete information**.

Q4: To what extent is this progress sustainable in the long term?

This question focused on assessing the extent to which the results achieved in meeting PA3 objectives can be maintained over time, given the conditions in which they were produced, for the specific areas and target groups, as well as based on the foreseen economic and social developments.

The progress in terms of increasing SI awareness is sustainable under current conditions. Nevertheless, the effects of communication actions could be enhanced by better planning, a better knowledge of the needs of the relevant public and by ensuring appropriate administrative capacity.

The progress in terms of ensuring a coordinated dissemination of general SI-related messages is not sustainable under current conditions, without changing implementation mechanisms and supporting the duties of MEF/ACIS, as coordinator.

Thus, the delivery and sustainability of information activities coordination rely on the existence of well-established hierarchical relationships between the institutions involved and the existence and well-functioning of coordination mechanisms. In this context, the definition and deployment of additional instruments at central and regional level are prerequisites for ensuring effective coordination.

Q5: What mechanisms have been implemented or are necessary to facilitate effects and their sustainability?

This question seeks to identify the interventions and mechanisms that can help ensure the success of communication actions in time, such as those implemented under OPTA 2007-2013 and which can increase the effectiveness of interventions foreseen during 2014-2020.

In this regard, the assessment has revealed four required mechanisms to be developed in the near future.

Ensuring the proper functioning of the coordination mechanisms set out in the National Communication Strategy 2007-2013 – i.e. Communication Working Group and Communicators' Forum **–** , which can facilitate effects. In this respect, it is essential **to implement the legal basis** (Decision no. 398/2015 establishing the institutional framework for the coordination and management of European Structural and Investment Funds and ensuring the continuity of the institutional framework for the coordination and management of Structural Instruments 2007-2013) **so as to ensure MEF's coordination function and relationships with other institutions**.

The interventions envisaged under PA3 of OPTA 2007-2013 have been appropriately chosen, but they were not implemented on time and were insufficient. In this context, it is necessary **to plan and implement interventions in an integrated, consistent and sustained manner**, in order to ensure a more effective communication process. Interventions must be based on a good knowledge of the information needs of the various target-groups.

Supporting the overall operation of an information network at regional/ county level may facilitate the desired effects in terms of increasing general information on SI/ESIF, whilst creating the necessary means (ensuring increased visibility of the information office, both online and within the structure where activity is to be conducted, well-trained and properly sized staff; access to a database containing the necessary information, updated in real time; ensuring proper communication with SI/ESIF managing and implementing authorities etc.).

The creation and operation of a system for information dissemination and multiplication, which may consider partnerships with relevant entities (NGOs and private organisations, with experience and results in this area), as well as media involvement may increase communication effectiveness. At the same time, **the deployment of a grant scheme** may help promote SI/ESIF and their role in social and economic development.

Another **optional mechanism** that could be considered is to create dedicated "**one-stop-shop**" structures (for SMEs or other types of beneficiaries) aiming to provide specific information about financing under the various OPs. Should it be decided to support such a mechanism, a thorough analysis on the accuracy and consistency of the provided information needs to be conducted. At the same time, it will be necessary to clarify any issues regarding the accountability for the information provided by the staff of these structures and acknowledging this perspective by the relevant authorities (MA, IB).

Recommendations

The proposed recommendations aim to promote the strategic role of the SI/ESIF communication and information process, as well as to improve the coordination of communication actions across the SI/ESIF management system.

R.1 MEF should coordinate communication activities implemented by the relevant authorities, so as to ensure a consistent dissemination of general messages on SI/ESIF. Messages will refer to the role and effects of SI/ESIF in terms of social and economic development in Romania, accessing funds, as well as ensuring a transparent use of funds in accordance with the provisions of the National Communication Strategy and other relevant policy documents for 2014-2020.

R.2 It is recommended to create a mechanism for the proper delivery of MEF's coordination function, by concluding protocols and conducting of an effective exchange of information between the institutions managing European funds.

R.3. MEF should conduct general information activities through proper planning and a detailed analysis of information needs, covering both the general public and the main target-groups (potential beneficiaries, media representatives, promoters of information), so as to improve the relevance of the conveyed information.

R.4. MEF should support the operation of an information dissemination and multiplication system through partnerships with relevant entities and media involvement, in order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

[1]. The Evaluation Report contains an introduction, a main section and annexes. The first chapter of the Report outlines the general framework of the evaluation exercise, providing a brief description of the Operational Programme Technical Assistance [OPTA] and Priority Axis 3 [PA3] (subject to evaluation), of the objectives and expected results.

[2]. Chapter 2 describes the evaluation methodology and methodological constraints, while the following three chapters form the main section of the Evaluation Report and refer to the reconstruction of the Change Theory for PA3, including the assumptions tested for the evaluation (Chapter 3), the Progress made in implementing PA 3 (Chapter 4) and Theory of Change Query results by testing the assumptions made (Chapter 5).

[3]. The main conclusions of the evaluation have been provided as answers to the Evaluation Questions in Chapter 6. The recommendations of the evaluation are provided in a separate section of each chapter.

1.1. Background and objectives

1.1.1. Overview of OPTA 2007-2013

[4]. The interventions covered by this evaluation exercise were financed under PA3 of OPTA 2007-2013 and pertain to the communication and information actions carried out for the dissemination of information and promotion of Structural Instruments in Romania.

[5]. OPTA is one of the seven operational programmes for the implementation of Structural Instruments [SI] in Romania, with the overall objective of ensuring the required support for the *coordination* process and to contribute to the *effective, efficient and transparent implementation and absorption* of Structural Instruments in Romania.

[6]. OPTA is by nature a cross-cutting programme, addressing needs identified for the whole SI management and implementation system. OPTA complements the technical assistance priority axes of the operational programmes and is a tool for the coordination of the cohesion policy, providing a general, coherent and consistent approach.

[7]. In order to achieve the overall objective, OPTA sets out two specific objectives:
   a) *Ensuring support and appropriate tools for the efficient and effective coordination and implementation of Structural Instruments 2007-2013 and in preparation for the next SI programming period*

   b) *Ensuring a coordinated countrywide dissemination of general messages on Structural Instruments and implementing ACIS' Communication Action Plan as per the National Communication Strategy for Structural Instruments [NCS - SI]*

[8]. The objectives set were achieved by implementing the actions under the three priority axis of the OP, as follows:
c) **Priority Axis 1 - Support to the implementation of structural instruments and coordination of programmes**, which aims *to strengthen coordination capacity* for

Structural Instruments implementation and *the development of an appropriate administrative system,* through actions seeking to ensure a common level of knowledge and experience among stakeholders.

d) **Priority Axis 2 - Further development and support for the functioning of the Single Management Information System** – aims to ensure the smooth functioning of SMIS, its organizational and functional development and the ongoing expansion of the system so as to allow *quick access to information* for all institutions involved in the management of structural instruments and to achieve the *proper and effective management of operational programmes*.

e) **Priority Axis 3 - Dissemination of information and promotion of Structural Instruments** – aims for a *nationally-coordinated dissemination* of general messages regarding structural instruments and the *implementation of the MEF's Communication Action Plan*, according NCS-SI.

[9]. Priority Axis 3 has, in turn, two key areas of intervention (3.1 and 3.2.) with the following objectives:

1) **providing assistance for the implementation of the Communication Action Plan developed by MEF. This assistance includes communication campaigns, polls, publicity, events, information materials, impact assessment and analysis of the best tools for promotion and publicity.**

[10]. With an allocation of RON 27,403,123[1], this area of intervention sought to support the implementation of the Communication Action Plan developed by ACIS, under the following indicative operations:

- Organization of campaigns and events (seminars, conferences etc.) to be undertaken to promote a greater understanding of the funds and the implementation and monitoring arrangements in Romania;
- Preparation, publication, translation and distribution of materials (publications, brochures, folders, CDs and other possible formats) for information and promotion of the structural instruments;
- Publicity actions and materials connected to OPTA;
- Carrying out opinion polls;
- Supporting national information campaigns on TV, radio or other media;
- Analysis of impact of the promotion and publicity activities.

2) **providing resources for the development and operation of a SI Information Centre, resources for the development of a dedicated web page, of a call centre and of regional and local network of information points.**

[11]. According to the National Communication Strategy for Structural Instruments in the 2007-2013 programming period, the core of the public information process is the Information Centre for Structural Instruments. According to the original planning, the Information Centre would be the focal point that all those interested will turn to following the campaigns and the place to obtain answers to general questions, as well as referrals to specialised bodies, depending on their particular interest.

[12]. IC-SI was to have a single website and a call centre, both with national coverage. The regional/local information points were to operate under the coordination of the information centre, forming a network to provide consistent and reliable information on

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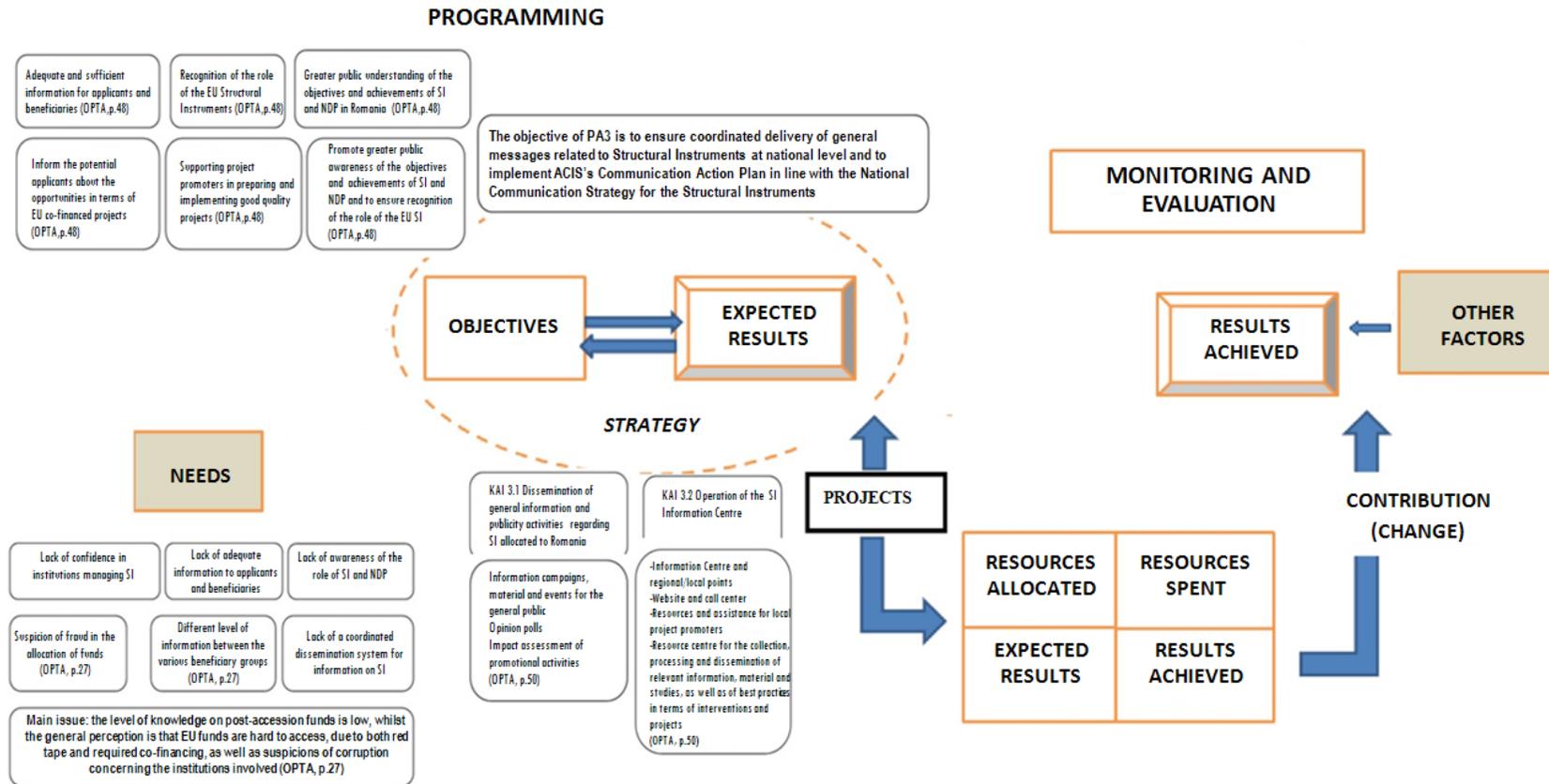
[1] After the reallocation in 2014

all programmes and opportunities offered by the Structural Instruments. At the same time, the information points were meant to act as resource and support centres for local project promoters, in preparing and implementing projects. Apart from the role of focal point routing information, the Centre was supposed to function as a resource centre for collecting, processing and disseminating relevant information, materials and studies, as well as best practices in terms of interventions and projects.

[13]. OPTA MA had been originally (at the time of the programme's development, in 2006) defined as single eligible beneficiary under OPTA PA3. Subsequently, on the backdrop of institutional changes, and having regard to other projects implemented with SCF support, the eligible beneficiaries have been amended, including: MEF through the Public Communication and Information Unit on Structural Instruments (KAI 3.1-3.2) and Regional Development Agencies, for projects aiming to create information points in growth poles with the support of the pole coordinator's office (KAI 3.2).

[14]. The intervention logic of Priority Axis 3 is briefly shown in the following figure.

Fig. 1 Intervention Logic of OPTA Priority Axis 3

PROGRAMMING

Adequate and sufficient information for applicants and beneficiaries (OPTA,p.48)

Recognition of the role of the EU Structural Instruments (OPTA,p.48)

Greater public understanding of the objectives and achievements of SI and NDP in Romania (OPTA,p.48)

Inform the potential applicants about the opportunities in terms of EU co-financed projects (OPTA,p.48)

Supporting project promoters in preparing and implementing good quality projects (OPTA,p.48)

Promote greater public awareness of the objectives and achievements of SI and NDP and to ensure recognition of the role of the EU SI (OPTA,p.48)

The objective of PA3 is to ensure coordinated delivery of general messages related to Structural Instruments at national level and to implement ACIS's Communication Action Plan in line with the National Communication Strategy for the Structural Instruments

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

OBJECTIVES

EXPECTED RESULTS

RESULTS ACHIEVED

OTHER FACTORS

STRATEGY

NEEDS

Lack of confidence in institutions managing SI

Lack of adequate information to applicants and beneficiaries

Lack of awareness of the role of SI and NDP

Suspicion of fraud in the allocation of funds (OPTA, p.27)

Different level of information between the various beneficiary groups (OPTA, p.27)

Lack of a coordinated dissemination system for information on SI

Main issue: the level of knowledge on post-accession funds is low, whilst the general perception is that EU funds are hard to access, due to both red tape and required co-financing, as well as suspicions of corruption concerning the institutions involved (OPTA, p.27)

KAI 3.1 Dissemination of general information and publicity activities regarding SI allocated to Romania

Information campaigns, material and events for the general public
Opinion polls
Impact assessment of promotional activities (OPTA, p.50)

KAI 3.2 Operation of the SI Information Centre

-Information Centre and regional/local points
-Website and call center
-Resources and assistance for local project promoters
-Resource centre for the collection, processing and dissemination of relevant information, material and studies, as well as of best practices in terms of interventions and projects (OPTA, p.50)

PROJECTS

CONTRIBUTION (CHANGE)

RESOURCES ALLOCATED	RESOURCES SPENT
EXPECTED RESULTS	RESULTS ACHIEVED

Note: the component on allocated/used resources and results was developed in the analysis sections.

16

1.1.2. Evaluation objectives

[15]. **The general objective** the evaluation is to:
- acquire new knowledge on the impact of interventions financed under OPTA 2007-2013 and contribute to decision-making based on evidence;
- analyse what were the effects of the interventions financed under OPTA 2007-2013 and assess the impact achieved, measured on the basis of indicators set according to each type of support;
- make proposals regarding the appropriateness of the methodologies used and the databases required for future evaluations of such interventions.

[16]. **The specific objective** is to carry out the impact assessment of *PA3 Dissemination of information and promotion of Structural Instruments under Operational Programme Technical Assistance 2007-2013*, according to the revised OPTA Evaluation Plan, approved by the Programme Monitoring Committee in October 2014. The analysis addresses the entire programming period, from 2007 and 2015; the **reference period** is thus sufficiently comprehensive in order to cover both the stage of preparing communication activities (2007) and their entire implementation period (2008-2015).

[17]. The following **Evaluation Questions** have been the subject of analysis:
1. What is the progress in terms of the objectives set out under PA3 Dissemination of information and promotion of Structural Instruments?
2. To what extent can this progress be attributed to OPTA 2007-2013?
3. Are there other effects, positive and negative, of the PA3 implementation?
4. To what extent is this progress sustainable in the long term?
5. What mechanisms have been implemented or are necessary to facilitate effects and their sustainability?

[18]. The evaluation methodology employed **covered** all three elements of the general objective. **The objectives of the evaluation have been achieved, enabling the Report to provide answers to all evaluation questions**. Furthermore, based on the findings, conclusions and recommendations provided, **we believe that this evaluation exercise can make a direct contribution in designing mechanisms for more effective communication and publicity measures at horizontal level regarding ESIF**, as set out by PA 1 "Strengthening the beneficiaries' capacity to prepare and implement ESIF-financed projects and disseminating information on these funds" under OPTA 2014-2020.

[19]. The manner of addressing the objectives of the evaluation is explained in the methodology section and detailed in the chapters on the change theory reconstruction and assumption testing.

2. Evaluation Methodology

2.1. General considerations

[20]. This section describes the **evaluation methodology used** in order to answer the evaluation questions, based on the approach proposed by the Consortium in the Technical Offer, updated according to the evaluation team's analyses conducted at the beginning of the project and the consultations with the Beneficiary.

[21]. In order to ensure an accurate understanding of the Beneficiary's needs and to identify the best ways to approach the subject of the evaluation, the Beneficiaries' representatives were involved from the outset in the design and application of the working methodology, both through discussions on the subject, and direct involvement, by facilitating access to data required for analysis.

[22]. The methodology took into account both the identified needs of the Beneficiary and the time and data availability constraints shaping the evaluation process. The literature and best practices review on the **theory of change** provided a major input in the evaluation process. Consequently, the most effective evaluation methods and techniques were selected in order to ensure compliance with the planning set out in the Agreement and to provide a highly relevant analysis.

[23]. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the ToR, building on the documentary and literature review. Since the theory of change for PA3 is not explicitly outlines in the programming documents, the evaluation team reconstructed the theory of change for Priority Axis 3, using the Ray Rist model[2].

Fig. 2 Theory of Change template

Source: The Road to Results – Designing and Conducting Effective Development Evaluations, p.160 (Linda G. Morra Imas, Ray C. Rist).

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[2] "The Road to Results" – Designing and Conducting Effective Development Evaluations, p.160 *(Linda G. Morra Imas, Ray C. Rist)*

[24]. Starting from the reconstructed theory of change, the evaluation team have made a number of assumptions, which have been tested in order to provide answers to the Evaluation Questions.

| TC Reconstruction | TC Interrogation | Providing answers to EQ and ER development |

[25]. *Methodological constraint:* the evaluation process also depended on the validity and accuracy of available data. Moreover, concrete measures have been taken for data collection, since the initial review of the available information showed that it was not enough for analysis. Thus, in the case of information about awareness, MEF only had data up to 2013, making it necessary to conduct a population survey under the project, in order to obtain up-to-date data (comparable to those obtained in the 2006 survey) concerning population awareness by 2015.

[26]. Also, in some cases, it was necessary to further process or change the planned approach, given that the data was not always available, or not available in a format easily analysed. For example, the IC-SI database of requests received by the helpdesk service was employed in order to assess the effectiveness of the SI Information Centre. According to the AIR, IC-SI recorded and solved a total of 5,647 tickets (requests), while the database available to the evaluation team recorded 5,725 requests, whereas IC-SI also received requests after the end of the SMIS 38416 project, which funded the Information Centre. Of the overall 5,725 tickets in the database, 201 were selected for a preliminary analysis in terms of relevance to the survey and, then, after applying all the filters, a sample of 53 respondents was selected, which eventually provided a sample of 24 representatives from economic entities having contacted the IC-SI (Information Centre for Structural Instruments) helpdesk. For the comparative analysis, another 24 respondents who had not used the helpdesk service were selected from among legal entities in the Centre development region.

[27]. **The Theory of Change for PA3 was reconstructed in order to identify causal links between inputs, activities, outputs and results (Chapter 3).** The six elements of the theory of change were developed based on the information included in the programming documents, implementation reports and other relevant documents, as well as by analysing the factors that influenced the programming and implementation process.

[28]. The reconstruction of the theory of change (TC) presents the elements as they were perceived at the time of programming, as well as the changes occurring over time, in a manner that captures both the programme's impact and the causes behind the developments.

[29]. Specifically, the TC reconstruction process aimed to:

- Identify and analyse the causal links underlying the interventions supported under the two KAIs of PA3 (by reconstructing the logical model of the Change Theory),

highlighting issues, the needs of the target-group, the foreseen results and activities planned for their achievement;

- Analyse the extent to which the intervention logic defined in the programming period (starting from the issues identified, the needs of the target group and contextual elements and reaching to activities and the relation between them and expected results) is correct and can lead to the desired change. It also analysed the extent to which Programme Indicators (PI) defined reflected the expected results in terms of desired change and the progress in achieving them, as proxy for the progress in achieving PA3 goals.

- Identify changes related to the elements defined in the programming period and how they impacted the implementation and influenced results.

[30]. **Based on the reconstructed Theory of Change, a series of assumptions were formulated,** as a way to test the manner in which the originally-proposed actions for implementing the strategy contributed to achieving the set objectives, given the factors of influence and the established implementation mechanisms.

[31]. Consultations with stakeholders, in order to discuss and agree on the TC reconstruction were very important elements for the entire evaluation process. **In this regard, on 25 September 2015 a focus group was held with the delegates of the communication directorates within MEF and MA. It provided confirmation and validation of TC elements.**

[32]. The assumptions drawn in the initial stage of the evaluation are closely linked to the two main elements targeted by PA3 actions, as follows:

Table 1 The link between assumptions and evaluation questions

ASSUMPTION	LINK TO THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS
1. The communication tools used were selected and carried out properly (including in terms of ensuring complementarity with other messages), consistent with the needs identified and the defined purpose.	Q2 and Q5
2. The communication tools used were implemented in time for the different target-groups and according to the defined purpose (general public, project promoters)	Q2 and Q5
3. The surveys conducted are comparable in time and correctly reflect the level of information on SCF.	Q2 and Q4
4. The development of an official website, providing links to other official sources of information, has helped to raise awareness and increase transparency on the use of SCF.	Q2
5. The helpdesk service of the Information Centre was effective and resulted in increased awareness amongst potential applicants for grants	Q2
6. The publicity campaigns conducted were effective and helped increase awareness amongst potential applicants for grants	Q2
7. The selected action and institutional mechanisms (conducting separate actions / coordinating actions implemented by other entities / catalytic approach – funding certain multiplication factors) had an optimal	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5

contribution to meeting the set objectives	
8. MEF's direct involvement in communication activities for the public provided legitimacy and credibility to the information	Q2

[33]. **These assumptions were then tested in order to determine how the defined strategy led to achievement of the set results, taking into account the influence factors identified (Chapter 5).**

[34]. **The findings from assumption testing, validated by the consultations with stakeholders in a focus group held on 17 November 2015, served to draw conclusions and provide answers to the evaluation questions**.

[35]. The evaluation tools and techniques and the manner in which they were applied to each evaluation question are presented below.

2.2. Evaluation tools and techniques

[36]. The answer to each evaluation question is based on findings drawn from assumption testing. These were obtained using a mix of tools and techniques for quantitative and qualitative research. All evaluation questions require the use of at least two tools, so that the results may back up each other (in other words, to ensure confirmation from at least two sources).

Q1. What is the progress in terms of the objectives set out under PA3 Dissemination of information and promotion of Structural Instruments?

[37]. In order to provide an appropriate answer to this question, **the reconstructed Theory of Change for PA3** was used, based on a logic model, which aimed to identify causal links between the axis elements, as defined in the programming stage, as well as changes occurring during the programming cycle and the impact of the adopted measures.

[38]. Documentary analysis, qualitative methods provided in Theory of Change interrogation stage and the population survey provided the answer to this question.

Q2. To what extent can this progress be attributed to OPTA 2007-2013?

[39]. According to the Theory of Change, Question 2 seeks to establish the impact of the actions implemented under PA 3, independent from the results obtained due to other factors. For this purpose, an inventory and assessment of the results achieved in projects implemented under PA3 where carried, whilst also identifying the impact of PA3 interventions independent from other interventions.

[40]. In terms of the applicability of the counterfactual analysis, based on the testing of assumption no. 5 regarding the effectiveness of the Helpdesk within the Information Centre for SI, the analysis indicated several constraints that not only limited methodological options, but also raised doubts on the validity and relevance of the results. Nevertheless, after preliminary analysis, the expert team chose to apply the correlation method for the Centre beneficiaries (SMEs), as a pilot exercise designed to identify the contribution of this service in providing information to potential beneficiaries.

[41]. The research conducted was based on the evaluation questions, but covered them only in part, as the evaluation question is worded as follows: **"To what extent did the IC-SI helpdesk service contribute to fulfilling the envisaged role of resource centre and information hub, by reducing the number of alternative sources of general information on SI funding opportunities, contacted by potential beneficiaries? "**

[42]. *Methodological constraint*: the main challenge for this question is to distinguish this impact from the outcomes of other actions - the so-called "spill-over effect" (e.g. OP-level information and communication measures) or other factors (e.g., insufficient communication infrastructure at national level or, on the contrary, a major interest of the Romanian public in accessing European funds, the availability of private communication channels, which are more effective than public ones etc.).

[43]. The sample was determined by selecting from the helpdesk beneficiaries database those who:
- are SMEs;
- ask questions about existing funding opportunities;
- are found to be eligible for funding under at least one open funding line during the operation of IC-SI, based on the answers received;

[44]. Following the database segmentation, it was found that approximately 60% of callers falling into the three categories above were based in the Centre Region and, thus, the pilot survey was carried out in this region, in order to determine:

a) To what extent information seekers (regarding general, funding opportunities-related information) turned to official sources (help desk / MAs' websites / IBs) following assistance from IC-SI, in order to obtain specific information on how to access funds.

b) To what extent information seekers (thereby validating the Centre's role in disseminating information on SI and as catalyst for the other official channels) required further iterations in order to find general information from other sources, after receiving information from IC-SI.

[45]. Given the multitude of sources of information available, the complexity of the application process and the applicants' lack of experience in 2007-2013, it was assumed that those who contacted IC-SI have used also other sources of information, including the MAs' help desks, websites, consultants etc. The evaluation sought to determine their behaviour after contacting the IC-SI helpdesk, thereby validating the Centre's role in disseminating information on SI and as catalyst for the other official channels.

[46]. In other words, this served to test the assumption that the beneficiaries who contacted IC-SI no longer had to consult other sources of general information after receiving answers from IC-SI and mainly turned to official sources for specific information on calls for proposals.

General Information				Specific information
IC-SI beneficiaries	Different sources (public, private)	IC-SI		MA / IB (website, helpdesk) Other sources
Other SI applicants	Different sources (public, private)	MAs / IBs different OPs	Different sources (public, private)	Other sources MA / IB (website, helpdesk)
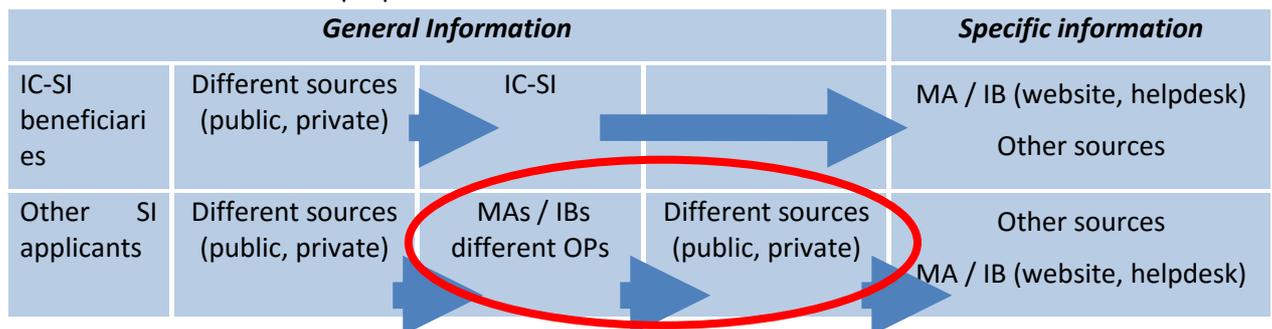
[47]. Following the pilot survey among helpdesk beneficiaries who were SMEs and located in the Centre region, 53 valid responses were obtained[3]. It was then attempted to identify the "identical pairs" for the IC-SI beneficiaries included in the sample from among those who did not contact the IC-SI, using the following criteria:
- SME (same size, area of interest (SOPIEC, HRD), county, environment);

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[3] According to the Survey Report, see Annex 3

- Applied for funding under the open calls during the operation of IC-SI (SOPIEC, SOPHRD)

[48]. Methodological constraint: The databases available at MA-level did not allow to extract the necessary information to determine a control group among those who called MA/IB helpdesks for general information on funding opportunities, as originally intended. Therefore, the decision was made to call funding applicants under the open lines (SOPIEC and SOPHRD), identified from the databases provided by MA SOPIEC and MA SOPHRD. Following the questionnaire on the control group, it was found that SMEs in the control group could not be regarded as direct correspondents of the helpdesk beneficiaries, the latter having a higher level of interest and information acquired during the application submission process.

[49]. Thus, only 23 applicants who meet the set criteria for the control group could be identified. The questionnaire was applied to them, with the results described in detail in Annex 3.

Q3. Are there other effects, positive and negative, of the PA3 implementation?

[50]. In terms of the proposed methods and tools, Q3 is closely linked to the previous questions. The analysis carried out also focused on the unintended effects of the measures under PA 3.

[51]. In order to provide a comprehensive answer to this Evaluation Question, the aspects regarding the unintended effects of PA3-funded interventions as early as the the stage of reconstructing the theory of change, particularly during the assessment of the factors of influence and the preparation of the working assumptions. The literature review, identifying and analysing good practice examples identified in terms of successful approaches aiming to achieve similar results to those under PA3, along with the lessons learned on similar interventions also served to identify other effects – either positive or negative – of the information and publicity measures for SI dissemination and promotion.

Q4. To what extent is this progress sustainable in the long term?

[52]. The results' sustainability in time was assessed in view of the conditions in which they were produced, for the areas and target groups covered, but also based on the foreseen economic and social developments. Apart from the extent to which the results are sustainable over time, the analysis also sought to identify potential obstacles to project sustainability.

[53]. The answer to this question was drawn up based on the quantitative and qualitative analyses provided (documentary review and consultation). The focus group and interviews, complemented by good practice examples and lessons learned have also provided an important input in providing a comprehensive answer to this Evaluation Question.

Q5. What mechanisms have been implemented or are necessary to facilitate effects and their sustainability?

[54]. We understand this question as being consistent with the direct impact desired from the funded interventions and also as a question focused on identifying the specific interventions and mechanisms that can make an optimal contribution to ensure the long-term success of the measures envisaged under OPTA 2014-2020.

[55]. In this context, existing institutional arrangements for the implementation of PA3 interventions have been analysed, as well as the manner in which they meet the requirements for the long-term sustainability of the results. The analysis also took into account the context changes occurring throughout the programming period and expected developments.

[56]. In order to identify mechanisms likely to facilitate effects and to ensure their sustainability over time, the choice of tools consisted of documentary review and consultations, particularly with key decision-makers in MEF and MA. Good practice examples and lessons learned in the field of information and communication for Structural Instruments were an important reference in drawing up feasible proposals for ensuring the sustainability of the interventions' outcomes.

[57]. In brief, the research tools used for analysis are provided in the following table:

Table 2 Evaluation tools and techniques

Tool / Evaluation Question	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5
Desk research	x	x	x	x	x
Quantitative Analysis	x	x			
Interviews	x	x	x	x	x
Workshop / focus group *	x	x	x	x	x
Poll	x	x	x		
Counterfactual analysis		x			

2.3. Approaching communication actions

[58]. Both literature[4] and guidelines developed to define communication actions[5] highlight the need to address communication activities based on the level of awareness and involvement in the topics under analysis (in this case, Structural Instruments).

[59]. This clarification is needed to delineate the concept, on the one hand, the purpose of the information and communication actions under OPTA 2007-2013 and, on the other hand, to define the way in which they were addressed in the actions implemented under PA3 .

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[4] Source: Newsom Doug, Scott, Alan, Turk, Vanslike Judy, "This is PR", Waldworth Publishing Company, Belmont, USA, 1993, cited by Cristina Coman, "Relaţiile publice: principii şi strategii", Iaşi, Polirom, 2001, p.79)

[5] Toolkit for the evaluation of communication activities, DG Communication, July 2015
http://www.google.ro/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCAQFjAAahUKE wj4pJDY3ZTJAhVnEXIKHffZAQ0&url=http%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Fdgs%2Fcommunicatio n%2Fabout%2Fevaluation%2Fdocuments%2Fcommunication-evaluation-toolkit_en.pdf&usg=AFQjCNHwgwshYI5r9xNnu6jwIEcbLu257w&bvm=bv. 107467506,d.bGg

[60]. Firstly, we deem it necessary to define the terms of "**general communication**" and "**specific communication**", respectively, in connection with SI, since these underlie the delimitation established between ACIS (IC-SI included) and managing authorities in terms of the type of information they are to provide to target groups, thus avoiding overlaps. Thus, following consultations, the two terms designate:

a) *General information , which include information on: available sources of funding, existing operational programmes, institutions managing the funds for each OP, the rate of absorption of funds, generally-applicable procedures, the role of SI, results achieved, elements that contribute to ensuring a transparent use of funds (e.g. list of SCF beneficiaries) etc.*

b) *Specific information , which include information enabling access to available funding under a given PO, as well as information on: specific details on the calls for proposals, the conditions for accessing funds under OP, specific documentation for a given operational programme.*

[61]. At the same time, it is required among the various types of communications performed, in the following categories:

- Information on sources of financing, conditions for accessing funds, procedures etc. This type of information contributes to improved knowledge and better understanding of the specific features of SI, contributing directly to project preparation and implementation. In order to meet the needs of the target groups, information must be accurate, timely, trustworthy and legitimate. Therefore, it would be advisable that the duty of providing information be entrusted to the authorities directly involved in SI management (MEF/MA/IB).

- Promoting project results, the role of SI and their benefits for the economy and society. Since it is not strictly related to project preparation and implementation, promotion can be addressed through the involvement of several groups of stakeholders (project promoters, private entities, consultants etc.)

[62]. We also deem it necessary to determine the position of each OPTA target group relative to the various stages of the communication process at the start of the implementation, and the expected position of the target groups once the actions have been carried out, since this also determines the actions to be taken. The same approach was followed in the OPTA Communication Plan 2009, mentioning, for example, that "a potential applicant needs a minimum amount of prior information in order to become interested and especially in order to formulate relevant questions" [OPTA Communication Plan 2009 (p. 4)].

[63]. The following figure provides a graphic illustration of the communication stages, each of which is further detailed and explained in terms of the target groups under OPTA PA3.

Fig. 3 Communication stages

[64]. The first level – **awareness** – covers the widest public, those least specialised and showing little interest. It does not seek to achieve more than a level of awareness and familiarity with the area of reference. The information relevant to this step is general. As interest grows, the different audiences are more willing and open to make efforts in order to gain knowledge, so as to attain the stage called information. At that stage, the audience pays attention to information transmitted in the public space or even seeks information in certain media, which they use frequently and trust.

[65]. In any communication activity , the first step is **awareness / familiarisation** – people are only aware that a process is going on and they may become interested in the subject or not, depending on their individual options. The typical result of this stage is the "**notoriety**" of the communicated fact. If the public is genuinely interested in the subject and has become aware that a communication process is underway, **information** can occur (provision of accurate, technical information). The relevant information for this stage are both general and specific. Typically, direct communication actions for broader audience groups only include the awareness and information stages, respectively, whereas the other stages are reserved for increasingly select groups.

[66]. **The communication stage** involves a two-way process: once the person/group concerned has acquired some information, they are prepared to ask questions, assess answers and repeat the process. Once informed, the audience segments identified are prepared to ask questions, to enter into dialogue. In an appropriate setting (direct meetings, presentations), they can get answers, analyse, identify the relevance of the topic to them, thus enabling them to subsequently attain knowledge. This stage covers the communication of both general and specific information.

[67]. This leads to **knowledge**. Once the audience has reached this stage, the communication process has reached its overall goal. On the other hand, the shift from knowledge to **participation** (action) is no longer fully determined by the communication efforts, but also other circumstances. This time is, however, a peak in terms of

behaviour, given that the public is ready to participate in the communication process if their interest is high enough. From this stage, the originator of the communication process should take into consideration "communication partners", who are in a position to **involve** in carrying forward the communication process. This context could be extremely beneficial and is usually relevant to media experts and opinion leaders in general, who are willing to take on part of the effort (time, exposure, searching for other references, costs etc.). There is, however, a potential downside: such partners could re-write the message (according to their own level of understanding), possibly distorting it or even taking the lead in other directions. However, reaching such a level would be manageable, given that the communication partners have knowledge and their communication objective could be identified and linked. Similar to the knowledge stage, this stage involves communication of both general and specific information.

[68]. **The implementation experience shows that the following levels – communication, knowledge, participation and involvement – are specific to beneficiaries, internal audiences (institutions involved SCF management and implementation) and other stakeholders. This last category includes individuals, organisations and authorities involved in the management of Structural Instruments or those impacted by the Structural Instruments, but who are not potential beneficiaries, media**.

[69]. In terms of specific communication, aimed at potential beneficiaries, the communication process can be exemplified by following largely the same stages:

Fig. 4 Communication stages and involvement of potential beneficiaries
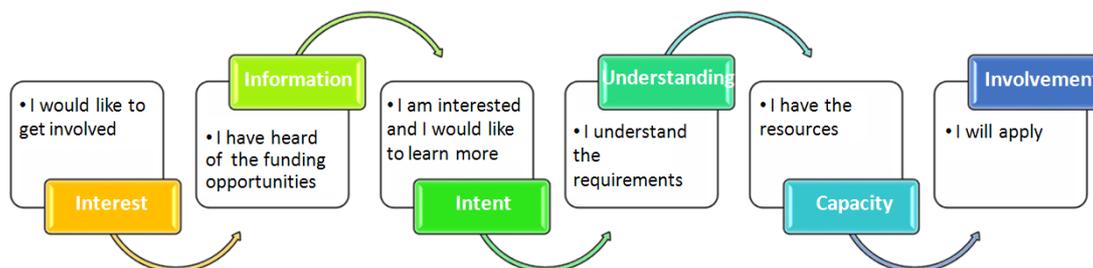
Source: Toolkit for the evaluation of communication activities, DG Communication, July 2015

3. Reconstructed Theory of Change for PA3

[70]. This section outlines the elements of the Theory of Change, as identified at the time of OPTA programming, and the changes during implementation. The purpose of the analysis is to capture not only the PA3 evolution, but also the reasons behind this development.

3.1. Issued identified in communication

[71]. During 2005-2006, ACIS undertook a series of qualitative sociological surveys and opinion polls among the population regarding EU funds. The research results indicate a low level of information among the population with respect to post-accession funds. The prevailing opinion at the time was that accessing the funds provided by the EU is difficult, both on account of red tape and lack of co-financing options, as well as of corruption suspicions surrounding the public institutions involved. Organisations developing real projects usually give up on submitting the funding applications because of red tape and suspicion of corruption.

[72]. However, studies showed that the groups of potential beneficiaries did not distinguish between the different programs, between EU pre-accession funds and post-accession funds: Structural Instruments were regarded as "PHARE funds". In the view of the four groups, accessing funds involved red tape, co-financing and project application.

[73]. The most frequently used means of providing information at the time of programming included Internet, seminars, media. It was also noted that a potential applicant needed a minimum amount of prior information in order to become interested and especially in order to formulate relevant questions. The information set forth as necessary cover aspects such as: what are the target groups / areas of these funds; what to do in order to access Structural Funds or which are the programmes addressing each group.

[74]. The results above are also confirmed upon the development of OPTA 2007-2013, on the backdrop of the generally-negative perception among the entire population with regard to European funds. Thus, "Romanians are convinced that the allocation of European funds is related to fraud and corruption. Their opinion is based on information obtained through the media and everyday personal experience related to corruption. The suspicions of fraud in the allocation of funds are triggered by the fact that people do not trust the institutions involved, such as ministries, SAPARD Agencies, city halls, county councils, prefectures and Regional Development Agencies."

[75]. According to the same document, 83% of the urban population had no knowledge about the funds to be provided as of 2007, although more than 60% of the population were interested in information about the projects that could be financed from EU funds.

### Changes during OPTA implementation

[76]. Following recent interactions with various stakeholders involved in information and publicity coordination at MA level, in relation to this evaluation, these issues have remained valid during the OPTA implementation. Furthermore, **the challenges in implementing the operational programmes, presented and explained in detail in the interim evaluations conducted, have confirmed, at least for part of the public, the initial reservations regarding the difficulties in accessing funds**. In other words, what

began as fear turned into certainty, and the current of opinion was and remains rather unfavourable relative to certain operational programmes (e.g. SOPHRD), which affected the overall perception of SI.

[77]. At the same time, by observing how the level of population awareness of SI evolved over time, the self-declared level of information and the type of information sought by the general public[6], it becomes apparent that, as the operational programmes move forward from calls for proposals to actual implementation, the need for general information drops and is replaced by the need for more specific information. These findings have also been backed up by the interviews and acknowledged on-site, at the time when the information caravans were conducted, as attendance to the general sessions was declining and thematic sessions (on programmes) saw increasing audiences.

Fig. 5 The evolution of general public awareness of SI[7]
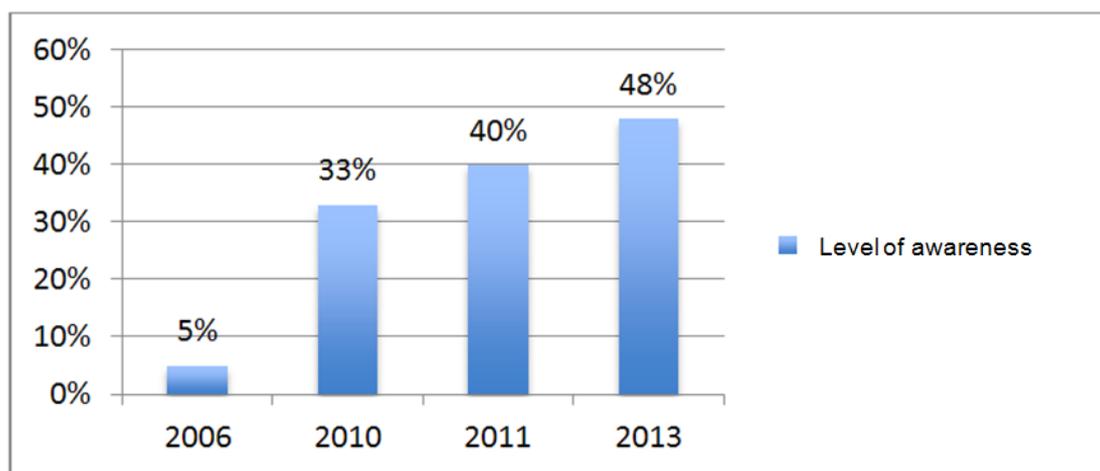
Source: AIR 2014 data

[78]. The evolution of the main communication issues identified from 2006 up to now is outlined in brief.

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[6] Based on surveys carried out between 2007-2015

[7] AIR 2014 data, up to the time of this evaluation. The graph does not include the evaluation results, presented further in the ER.

TC Reconstruction Issues identified		

1

2006-2007	2008-2015
3) Low level of knowledge about post-accession funds	5) Low level of knowledge about post-accession funds
4) Mentality on accessing EU funds (difficult to access both because of red tape and co-financing requirements, as well as of suspicions of corruption directed at the institutions involved)	6) Mentality on accessing EU funds (difficult to access both because of red tape and co-financing requirements, as well as of suspicions of corruption directed at the institutions involved)
	7) Decreasing need for general information and increasing need for specific information on SI

3.2. MA OPTA needs and resources in terms of communication activities

3.2.1. Needs

[79]. SWOT analysis developed **at the time when the OP was prepared** identifies the main elements likely to influence the success of communication activities and the extent to which OPTA objectives can be met. In close connection with the issues (weaknesses) identified and in the context of potential threats, OP-level <u>requirements</u> have been identified in terms of needs, which determine the structure and the line of action of OPTA interventions.

Table 3 Correlation between the SWOT analysis and intervention needs under OPTA

Strengths	Weaknesses	Requirements
▪ Availability of coordination mechanisms, both at inter-ministerial level and at management level, having acquired significant experience following the management of Phare and ISPA programmes	▪ Major knowledge gaps regarding the practicalities of implementing the SI ▪ The small number of publications on Structural Instruments; ▪ Difficulties in finding up-to-date information on the progress made in preparing the implementation of Structural Instruments ▪ Insufficient access to information on the specific procedures of implementing the Structural and Cohesion Funds (SCF)	▪ Tools and information to MAs, IBs and potential beneficiaries ▪ Timely identification of bottlenecks ▪ Disseminating information to potential beneficiaries ▪ Coordinating the various MAs, training and information tools for MAs, IBs and potential beneficiaries

			Requirements
	▪ Weak and heterogeneous capacity for SI management, particularly at regional and local level		
Opportunities	**Threats**		**Requirements**
▪ Progressive development of the information society and, therefore, a more efficient reception of information on SCF via the Internet or other media channels ▪ Availability of media channels and public relations (PR) companies for promotion, information and publishing information on SI	▪ High degree of complexity of the SI implementation system ▪ Public perceptions about EU funds improperly managed and the perception of fraud and corruption in the system		▪ Publicity and dissemination of information on SI to the general public

[80]. High complexity of the SI implementation system and applicable procedures, as well as the variety of the target groups require that specific communication mechanisms and instruments be defined, in order to meet the needs of the target audience and achieve the set objectives.

[81]. The needs identified are supplemented by the SI information and publicity requirements, as per the provisions of EU Regulations. Thus, according to Art. 69 of General Reg. 1083/2006, information and publicity have the objective of providing information on and publicise operations and co-financed programmes, addressing to European Union citizens, beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, with the aim of highlighting the role of the Community and ensure that grant assistance is transparent.

Changes during OPTA implementation

[82]. Following consultations with stakeholders, it was confirmed that the needs (requirements) had been correctly identified at the time of programming and they have also been maintained during the implementation period. At the same time, either an overstatement of strengths – namely the existence of experienced coordination mechanisms – have been either overstated or, for different reasons, failed to last or to function at optimum level later on.

[83]. The need to adapt the information conveyed and the communication channels to the needs of the target groups, given the complexity of the implementation procedures and the variety of information, depending on the area of interest, has become increasingly urgent, given the lack of standard procedures, even under the same OP, the successive changes in the applicable rules and regulations and the complex criteria of distinguishing the interventions supported under the different OPs.

[84]. The needs are briefly outlined below:

TC Reconstruction Needs	
2006-2007 - Needs	**2008-2015 - Needs**
8) Increasing public awareness of SI	11) Increasing public awareness of SI
9) Coordinating communication on SI so as to avoid overlaps or contradictory information and to cover gaps in communication	12) Coordinating communication on SI so as to avoid overlaps or contradictory information and to cover gaps in communication
10) The need to adapt the information and channels according to the features of the various target groups	13) The increasingly urgent need to adapt the information and channels to the features of the different target group

2

3.2.2. Resources

[85]. The resources provided for communication can be divided into three main categories: financial resources, functional resources (institutional framework and mechanisms), operational resources (strategies, plans, platforms, websites).

[86]. The SCF financial resources available for achieving OPTA PA3 goals, as provided for in the official version of OP approved by the EC in 2007, amounted to approx. 20% of the overall OPTA allocation, reflecting the importance of communication activities in achieving the general objective of the OP.

Table 4 PA3 financial allocations, OPTA official version, Jan. 2007

KAI	EU Funding	National budget	Total
KAI 3.1	23,292,655	5,823,164	29,115,819
KAI 3.2	10,762,161	2,690,540	13,452,701
Total	34,054,816	8,513,704	42,568,520

[87]. According to the OPTA Communication Plan 2009, the following indicative distribution by communication activities was considered:

Fig. 6 Indicative allocation for communication on SI

Information campaigns (spots, events)

Information Centre (help-desk, call center, website)

Information material and promotional products

Studies and surveys

Cooperation with the media

Communication training, joining networks
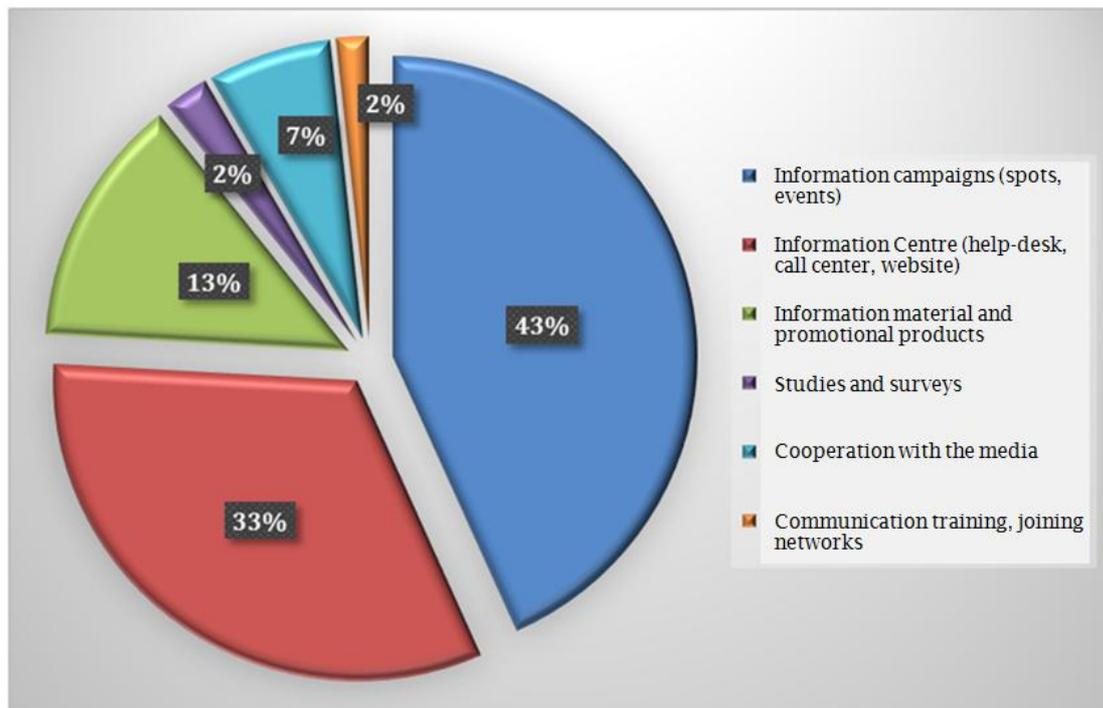
Source: Indicative allocation of SI budget, according to the ACIS Communication Plan 2009

[88]. The institutional mechanisms created to implement SCF-financed communication actions, as well as to coordinate the activities supported across the different OPs, established resources for implementation in terms of organisation and coordination. The structures created within MA OPTA and at inter-institutional level were as follows:

- **National Steering Committee** for the preparation of SI management, with ministerial representation, aiming to strengthen SI coordination

- **Management Committee for SI Coordination**, created under CNC, including management officials from MA, CPA, AA and ACIS, as the main driver for coordination and settling common issues

- **Working Group for Information and Publicity**, made of representatives in charge with communication within MA and IB, and the **Working Group for Training**, both subordinated to the Management Committee for SI Coordination.

- **Communicators' Forum,** consisting of communicators from the institutions in charge with SCF management (MA, IB, other institutions in charge with SCF management – e.g. Certification and Paying Authority). The duties of this Forum include ensuring compliance with communication policies and rules and the information exchange between the structures managing SI, so that communication activities supported across the different POs and the messages conveyed be in coordination.

[89]. In addition, a **Communication Unit** was set up within ACIS, subordinate to the System Coordination Directorate, in order to ensure the coordination of SI information, communication and promotion activities in Romania.

[90]. The PA3 implementation also benefited from other operational resources, which supported the communication process. In this regard, at the time of OP development,

the National Communication Strategy for SI[8] was being prepared, which later defined the general approach to the communication of relevant information on European grants, across the entire system for the management and implementation of funds.

[91]. Also, as of 2006, ACIS has developed a dedicated section on EU grants on the MPF website (www.mfinante.ro/fonduriUE),whereas in 2007, the SI dedicated webpage was launched, www.fonduri-ue.ro, which included general and specific information on the institutional framework, relevant legislation, description of the Structural Instruments and the process of drafting the NDP, NSRF and OPs.

Changes during OPTA implementation

[92]. During the programming period, there were several changes to the financial resources available at KAI-level. The first such amendment took place in 2012, upon the reduction of the national co-financing rate from 20% to 15%, as per Reg. 1311/2011 amending General Reg. 1083/2006, as a measure of support for Member States during the financial crisis. On the other hand, in 2014, give the slow progress in the implementation of PA3-funded interventions, as well as increasing needs and the success of other interventions supported by OPTA (e.g. PA1), KAI 3.1. resources saw a significant cut. Thus, according to decision EC C(2014) 6346 of September 2014, approximately 62% of the KAI 3.1 financial resources were reallocated to PA1 and 8% to KAI 3.2.

[93]. Currently, the funds allocated to the two KAIs stand at 30% for KAI 3.1 and 117% (for KAI 3.2), respectively, of the amounts available in 2006.

Table 5 PA3 financial allocations, changes during the programming period

KAI	Official version of FID _Oct 2010 (RON)	Amendment as per FID_April 2013 (RON)	Amendment as per FID_April 2015 (RON)
KAI 3.1	29,115,819	27,403,323	8,835,325
KAI 3.2	13,452,701	12,661,366	15,690,609
Total	42,568,520	40,064,689	24,525,934

Note: Reallocations were actually done one year before the reference in the FID

[94]. Another amendment refers to increasing the beneficiary's own contribution to the project financing. According to the official version of OPTA, public funding for communication projects is 100%, fully covered from Community funds. One such amendment appears in the April 2013 FID, increasing the beneficiary's own contribution to 15%, only to return to the initial level of public funding in 2015 (as per the April 2015 FID) .

[95]. In terms of changes occurring within the institutional structures, these have resulted not so much in amendments to the mechanisms provided (WG, Forum, Communication Unit), which remained unchanged in structure and responsibilities, but in the recurrent changes to the broader institutional framework, by setting-up the Ministry of European Affairs and, subsequently, the Ministry of European Funds, which led to changes in the public procurement approval loop or even in the approval of communication activities, but also to different priorities for action, including in terms of communication.

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[8] The Communication Strategy for IS was approved in late 2007.

[96]. The resources planned in 2006-2007, and the changes during 2008-2015 are summarised below:

TC Reconstruction Resources	
2006-2007 - Resources	**2008-2015 - Resources**

• NCS-SI
• OPTA 2007-2013 Communication Plan
• SCF funds available for communication:
 	
    KAI 3.1 — RON 29,115,819
    KAI 3.2 — RON 13,452,701
    Total — RON 42,568,520
 	
• The institutional structure and mechanisms for implementation and coordination created
• ACIS (MPF)
• Communication WG
• Communicators' Forum
• Coordination mechanisms foreseen:
• Extranet
• Procedures Manual
	• NCS-SI
	• OPTA 2007-2013 Communication Plan
	• SCF funds available for communication:
	  KAI 3.1: - 30%
	
	  KAI 3.2 - 117% of the amounts available in 2006
	• The institutional structure and mechanisms for implementation and coordination created
	• ACIS (MPF) / MAEur / MEF
	• Communication WG
	• Communicators' Forum

3.3. PA3 objectives and programme indicators

[97]. According to the official version of OPTA 2007-2013, **Priority Axis 3** "**Dissemination of information and promotion of Structural Instruments** " envisages a *nationally coordinated dissemination of general messages on SI and the implementation of the MEF Action Plan on communication, according to the National Communication Strategy for Structural Instruments.*

[98]. The **PA3** implementation therefore seeks to achieve a double objective. On the one hand, it envisages **to ensure the nationally coordinated dissemination of general messages on SI** and, on the other hand, it aims to **implement MEF's Action Plan for communication** according to the National Communication Strategy for Structural Instruments.

[99]. Regarding the first objective, the wording rather refers to the manner of implementation than setting a clear goal. However, the objective sought can be interpreted as "ensuring appropriate coordination of communication actions" and, in this context, it is appropriate.

[100]. Regarding the second part of the PA3 objective, the evaluation takes into account the objectives set out in ACIS' Communication Plan, namely:

a) **General objectives of SI communication**

• Ensure the <u>recognition of EU's contribution to Romania's modernisation, the role and results achieved by means of Structural Instruments</u>;

- To constantly and accurately inform all target groups about the funding opportunities that can benefit Romania through Structural Instruments, about the rationale for putting this process in motion, about the goals and benefits of their implementation;

- To ensure transparency, so as to support SCF absorption and, implicitly, Romania's modernisation and the reliability of the EU integration process.

b) General objectives of OPTA communication

- Ensure transparency and acknowledge the EU contribution to strengthening the Structural Instruments management system, the role and results achieved by means of these funds under OPTA;

- To consistently and correctly inform all target groups about the financing opportunities provided by OPTA, about the goals and benefits of implementing this programme.

[101]. In view of the above, **the objectives defined in the OPTA Communication Plan translate into increased awareness of the role and results of the SI and the role and results of OPTA, respectively, and an increased level of information among the target groups covered by OPTA communication.** Communication activities will aim to provide general information in the first case and specific information in the second.

[102]. The SI-related objectives set under the OPTA Communication Plan will be achieved through cumulative actions across all OPs and not just as a result of the implementation of actions funded under OPTA PA3. In this respect, the focus falls on communication actions supported by other OPs, as well as direct sectoral assistance provided under these OPs, which makes an implicit contribution to increasing information and awareness of SI. **In this context, the progress in achieving PA3 objectives, particularly in terms of the level of awareness of SI, will take into account the cumulative progress, across the whole system and the entire population, respectively.**

[103]. The planned approach was for MEF to provide general information (on the role of SI for Romania's development, transparency in granting funds, efficiency-related issues etc.), MEF being regarded as solely responsible in this respect. Specific information were to be provided by the MA. Both ACIS/MEF and MA targeted several categories of target groups, as described in section 3.5.

[104]. At the same time, according to the Communication Strategy, MEF had the responsibility to implement the Information Centre for SI, as SI information hub. IC-SI aims to provide both general information and specific information and it will be implemented by ACIS in cooperation with the MA.

[105]. The objectives of the OPTA Communication Plan are summarised below:

Fig. 7 The objectives of the OPTA Communication Plan

Objectives of the Communication Plan for OPTA 2007-2013

General objectives

Specific objectives

External communication

Internal communication

Ensure the recognition of the EU contribution to the modernisation of Romania, of the role and results achieved through SI

Ensure transparency, so as to support SI absorption in Romania and, implicitly, the modernisation of Romania and the reliability of the EU integration process

Constantly and accurately inform all target groups about the financing opportunities that can benefit Romania through SI, about the rationale of setting this process in motion, about the objectives and benefits of its implementation

Awareness

Information

Awareness

a) accurately and constantly inform the general audience about the role, significance and results of SCF implementation in Romania;
b) create and maintain confidence in the SI management system
c) create and maintain a high degree of trust among the general public and potential beneficiaries regarding the transparency and fairness of the SCF management process;

Information

d) fully, accurately and timely inform the public about the mechanism and the institutions in charge with SCF management, so as to gain support for the promotion of SI and, implicitly, for their implementation;
e) increase the number of mature projects submitted for funding

a) create and constantly improve the communication coordination mechanism;
b) support a better understanding of SCF at institutional level and knowledge of SCF at individual level;
c) create an effective common internal information system across all institutions involved in SI management, so as to provide supportt for all activities at network level

Knowledge, participation, involvement

[106]. With regard to **OPTA-related communication**, given the specificity of the programme, the pursued activities targeted a small audience, with a high level of knowledge regarding SI in Romania. Communication efforts have been therefore directed towards achieving a higher level of understanding of the mechanisms for accessing funds and for implementation and not increasing awareness. The role and results of the OPs have been promoted in all actions and targeted all audiences.

[107]. Looking at the overall objectives defined at the level of SI-related communication and OPTA, we illustrate below the reconstruction of the Theory of Change for the objectives established under PA3.

<div align="center">

**TC Reconstruction
PA3 objective**

3

</div>

General objectives of SI communication	**General objectives of OPTA communication**
• Ensure the recognition of the EU contribution to Romania's modernisation, of the role and results achieved through SI; • Constantly and accurately inform all target-groups about financing opportunities that can benefit Romania through SI, about the rationale of setting this process in motion, about the objectives and benefits of their implementation; • Ensure transparency, support the absorption of SI in Romania, and implicitly Romania's modernisation and the reliability of the EU integration process.	• Ensure transparency and recognition of the EU contribution to strengthening the SI management system, the role and results achieved through the use of these funds within OPTA; • Constantly and accurately inform all target-groups about financing opportunities under OPTA, about the goals and benefits of implementing this programme. **The set objective for PA3 translates into:** ✓ **Nationally-coordinated dissemination of general messages regarding SI** ✓ **Increasing the level of awareness of SI** ✓ **Increasing the level of information on OPTA among the target groups covered by the OP**

[108]. A series of programme indicators have been established at OP level in order to measure the progress in achieving PA3 objectives, as follows:

<div align="center">

Table 6 OPTA Programme Indicators

</div>

Indicator	Indicator type	Initial OPTA
Copies of all publications, brochures and flyers with information produced under OPTA	output	1.000.000
Supported events (conferences, seminars, workshops) to promote SI interventions	output	70
Media campaigns	output	14
Surveys	output	7
Number of hits on the SI website	output	1.000.000

Number of requests received by IC-SI	output	40,000
Level of awareness of SI	result	+15

[109]. **PA3 takes into account the overall communication on IS and specific communication on OPTA, but there is not a clear separation of the targets for each type of communication at indicator level**.

[110]. The defined result PI "<u>Level of awareness of SI</u>" reflects the general objective of the PA, but only partially, taking into account only the population awareness of SI and not also the level of information on OPTA. Moreover, result PI only implicitly reflect the PA objective on ensuring a coordinated dissemination of the general messages on SI.

[111]. However, the Communication Strategy for SI 2007-2013 sets targets for the following indicators, whose fulfillment of was shared between ACIS and MA, however without providing a clear distribution of the targets:

Table 7 Targets as per the Communication Strategy for SI 2007-2013

Indicator	Baseline value (2007)	Interim value (2010)	Target value (2015)
The number of visitors to the website www.fonduri-ue.ro	0	500,000	1,000,000
Number of events organised	10	50	120
Number of publications issued	2	30	100
Number of questions to the Call Centre or local information centres	0	25,000	60,000
Number of full searches carried out in the common internal information system	0	8,000	15,000
General level of awareness of SI	5%	15%	25%

Changes during OPTA implementation

[112]. **The OPTA implementation saw major changes to the programme indicators (PI) and their respective targets. There is significant variation in this regard, characterized both by the introduction of new indicators and reductions/ increases in their targets.** Output PIs have undergone several changes over time, reflecting progress directly made in implementing the programme. Similarly to output indicators, the result PI target was changed in September 2014, by an amendment to the OP, having been significantly increased from +15% (given the baseline value of 5% for 2006) to a significantly higher target value, of 50%.

Table 8 Evolution of OPTA programme indicators

Indicator	Initial OPTA	Jan 2012	Jun 2012	Sept 2014	Nov 2014
Copies of all publications, brochures and flyers with information produced under OPTA*	1,000,000				
Studies, analyses, reports, strategies**		28	28	4	4
Events supported (conferences, seminars, workshops) to promote SI interventions / Information and publicity events**	70	120	120	98	98
Information and publicity materials**		72	72	36	36
Media campaigns	14	10	10	4	4
Surveys	7				

Number of hits on the SI website	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,763,732	1,763,732
Number of requests received by IC-SI	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000
Level of awareness of SI	+15	+15	+15	50	50

*The indicator has been removed ever since the first official update of the OP
**Newly-introduced indicators / Name change

3.4. Positive and negative factors affecting the PA3 implementation

3.4.1. Factors having supported the PA3 implementation

[113].Some of the influencing factors mentioned have been identified during the OPTA programming stage, especially support-factors, namely:
- Communication activities supported in other OPs. The resources originally allocated under sectoral OPs amount to approx. EUR 157 mil.[9], of which approx. EUR 119 mil. Community contribution;
- Assistance available under PA1 - KAI 1.1 "Support to the management and implementation of SI", regarding communication coordination and support for training sessions;
- Generally positive perception of EU structures among the Romanian public.

[114].The mechanisms provided under the NCS aimed to enhance these factors, by creating synergies and complementarities between the various actions funded. Some of the tools provided, especially the Information Centre for SI were to be implemented jointly by ACIS/MEF and MAs. Similarly, given the positive perception of EU structures, the Communication Strategy for SI aimed to harness this positive capital, by conveying specific messages through the communication actions.

3.4.2. Factors having negatively impacted the PA3 implementation

[115].Similarly to positive factors, the barriers or sensitive issues that may create difficulties in achieving the set goals have been partly identified at the time when OPTA was developed, but there have been some cases of underestimation. This includes aspects regarding the complexity of SCF interventions, a factor which – although known at the time of programming – has become increasingly important in the implementation process, given the complex national procedures and their successive amendments.

Changes during OPTA implementation

[116].If, as stated above, some of the barriers and challenges in implementation have been identified by stakeholders as early as the programming stage and provisions and measures have been put forward in order to address these issues, other factors occurred during the programming cycle, impacting the entire implementation process, with negative effects on the outcomes. This includes aspects such as:

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9 The amount includes initial allocations for information and publicity activities provided for in the sectoral OP. In the case of SOP IEC, allocation takes into account both the information and communication-related support and assistance for evaluation activities and IT.

- Difficulties in coordinating communication actions due to institutional mechanisms (ACIS-MA hierarchical level) and certain factors external to the system (such as public procurement procedures);
- The public procurement system and the availability of funds, which may have a negative impact on the timely implementation of the communication actions;
- Insufficient human resources;
- Very frequent institutional changes, leading to changes in the strategic approach and in the implementation of the communication actions.

[117]. One major external adverse factor was the fact that ACIS/MEF, although responsible for the SCF system management, was not offered a hierarchically superior position to the other MA or IB and did not have the necessary levers in order to coordinate MA-level communication.

[118]. The cumbersome public procurement system was reflected in the difficulty of defining selection criteria to ensure a high quality of the services delivered, the lengthy procurement process or the high number of objections.

[119]. Moreover, these difficulties were enhanced by the small number of people effectively involved in managing communication and the frequent institutional changes – moving ACIS under the authority of GSG and, subsequently, that of MAEur, which was followed by the set-up of the Ministry of European Funds, with an impact on the OP implementation.

[120]. The periods just prior to the elections (local, parliamentary etc.), the changes in government (not necessarily related to SI) are also potential negative factors on communication, since certain audiences (population, media) may perceive the messages as political campaigning.

[121]. The factors with a potential impact on the PA3 implementation are summarised below:

TC Reconstruction Influence factors	4

2006 - Support factors	2008-2015 - Support factors
• Communication actions supported under other OPs (approx. EUR 157 mil.)	• Communication actions supported under other OPs
• The available assistance under PA1 for the coordination of communication and training sessions	• The available assistance under PA1 for the coordination of communication and training sessions
• The existence of networks/ resources on European topics (e.g. EuropeDirect, the infoeuropa.ro website, IC of EC etc., ECR)	• The existence of networks/ resources on European topics (e.g. EuropeDirect, the infoeuropa.ro website, IC of EC etc., ECR)
• Generally positive perception of EU structures among the Romanian public.	• Generally positive perception of EU structures among the Romanian public.
2006 - Barriers	**2008-2015 - Barriers**
• The heterogeneity of the target groups, including in terms of level of information	• The heterogeneity of the target groups, including in terms of level of information
• General public opinion regarding public	• General public opinion regarding public

funding (suspicion of fraud and lack of trust in the institutions involved in the management of public funds)	funding (suspicion of fraud and lack of trust in the institutions involved in the management of public funds) • Challenges in implementing SI • Coordination difficulties due to institutional mechanisms • Public procurement system • Insufficient human resources • Institutional / political / decision-making changes

3.5. Strategy to achieve the PA 3 objectives

[122]. According to the Theory of Change, the strategy reflects the vision and the actions proposed for implementation at the time of programming (how it is envisaged to meet the goals). In the case of OPTA PA3, it was established through the NCS-SI and the OPTA Communication Plan 2009. In order to have a complete picture of how the actions were addressed, we also include elements related to the messages conveyed and the target groups, as well as aspects on the manner of coordinating communication activities.

3.5.1. Actions

[123]. The objectives defined for PA3 at the time of OPTA's development were to be achieved through the activities under the two KAIs defined, as follows:

➢ KAI 3.1 " Dissemination of general information and publicity activities regarding the Structural Instruments allocated to Romania", which aims to provide assistance for the implementation of the Communication Action developed by MEF. This assistance includes *communication campaigns, polls, publicity, events, information material*, impact assessment and the assessment of the best promotion and publicity tools

and, respectively:

➢ KAI 3.2 "Operation of the Structural Instruments Information Centre", aiming to *provide resources for the development and operation of an Information Centre for SI, resources for the development of a dedicated web page (www.fonduri-ue.ro), a call center and a network of regional and local information points.*

[124]. Communication actions for KAI 3.1. covered:
• the organisation of campaigns and events (seminars, conferences etc.) in order to foster a better understanding of EU funds and of the implementation and monitoring process in Romania;
• the preparation, publication, translation and distribution of materials (publications, brochures, folders, CDs and other possible formats) for SCF information and promotion;
• publicity actions and the publication and dissemination of materials on OPTA;
• opinion polls;
• national information campaigns on TV, radio or other media;
• impact assessment and the identification and analysis of the most efficient promotion and publicity activities.

[125]. The following types of actions were covered for KAI 3.2.:
- remuneration for the Information Centre staff;
- purchasing books and materials for the Information Centre;
- communication regarding the Centre and its services;
- website development and maintenance;
- staff remuneration and operation of the information points.
- events related to the activity of the Information Centre.

[126]. **Information Centre was planned as a key element in SI-related communication in Romania** and the main source of information at national level regarding Structural Instruments. It was originally planned to include an information desk, a call center and the web page (the www.fonduri-ue.ro website, already functional, as mentioned above). It includes specially trained operators, who will answer general questions about the SI, calls for proposals launched, and will refer specific questions to MA, IB and CTS via a dedicated telephone helpline. All target groups here were to find printed materials or other information from official sources. The centre was planned to operate in conjunction with other sources of official information (e.g. Europe Direct, MA, IB websites etc.) and was to be implemented jointly by ACIS/MEF and MAs. Thus, IC-SI was to provide both general information and specific information, the latter to be covered exclusively with the support of MAs[10].

[127]. According to the OP, the communication actions would be performed in accordance with the National Communication Strategy (NCS-SI), which was being prepared at the time when the OP was completed and was developed by 2008 (under the coordination of ACIS), before starting the actual implementation of the activities under the two KAI.

3.5.2. Messages

[128]. The objectives defined for NCS-SI cover both external and internal communication. Thus, the following general messages are to be provided:
- Ensure the recognition of the EU contribution to Romania's modernisation, of the role and results achieved through Structural Instruments;
- Constantly and accurately inform all target groups about the financing opportunities that can benefit Romania through SI, about the rationale of setting this process in motion, about the objectives and benefits of their implementation;
- Ensure transparency, support SCF absorption in Romania and, implicitly, Romania's modernisation and the reliability of the EU integration process

[129]. A key element of the strategy is the **consistency of the messages**. This requires coordination and guidance for the communication process and the information and publicity activities of all structures managing SCF, whilst applying a working methodology by which the key messages are sent to all the institutions above and multiplied by them. The consistency of the messages is also based on:

- **The Communication Strategy**, which established an integrated approach to all aspects regarding communication programmes and which contains general messages to be used in communication plans);

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[10] The NCS mentions referring requests to the relevant MA/IB; the implementation used a ticket system, by which IC-SI forwarded the questions to the MA and provided answers to requests based on the replies received.

- **The Communication Plans** (establishing methods, facilitating the implementation of activities, establishing responsibilities);

- **The "Structural Instruments" website (www.fonduri-ue.ro)**, which operates as a virtual information centre of SCF and is inter-linked with the websites of the European Commission, of the Ministry of Public Finance and the websites of the institutions in charge with SCF management;

- **Info-center and call center,** as a first domestic source of information on SI, providing information about NSRF, OP tenders, the institutions involved in SI implementation, which would refer specific requests and inquiries to the relevant MA, IB and CTS;

- **Media campaigns** to be up and running in a coordinated manner, so that the campaigns launched by various institutions would be consistent with each other and not overlap, in compliance with organizational identity regulations.

[130]. According to the NCS, the communication actions were to consider a **proactive approach**, including identifying trends and areas/topics of interest in terms of internal and external communication and channelling communication efforts towards topics of interest to the media and public opinion, while providing training for the staff and discouraging reactive attitude in providing information.

3.5.3. Target audience:

[131]. In accordance with the National Communication Strategy, SI-related communication (performed by ACIS) covers the following main target audiences:

- General public: population and opinion leaders.

- Potential beneficiaries: public administration, corporate sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia / research community.

- Internal public (from SCF institutions): employees of the MAs, IBs and other institutions involved in SCF management and implementation; employees of the line ministries; EU institutions.

- Stakeholders - individuals, organizations and authorities involved in the management of funds or impacted by the European funds, although not potential beneficiaries: representatives of the corporate sector, academia; central and local public authorities; project promoters; representatives of the civil society; groups affected by the outcomes of project implementation; Romanian delegates from various European institutions with an advisory or decision-making role; politicians.

[132]. Media: Audiovisual (TV, radio, Internet); print (national, regional, local) and news agencies. Certain target groups considered are common to all OPs and for all Structural Instruments, which is why their information requirements are similar. Each target group should be approached as part of the general public, as the various pieces of information provided to the general public form the basis for the dissemination of specific sectoral information.

3.5.4. Coordinating information and publicity activities

[133]. A major element of the strategic approach defined for the NCS lies in the **coordination of information and publicity activities**. The structures and instruments defined in this regard cover:

- **Communicators' Forum for SI**, which ensures compliance with communication policies and rules and facilitates information exchange between the structures managing the CSF, so that OP-level communication actions and messages are coordinated.

- **The communicator's working group** (Communication Working Group), providing operational coordination of communication activities, operational management of the fonduri-ue.ro portal, IC and call center.

- **Common Internal Information System**, i.e. an **Extranet page**, accessible to all employees from the institutions involved in the SCF management and facilitating the effective coordination of the flow of information and support internal and external communication activities.

- **Procedures Manual** to facilitate the proper and coordinated implementation of the communication plans and support inter-institutional communication.

[134]. Defined structures also include **dedicated communication team within ACIS**, which, alongside the implementation of ACIS communication actions, is in charge with coordinating the communication actions of all programmes. Together with the institutional communication system, it ensures the operational coordination of the communication actions, manages the www.fonduri-ue.ro website and IC-SI.

[135]. According to the NCS, **the public communication activity was structured on three levels**, aiming to channel citizens' interest towards the development of projects, like a real "funnel", and to improve the perception of Romanian citizens on the transparency of EU funds implementation. The three elements are:

- broad-spectrum information campaigns (in the media);

- central information point (IC-SI), which can be contacted by all potential beneficiaries interested in accessing funds: website and call center (single number);
- dissemination of information and assistance to potential beneficiaries, ensured by the managing authorities and the intermediate bodies.

[136]. Responsibility for the implementation of the Communication Strategy lies with both MA OPTA, as well as the other MAs, and the actions are financed from the TA available in the various OPs. According to NCS, ACIS had overall responsibility for communication pertaining to Structural and Cohesion Funds and to global issues regarding the national implementation and management of these funds, whilst the AM would communicate regarding the specific issues of the Operational Programme they managed.

[137]. Following the analysis, the communication strategy, as an element in the reconstruction of the Change Theory, is summarised below.

Actions:	Coordinating information and publicity
KAI 3.1 Dissemination of general information and publicity activities regarding the Structural Instruments allocated to Romania	• Communicators' Forum for the SI; • Communicators' working group (Communication Working Group); • Common Internal Information System; • Procedures Manual.

Actions:

KAI 3.1 Dissemination of general information and publicity activities regarding the Structural Instruments allocated to Romania

- the organisation of campaigns and events (seminars, conferences etc.) in order to foster a better understanding of EU funds and of the implementation and monitoring process in Romania;
- the preparation, publication, translation and distribution of materials (publications, brochures, folders, CDs and other possible formats) for SCF information and promotion;
- publicity actions and the publication and dissemination of materials on OPTA;
- opinion polls;
- national information campaigns on TV, radio or other media;
- impact assessment and the identification and analysis of the most efficient promotion and publicity activities.

KAI 3.2 Operation of the Structural Instruments Information Centre

- remuneration for the Information Centre staff;
- purchasing books and materials for the Information Centre;
- communication regarding the Centre and its services;
- website development and maintenance;
- staff remuneration and operation of the information points.
- events related to the activity of the Information Centre.

Coordinating information and publicity

- Communicators' Forum for the SI;
- Communicators' working group (Communication Working Group);
- Common Internal Information System;
- Procedures Manual.

Messages

- General messages

Target groups

a) General public
b) Potential beneficiaries:
c) Internal public (from SCF institutions)
d) Stakeholders
e) Media

3.6. Assumptions made

[138]. Based on the reconstructed Theory of Change, a series of assumptions have been devised, which were then tested by the evaluation experts in order to determine the effective manner in which the defined strategy served to achieve the proposed results in view of the influence factors identified.

[139]. The assumptions identified provide the links between the key elements of the TC and were used to test the manner in which the defined interventions (the strategy) helped obtain the expected change (the desired results), in the given circumstances,

characterised by influence factors. They cover all categories of actions supported under PA3.

[140]. **The results of assumption testing are detailed in Chapter 5 - Theory of Change Interrogation, thus providing an answer about the net effect of interventions supported under OPTA, independent from communication-related interventions under the sectoral OPs or other public or private initiatives**.

TC Reconstruction Assumptions	6

1. The communication tools used were selected and carried out properly (including in terms of ensuring complementarity with other messages), consistent with the needs identified and the defined purpose.
2. The communication tools used were implemented in time for the different target-groups and according to the defined purpose (general public, project promoters)
3. The surveys conducted are comparable in time and correctly reflect the level of information on SCF.
4. The development of an official website, providing links to other official sources of information, has helped raise awareness and increase transparency on the use of SCF.
5. The helpdesk service of the Information Centre was effective and resulted in increased awareness amongst potential applicants for grants
6. The publicity campaigns conducted were effective and helped increase awareness amongst potential applicants for grants
7. The selected actions and institutional mechanisms (conducting separate actions / coordinating actions implemented by other entities / catalytic approach – funding certain multiplication factors) had an optimal contribution to meeting the set objectives
8. MEF's direct involvement in communication activities for the public provided legitimacy and credibility to the information

[141]. Assumptions 1-6 concern the manner in which the designed communication tools were used in order to increase information and awareness among the target groups, whereas assumptions 7-8 focused on coordination aspects pertaining to the dissemination of general SI-related messages.

[142]. The reconstructed Theory of Change is described below.

Fig. 8 Theory of Change reconstructed for OPTA PA3

Strategy **5**		Assumptions **6**
KAI 3.1 Dissemination of general information and publicity activities regarding the Structural Instruments allocated to Romania ✓ the organisation of campaigns and events (seminars, conferences etc.) in order to foster a better understanding of EU funds and of the implementation and monitoring process in Romania; ✓ the preparation, publication, translation and distribution of materials (publications, brochures, folders, CDs and other possible formats) for SCF information and promotion; ✓ publicity actions and the publication and dissemination of materials on OPTA; ✓ opinion polls; ✓ national information campaigns on TV, radio or other media; ✓ impact assessment and the identification and analysis of the most efficient promotion and publicity activities. **KAI 3.2 Operation of the Structural Instruments Information Centre** ✓ remuneration for the Information Centre staff; ✓ purchasing books and materials for the Information Centre; ✓ communication regarding the Centre and its services; ✓ website development and maintenance; ✓ staff remuneration and operation of the information points. ✓ events related to the activity of the IC	*Coordinating information and publicity* • Communicators' Forum for the IS; • Communicators' working group (Communication Working Group); • Common Internal Information System; • Procedures Manual. *Target groups* a. General public b. Potential beneficiaries: c. Internal public (from SCF institutions) d. Stakeholders e. Media *Messages* • General messages	1) The communication tools used were selected and carried out properly (including in terms of ensuring complementarity with other messages), consistent with the needs identified and the defined purpose. 2) The communication tools used were implemented in time for the different target-groups and according to the defined purpose (general public, project promoters) 3) The surveys conducted are comparable in time and correctly reflect the level of information on SCF. 4) The development of an official website, providing links to other official sources of information, has helped raise awareness and increase transparency on the use of SCF. 5) The helpdesk service of the Information Centre was effective and resulted in increased awareness amongst potential applicants for grants 6) The publicity campaigns conducted were effective and helped increase awareness amongst potential applicants for grants 7) The selected actions and institutional mechanisms (conducting own actions / coordinating actions implemented by other entities / catalytic approach – funding certain multiplication factors) had an optimal contribution to meeting the set objectives 8) MEF's direct involvement in communication activities for the public provided legitimacy and credibility to the information

Influence factors **4**		**Issues identified** **1**		**Expected results** **3**

Barriers	*Support factors*	**Issues identified**	**Expected results**
✓ The heterogeneity of the target group (potential beneficiaries, institutions, general public), including in terms of the level of information ✓ General public opinion regarding public funding (suspicion of fraud and lack of trust in the institutions involved in the management of public funds) ✓ The complexity of SCF interventions and procedures (quality of information required, the importance of conveying technical information, the need to adapt the information to the target group) ✓ Difficulties in coordinating communication actions due to institutional mechanisms (ACIS-MA hierarchical level) and certain factors external to the system (such as public procurement	✓ Communication activities supported by other OPs ✓ private communication initiatives (e.g. www.fonduri-structurale.ro) ✓ The available assistance under PA1 for the coordination of communication and training sessions ✓ Generally positive perception of EU structures among the Romanian public.	• The level of knowledge about post-accession funds is low • Mentality on accessing EU funds (difficult to access both because of red tape and co-financing requirements, as well as of suspicions of corruption directed at the institutions involved)	**PA3 Objective**: to ensure a nationally coordinated dissemination of general messages on Structural Instruments and to implement ACIS' Communication Action Plan, according to the National Communication Strategy for Structural Instruments **Purpose:** ✓ provide information to potential applicants about co-financing opportunities for projects from European funds; ✓ providing support project promoters in preparing and implementing high-quality projects; ✓ promoting general public awareness about the goals and achievements of the Structural instruments and about the NDP and ensuring the recognition of the role of EU SI. **Output indicators**[11] • 1 mil. publications, brochures and

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[11] Output indicators have undergone several changes during the programming period. Subsequent amendments mainly concerned the target values set for PI and reflect the physical progress already made in implementing the OP. The values shown represent the targets set at the time when OP TA was officially submitted.

procedures);

- ✓ The public procurement system and the availability of funds, which may have a negative impact on the timely implementation of the communication actions
- ✓ Very frequent institutional changes, leading to changes in the strategic approach and in the implementation of the communication actions.

2

Needs/benefits

- • Increasing the level of information on Structural Instruments (SI) among the general public, so as to meet the information and publicity requirements of the Regulations and to help increase SCF absorption to the highest degree possible.
- • The need to coordinate SI-related communication actions, so as to avoid overlaps or contradictory information and to cover gaps in communication
- • The need to adapt the information and channels according to the features of the various target groups
- ✓ Communication Strategy / Communication Plan
- ✓ SCF funds available for communication:
- ✓ Institutional structure: Working Group for Coordination

leaflets
- • 70 events receiving support
- • 14 campaigns
- • 7 polls
- • 1 mil. hits on the web page
- • 40,000 requests received by the Information Centre

Result indicators:
15% increase in the level of awareness of SI (in 2006 = 5%)

4. Progress assessment regarding the PA3 implementation

4.1. Turning available resources into immediate results (outputs)

[143].This section describes the progress in the implementation of PA3, in terms of the absorption of available funds, the results obtained by the projects contracted and implemented and in terms of reaching the targets set for the result indicator.

[144].Thus, in financial terms, the PA3 absorption is a mere 24% of the allocation for KAI 3.1. and 10% of the allocation for KAI 3.2. These low values calculated for the absorption of available funding refer to the allocations reduced following the redistribution of almost 70% of the KAI 3.1 financial resources to PA1 (62%) and of KAI 3.2 (8%), respectively, carried out in 2014.

Fig. 9 OPTA PA3 absorption, 31.12.2014 (EUR)
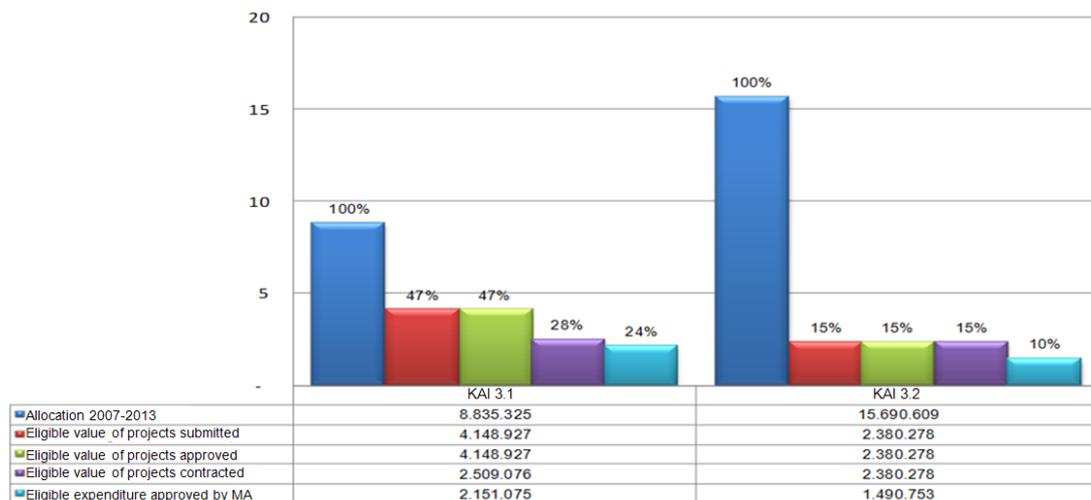
	KAI 3.1	KAI 3.2
Allocation 2007-2013	8.835.325	15.690.609
Eligible value of projects submitted	4.148.927	2.380.278
Eligible value of projects approved	4.148.927	2.380.278
Eligible value of projects contracted	2.509.076	2.380.278
Eligible expenditure approved by MA	2.151.075	1.490.753

* Differences in value relative to AIR 2013 are due to the exchange rate used for the conversion in EUR (December 2013 – 4.4361 RON/EUR, December 2014 – 4.4205 RON/EUR).

Source: OPTA AIR 2014

[145].In terms of funded contracts, OPTA PA3 provided support for two major projects, the beneficiary of which was the Public Communication and Information Unit on Structural Instruments. Apart from these, an application (MySMIS code 5424) to conduct communication activities in 2014-2015 was also submitted under OPTA.

Table 9 Contracts financed under OPTA PA3

	Number of projects/reimbursement claims/payment requests			Eligible value		
	In 2013	In 2014	Cumulative, up to 31 Dec. 2014	In 2013	In 2014	Cumulative, up to 31 Dec. 2014
Projects submitted	-	-	2	-	-	6,529,206
Projects approved	-	-	2	-	-	6,529,206
Projects contracted	-	-	2	-	-	4,889,354

Reimbursement claims approved	7	2	23	2,482,714	268,543	3,641,828
Payments made to beneficiaries[5]	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,978,952	379,009	3,070,418
Eligible expenditure declared to EC	N/A	N/A	N/A	2,846,562	269,183	3,819,537

Source: OPTA AIR 2014

[146]. Given that, at project level, resources have been used to implement activities that have indirectly led to the achievement of the programme indicators, quantifying the resources used to meet IP overall at OPTA-level cannot properly reflect the efforts made to implement the required activities for OPTA. In this context, the results achieved and the resources used are listed below, for each project.

[147]. The SMIS 1173 project aimed to support the implementation of ACIS' Communication Plan, covering a wide range of actions (e.g. press conferences, information campaigns, development and distribution of promotional materials, training courses, billboards etc.)

[148]. All these actions helped organise major events aiming to promote SI, such as "Europe Day", TV and radio spots, online banners, dissemination of information brochures to EC, MA and other relevant events, information sessions with media representatives, and polls regarding the level of information about SI among the general public.

Table 10 Achievements and resources used for the SMIS 1173 project

Indicator	Values at the beginning of the period	Actual values at the end of the contract (total incl. initial value) – no.	Degree of achievement	Overall eligible amount requested (RON)
Web page hits	240,000	1,020,571	204%	133,369
Posters distributed	0	6,000	100%	189,750
Workshops for journalists	0	5	100%	81,664
Media campaigns	0	2	100%	7,416,512
Communication and promotion ev.	11	31	100%	155,118
Number of promotional products bearing the SI logo distributed	0	22,175	100%	363,983
Information and publicity materials	3	12	100%	533,350
Media monitoring (no. months)	0	4	100%	60,500
Static outdoor billboards posted	0	115	100%	651,819

Source: Project progress reports

[149]. The SMIS 38416 project targeted the "Development of the Information Centre for Structural Instruments", in order to ensure a most effective countrywide dissemination of information about Structural Instruments among the target audiences and guiding potential beneficiaries for the development/promotion of viable projects.

[150]. The main activities foreseen in order to achieve the objective of this project focused on rendering the IC operational (renting the premises and providing it with furniture and

equipment, information materials, selecting, hiring and remunerating the 12-expert staff), conducting communication, information and communication actions, ensuring the helpdesk function, website maintenance and updates for www.fonduri-ue.ro.

[151]. The Information Centre only began its activity in 2012, after a lengthy contracting process, which was mainly due to the procurement process. Although the expected effects of the information centre were to ensure a widespread knowledge of Structural Instruments among the population, there have been, however, several limitations in this respect.

[152]. One of the time-consuming factors of the project concerned the web page reconstruction, which would have had an important role in facilitating access to relevant public information about SI and responses to the requests received through the IC. However, according to the table below, the project's output indicators indicate that the operating conditions for the IC have been ensured, while the communication/promotion events and the responses to information requests have been partially completed.

Table 11 Achievements and resources used for the SMIS 38416 project

Indicator	Value at the beginning of the period	Value at end of the contract	Degree of achievement	Overall eligible amount requested
Web page hits	235,000	1,207,796	382%	
Information requests received by the IC	0	5,647	25.61%	
No. of experts paid monthly	0	11	91.66%	5,510,450
No. of m^2 of the leased premises	0	320	106.60%	3,079,444
No. of materials purchased or printed	0	82	100%	2,785
Communication and promotion events	0	6	60%	8,178
Information and publicity materials	0	17	106.25%	464,662
Communication plans for the IC		2	100%	785,818
Media campaigns		1		86,855

Source: Project progress reports

[153]. Other activities supporting communication activities were carried out under PA1-funded contracts. One such example is Contract no. 6126/144/29.11.2013 "Support for MAEur in carrying out the functions of coordinating Structural Instruments and managing the Operational Programme Technical Assistance", which comprises 720 days of expertise[12] in support to the Communication Department for Structural Instruments of the Technical Assistance Directorate, in particular for the following activities:

- selecting the most appropriate methods of publicity and communication on Structural Instruments in order to achieve the objectives of the National Communication Strategy for Structural Instruments and the ACIS and MA OPTA communication plan;

- defining the results, key milestones and target groups for the ACIS Communication Plan;

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[12] At the time of this Report, a total of 544 days had already been used for the implementation of the activities.

- identifying the types of information materials and the manner of distributing them, as well as defining their contents;

- identifying and developing partnerships in order to meet the objectives of the ACIS Communication Plan and of the National Communication Strategy;

- coordinating the activity of the working groups on communication regarding Structural Instruments, which comprise delegates of the managing authorities and intermediate bodies;

- coordinating the activity of the Information Centre for Structural Instruments;

- developing technical assistance project proposals for the Communication Department, as well as the related tender documentations.

- technical management of the projects pertaining to the activity of the Department

- drafting the communication strategy for Structural Instruments in 2014-2020;

[154].The information and publicity activities set out under OPTA have been implemented according to the National Communication Strategy (p.14-15) and the OPTA Communication Plan 2013 (p.10-13) and focused on two lines of action: SI-related communication and OPTA-related communication.

[155].The OPTA PA3 physical progress is reflected in the following values of the programme indicators:

Table 12 Progress in meeting the PI under OPTA 2007-2013

Programme indicators as per the latest version of OPTA	OPTA target*	Val achieved in 2015 (incl. baseline value)	% achievement of the target in 2015
Studies, analyses, reports, strategies	4	4	100%
Supported events (conferences, seminars, workshops) for promoting SI interventions / Information and publicity events	98	36	37%
Information and publicity materials	36	29	81%
Media campaigns	4	3	75%
Number of hits on the SI site / Web page hits	1,763,732	2,128,313	121%
Number of requests received by IC-SI	40,000	5,647	14%
Level of awareness of SI	50	53**	106%

*OPTA official version, submitted to the EC in November 2014
** According to OPTA AIR 2014. According to the countrywide representative conducted under the project, the level of awareness stands at 51%. Even so, the target has been exceeded.

[156].According to the table above, the progress in achieving output indicators varies significantly, from 121% in terms of the number of website hits to 14% in terms of the number of requests received by IC-SI.

[157].Whereas for the number of requests received by IC-SI, a number of objective causes can be identified in order to explain and justify the low progress, the causes pertaining to the low progress in terms of the number of events held, information materials prepared and campaigns broadcast concern both the internal implementation capacity

of ACIS, as well as external factors (public procurement procedures, decision-makers' involvement etc.)

4.2. Aspects regarding the progress in achieving PA3 objectives

Progress in achieving the objective of raising awareness of SI

[158].In terms of attaining the level of awareness of SI, the initial target of 20% was exceeded as early as the first part of the program period, reaching 33% by 2010. The public awareness of the existence of SI is on an upward trend. Whereas in 2010-2011 only 33%-40% of the population stated having heard of SCF, by 2013, 48% of respondents acknowledged to have heard of them. In 2014, according to the AIR, public awareness of Structural Instruments had exceeded the set target of 50% and, by late 2015, according to the evaluation project survey, the awareness had reached 51%.

Fig. 10 The level of public awareness of SI

Source: Surveys conducted among the Romanian population

[159].In terms of public awareness and perception on different aspects of Structural Instruments, by 2011, there was already a certain stratification by degree of public interest[13], which demonstrates that awareness efforts have yielded results and that the information should be increasingly adapted to the specific needs of the various audiences.

[160]. Furthermore - if we look at how the respondents' interest towards SCF has evolved - whereas in 2010, general aspects such as "only general information" and "I'm interested in how they can benefit Romania" prevailed, views are becoming clearer with every year, concerning more diverse, yet specific elements, which demonstrates the increase in the level of awareness and interest towards SCF[14].

[161].In this context, the actual progress towards the OPTA objective of increasing SI awareness is good.

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[13] Comparative analysis report on the results of the two surveys "The level of public awareness of the Structural Instruments in Romani", TNS CSOP Romania 2011
[14] Idem 13

Progress in achieving the objective of OPTA-related information among target groups

[162]. It was sought to attain a higher level of information on OPTA in order to increase access to OPTA funding. Specifically, the information actions mainly addressed OPTA beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, mostly represented by public institutions (including MEF/ACIS, institutions with duties in SI management and audit etc.).

[163]. Information thus translated into a two-way road, as it was also generated by the interest of (potential) beneficiaries, who wished to know specific details in order to prepare applications and obtain OPTA financing.

[164]. Given this specificity of OPTA-related communication: the progress in achieving this objective is significant, as reflected in the beneficiaries' and potential beneficiaries' good level of knowledge on financing opportunities under OPTA and on how to access the funds.

Progress in achieving the objective of ensuring a coordinated dissemination of general messages on SI

[165]. As presented in detail in Chapter 3 on the reconstructed Theory of Change, the coordination mechanisms provided for information and publicity activities under the Communication Strategy for SI 2007-2013[15] included:
- Communicators' Forum
- Communication Working Group
- Extranet
- Procedures Manual

[166]. The way in which these mechanisms have functioned relative to those set out in the National Communication Strategy and the OPTA Communication Plan is shown below:

Mechanism provided	Actual implementation
The Communicators' Forum	
- comprising the communicators from institutions in charge with SCF management - (MA, IB, other institutions in charge with managing SCF – e.g. Certification and Paying Authority); - ensures compliance with the established communication policies; - facilitates information exchange between the structures managing SCF through common internal information system; - contributes to creating an organisational culture; - contributes to the national coordination of communication activities	**In theory, it convenes twice per year.** As per AIR 2010, four meetings were held during 2007-2010. Between 2011-2014, OPTA RAI contains just one mention about the Forum, namely a meeting in 2011, without providing any details on its subject. In a simple Google query, the first two pages do not show any information about the Forum's activity. The Forum's activity has not been very intense, which failed to make it an effective tool in coordinating communication. MA representatives felt that it would have been an excellent environment for sharing best practices and aligning communication efforts, but that the actual activities were insufficient. **Good practice examples:** **Regio Communicators' Forum** , which brings together each year members of the communicators' network, created by MAROP in 2010 to raise awareness among potential beneficiaries,

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beneficiaries and the general public regarding the funds available under the Regional Operational Programme 2007-2013 and to increase transparency in the spending of these funds.

The network consists, on the one hand, of representatives of the central authorities in charge with the management of Structural Funds: MAROP, IB ROP, ACIS, and, on the other hand, representatives of local public authorities, civil society, of the corporate sector and of central and local media: specialised staff from the European integration departments of local public institutions - prefectures, county councils, Europe Direct centres, universities, continuous training centres, Chambers of Commerce and Industry, consulting firms, industrial parks, business incubators, companies, city halls, NGOs for community development, county libraries, school inspectorates, journalists etc.

The National Network for Rural Development is another good practice example, bringing together relevant stakeholders (including project beneficiaries) and also having a communication strategy in line with NRDP.

Communicators' working group (Working Group)	
- comprising communication officers from MA; - facilitates swift communication between the Managing Authorities; - facilitates the effectiveness of the decision-making process concerning the individual communication aspects. - provides the basis for the optimal coordination of communication activities at national level.	The meetings of the working group ensured the coordination of communications between ACIS and Managing Authorities. It discussed both documents (e.g. communication plans, in the early stage) and the planning of events and actions, so as to avoid potential overlaps in terms of content or in terms of timing. The WG would have been an effective mechanism of cooperation between MA/ACIS, had it possessed the required levers in order to have the technical decisions of the WG implemented in MA ministries. There were many instances when this did not happen, mostly due to the hierarchical level of the people involved in the WG (operative staff) and the different approaches of the various ministries.
Common internal information system (Extranet)	
- Extranet page accessible to all the employees from the institutions involved in SCF management; - instrument for the effective coordination of the information flow and of the exchange of information between information officers from all institutions involved in the management of SCF; - supports internal and external communication activities, networking and other inter-institutional capacity-building activities; - tool for the effective coordination of messages between the structures responsible for managing European funds and for sending to all users the key-messages, themes, discussion topics, questions and updated answers etc.	Not done

- the relevant information conveyed through this system will be subsequently re-transmitted by the communicators within their institutions, so as to step up dissemination and to diversify the information provided to the staff.	
Procedures Manual	
- defines the procedures to be followed and implemented by each MA, IB in order to implement communication plans in a coherent and coordinated manner; - contains general rules for collaboration between the communication teams; - ensures the consistency and coordination of information and publicity at national level; - supports the inter-institutional communication system, enhancing the effectiveness of communication between the institutions managing Structural Instruments; - supports ACIS' role as national coordinator of Structural Instruments; - ensures transparency and consistency throughout the communication process; - provides a basis for the operative evaluation of communication activities	A Visual Identity Manual was drafted, but not also a procedures manual. The Regio Communication Guide is a good practice example in this respect[16]

[167]. As mentioned in Chapter 3 on the Reconstruction of the Theory of Change, one of the major negative factors impacting the PA3 implementation is the fact that ACIS/MEF, although responsible for coordinating the SCF system, does not enjoy a hierarchically-superior position relative to the other MA or IB and did not have the necessary levers for the actual coordination of the actions with the other MA. Therefore, the implementation cycle only saw a technical coordination, to correlate the activities implemented. This coordination has been mainly achieved within the Communication Working Group.

[168]. The lack of coordination in terms of decision-making – in the context of the political factors' influence and of elements related to the need for organisational independence – prevented a uniform approach across the different OPs in terms of the applicable procedures or the type of actions implemented.

[169]. The actions' coordination was also encumbered by the complex public procurement system, which caused major delays in the implementation of communication activities, and the inability to coordinate actions supported from several sources (under the various OPs).

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[16] http://www.inforegio.ro/images/info-publicitate/publicatii/Ghid%20de%20comunicare_Ro_final%2013%20feb.pdf

[170].These difficulties have been enhanced by the availability of a small number of persons effectively involved in managing communication activities, generating a predominantly reactive approach of MEF to the reactions and perception, sometimes negative, of the general public and economic entities towards SI, with an impact on the success of the communication actions implemented.

[171].In addition to that, the resources available through TA projects implemented under PA1 could only be used in part, as this support was difficult to manage and assimilate (given the involvement of many experts or the limited knowledge of the issues and system approach etc.).

[172].The issues identified during the programming stage, i.e. the mentality towards accessing EU funds (difficult to access, due to both the red tape and co-financing requirements and suspicions of corruption directed at the institutions involved), required a proactive approach to communication on the part of institutions managing SI, so as to counteract the potential negative effects of such attitudes.

[173].Institutional changes – ACIS shifted under the authority of the GSG and, subsequently, that of MAEur and the subsequent establishment of the Ministry of European Funds – also influenced the OPs' implementation, by redefining the strategic approach and impacting the available resources for communication.

[174].During implementation, a series of measures were adopted in order to address barriers, both horizontally and under each OP, however, in some cases, the implementation of these measures failed to counteract the negative effects thereof. The section on the Theory of Change Interrogation, under assumption testing, provides an analysis of the influence of these factors on the implementation of various information and communication activities supported.

[175].Given the above, there has been little progress in achieving the OPTA objective of ensuring a coordinated dissemination of general messages on SI.

4.3 Perspectives of communication and publicity under ESIF 2014-2020

[176].The communication activities will continue in the 2014-2020 programming period, with funding from both OPTA 2014-2020 and the related Technical Assistance PAs of each OP.

[177].An important change from the 2007-2013 period is the fact that, in 2014-2020, MEF will act both as Managing Authority for a number of OPs, as well as coordinator on some horizontal issues related to ESI funds management and implementation.

[178].Thus, OPTA 2014-2020 was designed according to the new architecture of the ESIF coordination, management and control, i.e. four management authorities within MEF (LIO, COP, OPTA and the Human Capital OP), and aims to provide technical assistance for the horizontal issues pertaining to all ESIF-financed OPs, as well as for the specific aspects of the three ERDF/CF-financed programmes under the direct management of MEF (LIOP, COP and OPTA).

[179].One of the specific objectives of OPTA 2014-2020 (SO 1.2) aims to "ensure the transparency and credibility of ESIF and of the role of the EU Cohesion Policy", in view of the following:

- Dissemination of information and conducting information and publicity activities regarding ESIF and OPTA, LIOP and COP. At the same time, funding is provided for information and promotional actions for the launch of the post-2020 programming period and for both the Partnership Agreement, as well as for the future operational programmes in the areas covered by LIOP and COP. Support will also be provided for the ESIF Information Centre and the territorial network of 41 information points (one in each county). The information network will be used to deploy the "one-stop-shop" mechanism for SMEs, which will provide comprehensive and accessible information on funding opportunities from ESIF and other funds and advice to entrepreneurs.

- Developing a culture of partnership for ESIF coordination and management, strengthening institutional capacity of the partners involved in this process. The support will focus on the set-up and functioning of the institutional coordination mechanism for the Partnership Agreement (Steering Committee for the Management of the Partnership Agreement, thematic Steering Sub-Committees and functional working groups), as well as on other committees, working groups and networks to be set up in areas impacting ESIF or the coordination of EU and national funding instruments.

[180]. The actions will be implemented in accordance with the Communication Strategy for 2014-2020, a document still under development at the time of this Evaluation Report.

5. Theory of Change Interrogation for PA3 (evaluation findings)

5.1. Conducting surveys

Assumption 1 - The surveys conducted are comparable in time and correctly reflect the level of information on SCF.

[181]. The progress in achieving the OPTA PA3 objectives is reflected, in terms of result indicators, in the level of awareness of Structural Instruments, monitored by means of surveys.

[182]. Their comparability is tested and their results investigated for a double purpose: on the one hand, it provides the required information in order to answer the first evaluation question, regarding the progress in meeting PA3 objectives and, on the other hand, helps formulate the findings for assumption 2 on the communication tools used.

[183]. In order to assess the evolution in the level of awareness, in 2006, ACIS (MPF) conducted a quantitative research (survey) among the general population and four major groups of potential funding beneficiaries: public administration, non-governmental organisations, corporate sector, research community/academia. This served to determine the baseline value of 5% for the result indicator of OPTA PA3, namely the level of public awareness of SCF[17].

[184]. The same research showed that, although the perception of the usefulness of European funds is generally positive, **more than half of the population believes that European funds are not distributed in a transparent manner and that there is fraud in their management and use, especially in public administration[18]**.

[185]. At the same time, the survey among potential beneficiaries indicated that funding priorities for Romania are best known by the public administration and by NGOs, unlike businesses and the research/academic community. At the initial stage of programming, the groups of potential beneficiaries did not distinguish between the different programmes, between pre and post-accession funds: Structural Instruments were regarded as "PHARE funds". In the view of the four groups, accessing funds involved red tape, co-financing and project application.

[186]. In the 2007-2013 programming period, the communication was based on the findings of the 2006 survey, which established the baseline values of the level of awareness. It also served to set the original targets of the KAI 3.1 indicators.

[187]. According to OPTA FID, eligible operations include surveys, impact assessment and identifying and analysing the most effective promotion and publicity methods. (p. 47). According to this provision, during the 2007-2013 period, the testing and monitoring of the level of awareness of SCF have been conducted using the following tools:

- **5-16 May 2010 – Sociological Research at national level, Romanian population aged 18 -70 years, 1,235 respondents.**
- Error-margin of 2.8% maximum, with a confidence level of 95%.

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[17] FID, Oct. 2010 version
[18] Source: OPTA Communication Plan 2009 (p.4)

- Sample type: Probabilistic samples, layered by development region and residence, using 154 sampling points in 60 rural localities and 57 cities plus Bucharest.
- Data collection methodology: Face-to-face interviews based on a predefined questionnaire administered at the respondents' residence by operators trained by CSOP.
- Reference Question: "*Have you ever heard about the Structural and Cohesion Funds? "*

- **14 January - 3 February 2011 – Sociological Research at national level, Romanian population aged 18-70 years, 2,449 respondents.**
- Error-margin of 2.8% maximum, with a confidence level of 95%;
- Sample type: Probabilistic samples, layered by development region and residence, using 308 sampling points in 120 rural localities and 79 cities plus Bucharest. The sample included 600 respondents from the 2010 research;
- Data collection methodology: Face-to-face interviews based on a predefined questionnaire administered at the respondents' residence by operators trained by CSOP.
- Reference Question: *"Have you ever heard about the Structural and Cohesion Funds?"*

- **September 2013 – Sociological Research at national level, Romanian adult population, not institutionalized, 2,400 interviews.**
- Sample type: multistage cluster sample, with probabilistic selection;
- Data collection methodology: CATI;
- Reference question: *"Have you ever heard about the Structural and Cohesion Funds?"*

[188].In 2014, OPTA AIR mentions a level of awareness of 53%, taken from the Flash Eurobarometer[19] European sociological research, concerning the EU regional policy. This level of awareness was therefore determined indirectly.

[189]. Given that the last sociological research conducted in Romania with the specific purpose of measuring the level of SCF awareness had been conducted in 2013, in order to provide a direct answer (and from indirect sources) **to the 1st evaluation question, it was deemed necessary to perform a sociological research comparable to those in 2010-2013 as part of the evaluation project**, following which the level of awareness was determined to be 51%:

- **October-November 2015 – nationally-representative sociological research, Romanian adult population, 1200 respondents**
- Sample type: multistage cluster sample, with probabilistic selection;
- Data collection methodology: CATI;
- Reference question: *"Have you ever heard about the Structural and Cohesion Funds?"*

[190].The next representative population survey is to be conducted in 2016. Therefore, this shows that public opinion on SI was assessed in 2010-2013, whereas the 2007-2009 and 2014-2015 periods had not been covered (were it not for the survey in the evaluation process).

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[19] European Commission Report *Citizens' awareness and perceptions of EU regional policy* October 2010

[191].In terms of testing and monitoring public information and perception on the different aspects of Structural Instruments, this has been done by the same researches mentioned above and focused on the following topics:

- Perceptions and attitudes on the social and economic situation in Romania;
- Confidence in various public institutions, including institutions in charge of European funds;
- Romania's participation in the European Union;
- The general level of information about SCF and sources of information;
- Interest and the knowledge of SCF: eligible beneficiaries, eligible areas;
- Using SCF;
- Preferences in acquiring information on SCF.

[192].Sociological researches on the topic of communication activities have also been conducted by MA ROP, both among the population and other target groups (beneficiaries, media etc.). However, these have a specific character, focusing on ERDF, ROP (REGIO) and their specific elements.

[193].In terms of testing and the level of information and perceptions of the various target groups, OPTA did not fund any specific researches during 2007-2015 (potential beneficiaries, internal audiences (from institutions involved in SCF management and implementation); stakeholders – individuals, organisations and authorities involved in the management of Structural Instruments or impacted by Structural Instruments, without actually being potential beneficiaries; media).

[194].On the other hand, surveys were conducted among beneficiaries in 2007-2013, at the initiative of the private sector/NGOs, such as those conducted through www.fonduri-structurale.ro or the one conducted between 5 November - 5 December 2011 by Data Research among the beneficiaries of SCF-financed projects (nationally representative, covering three target groups: 150 local authorities, 300 companies and 240 NGOs).[20]

[195].The surveys have been connected with the information campaigns, so that the research may also determine the communication actions' impact. SCF media coverage was included in the 2010, 2011 and 2013 surveys. The assessment of the information campaign conducted under OPTA in 2011 was ensured by the sociological research carried out in 2013.

[196].The surveys also provided relevant elements for the preparation of future communication actions. For example, the 2011 sociological research conducted among the general population stated that the "Communication effort and efforts to increase SCF visibility should focus on the under-35 age group and persons with low education" or "In order to increase the level of understanding, further communication efforts are needed (in all media channels: TV, as well as radio print and online media, web sites, complemented by events etc.), whilst information should be straightforward and highly accessible to the general public.". However, the analysis indicated the "Need to increase the level of information among the population: it is not sufficient for people to simply hear of SCF, as they also need to be informed in a clear and highly accessible manner, by all means of communication, about the concepts (in order to properly use terms such as "Structural Instruments" or "Structural and Cohesion Funds" etc.), eligible areas and

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[20] http://www.cries.ro/comunitate/sondaj-de-opinie-perceptii-beneficiari-fonduri-structurale/

beneficiaries who can access SCF. There have been several steps ahead, but communication and public information efforts should continue. "

[197]. The following key findings have been drawn upon testing Assumption 1:

- **The surveys are comparable in time and accurately reflect the evolution in the level of general public awareness of SCF**. However, these cut off by 2013, whereas the next survey is planned for 2016. 2014 data have been obtained from indirect sources, while **the 2015 survey was conducted under this evaluation project, in order to collect data for the analysis.**

- **No sociological researches were conducted during 2007-2013 for the other target groups covered by OPTA PA3.**

- The population surveys also provide information regarding the respondents' level of information on IS.

- The 2010, 2011, 2013 surveys provide concrete information and recommendations on how to address communication.

5.2. Development and implementation of communication tools

Assumption 2 - The communication tools used were selected and carried out properly (including in terms of ensuring complementarity with other messages), consistent with the needs identified and the defined purpose.

[198]. According to both the National Communication Strategy and the OPTA Communication Plan 2009, the communication objectives set out for communication and public relations (information and publicity) depend on a pro-active approach, as per the principle of coherence in national-level messages. "Public communication is the main component and targets the general public and potential beneficiaries. It will be structured into three segments, whose main role is to attract interest from initial intent to actual project development, thus stimulating the absorption of these funds."[21]

[199]. The three segments are, in fact, the three levels of the communication structure set out by the National Communication Strategy for SI:
a) **broad-spectrum information campaigns** (*national and/or regional-sectorial*);
b) **Information Centre**, providing general information on the Structural Instruments, the institutions involved in SCF management, current tenders, assistance for the public (at national level);
c) **Dissemination of thematic information and assistance to potential beneficiaries** (locally).

[200]. As per OPTA FID (2013), "Information campaigns for the general public will be carried out on the basis of sociological studies (including essential information required, the key messages, in accordance with the optimum media channels identified, campaign implementation and evaluation plan). An important element of the campaign is to promote the website and the single helpline of the Information Centre for Structural Instruments." (P. 47)

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[21] OPTA Communication Plan 2009, p.7-8

[201]. The communication tools used under OPTA have been implemented according to the National Communication Strategy and OPTA Communication Plan. The responsibility for this activity is shared between ACIS and the MAs of the sectoral OPs. The detailed analysis of their implementation is provided below.

Table 13 Activities for SI-related communication implemented under OPTA

Activity	Initial description	Target group	Owner
Developing the web page www.fonduriue.ro	**All kinds of public information provided by MAs and IBs.**	**All target groups**	**ACIS MA**
[202]. ACIS had originally developed a dedicated section on EU grants on the Ministry of Public Finance website (www.mfinante.ro/fonduriUE) – with general and specific information on the institutional framework, relevant legislation, SI description, the development of the NDP, NSRF and OP. The www.fonduri-ue.ro web page was developed with PHARE funding before starting the implementation of OPTA. The SMIS 1173 project ensured its maintenance and translation into English and it was subsequently amended. The "Structural Instruments" website (www.fonduri-ue.ro) *was developed under the SMIS 38416 project "Set-up and support for the operation of the Information Centre for SI* A detailed analysis regarding the operation and the usefulness of the www.fonduri-ue.ro website can be found in the Assumption 4 section.			
Central Call Center	**Specially trained operators answering in Romanian to general questions about SCF, current tenders and referring specific questions to the MA, IB and CTS.**	**General public, potential beneficiaries**	**ACIS**
[203]. IC-SI , together with the broad-spectrum information campaigns, is the main tool for SI-related communication. IC-SI was developed and opened under the SMIS 38416 project, becoming fully operational on 20.01.2012. Throughout the eight quarters of running under the SMIS project, the three helpdesk components of IC-SI were "face-to-face", "call center" and "electronic request", each entrusted to two information officers. Between 27.12.2011 - 27.12.2013, the level of satisfaction, based on the satisfaction forms filled out by IC-SI service beneficiaries, exceeds 98%.[22]			
[204]. IC-SI became operational fairly late given the information needs (the first calls for proposals were launched in 2008, mainly between 2009-2011 – in 2012, the need for general information was already lower, the direct communication channels with MAs had been established by the beneficiaries/applicants, whereas private sources of information had already become a benchmark in the absence of an official contact). After the completion of the SMIS 38416 project, IC-SI's activity has been more or less suspended. Detailed analysis on the functioning and usefulness of the IC-SI can be found in the Assumption 5 section.			
A common internal information system (extranet)	**A common database to support the flow of external and internal information, communication and information activities, networking and programme implementation.**	**The staff of the institutions within the SCF implementation system**	**ACIS MA**
[205]. The common internal information system (extranet) has not been rendered operational in the 2007-2013 programming period.			
Visual Identity Manual	**Using the Structural Instruments logo in Romania Developing and complying with the visual**	**All target groups**	**ACIS MA, IB, CTS**

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[22] As per Final Implementation Report for Service Agreement No.: 49/27.12.2011

	identity manual		

[206]. The final version of the Visual identity Manual for Structural Instruments 2007-2013 was published in 2010 and was used as a basis for the development of OP-specific visual identity manuals.

[207]. The purpose of this manual is to present the items to be used to in order to promote the visual identity of the EU and SI in Romania, including graphic examples; rules of use for these items; permitted exceptions to these rules.

[208]. The Visual Identity Manual for Structural Instruments is applicable to all operational programmes and SI-funded projects. VIM provisions are an integral part of the financing agreements concluded between MA/IB and beneficiaries.

[209]. Although the EC and the consultants involved in programming initially recommended that a single visual identity be used for all SI, MAs decided that each OP develop, in turn, its own visual identity elements and, thus, its own VIM, despite the risk of "dissipating the message" to the public.

[210]. This was due, on the one hand, to the fact that, upon the completion of the SI VIM, certain management authorities had already developed their own manuals and identity elements (logos), e.g. ROP. On the other hand, each ministry acting as MA deemed it necessary and appropriate to distinguish between programmes, in order to better highlight the results and benefits of the implementation, one of the recurring arguments being the heterogeneity of the funded areas and potential beneficiaries.

[211]. This approach led different general perceptions of the programmes and to a clearer identity of certain programmes (in this case - ROP). The evaluation did not highlight any evidence to explicitly confirm the initial fears about the dissipation of the messages conveyed and, in fact, the views expressed by stakeholders rather lead to the idea that there have been common identity elements, which all supported the promotion of SI.

[212].Moreover, the different identities developed for each OP prevented any image-related issues of certain programmes (e.g. SOPHRD) from automatically transferring to all the other ones.

Networking	Communication coordinators share experiences, best practices, failures and other relevant information regarding the implementation of the programme and of information and publicity measures (both nationally and internationally): - regular meetings (working groups); - joint training courses; - using the common internal information system (extranet)	Institutions in the SCF implementation system (communication and publicity officers)	ACIS MA IB CTS

[213]. Communication coordinators' networks have been mainly established through the Communication Working Group and the SI Communicators' Forum. These two structures are part of the SI coordination mechanisms and their functioning is detailed under Assumption 7.

[214]. Apart from this, networks have also developed through the collaboration with Europe Direct and county council offices, which translated into exchanges of information material or participation in joint events. However, these collaborations have not been formal and steadfast, often influenced by cyclical factors, such as the load on staff, topic and location of events.

[215].In terms of the other instruments originally intended for network development, no joint training sessions have been held and the Extranet failed to become operational.

Media Campaigns	In order to raise awareness of SCF in Romania, of the different OPs and funding opportunities, at the beginning of the programming period.	General public Potential beneficiaries	ACIS MA

Communicating information about the results and impact of SCF on the social and economic development of Romania.		

[216]. Information campaigns have been one of the central elements of SI-related communication. In the period 2007-2015, OPTA PA3 funded and developed three communication campaigns for the general public and potential beneficiaries, using a mix of tools and broadcasting general messages on IS.

A detailed analysis on the campaigns implementation can be found in the Assumption 6 section

Outdoor Publicity	billboards (billboards in various locations); illuminated displays.	General public	ACIS MA, IB, CTS (where relevant) Beneficiaries

[217]. This tool has been used as part of integrated communication campaigns. Thus, the SMIS 1173 project set out and provided 15 billboards in Bucharest and 100 in other locations, as well as 10 illuminated displays in Bucharest and 20 across the country.

[218].Despite the fact that billboards are not among the media preferred by the general public (only 14-16% prefer this instrument of information, which conveyed the campaign messages to just 6-8% of the interviewees[23]), the stakeholders interviewed during the evaluation generally agreed that this tool was useful and that, along with other instruments, it made a contribution to communication activities.

Media relations, cooperation with mass-media	Journalists can act as "disseminators of information" between the institutions within the SI implementation system and the different target groups. The continuous flow of information and continuous training of journalists can be provided by: - training sessions and thematic workshops for journalists; - press releases; - press conferences; - special cooperation programmes (dedicated pages or columns in newspapers and magazines, media partnerships)	General public Media	ACIS MA IB CTS

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[23] Survey report and comparative report on the surveys conducted in 2010-2011.

[219]. Press relations management primarily aimed to maintain a close collaboration with journalists specialised in European funding (or European topics in general), so as to ensure a proper understanding of the messages and the proper transfer of information through them.

[220]. SMIS 1173 - DF 3.1.008 / 30.09.2009 provided specific activities – trainings and 5 thematic workshops / information seminars for journalists – media representatives at national level, with respect to Structural Instruments (20.06.2011-30.06.2013).

[221]. Press releases and press conferences were largely influenced by the relationship between decision-makers and the members of the press (a more open approach to the media meant that more information was provided).

[222]. There have also been certain difficulties in conveying the messages, especially during pre-election periods, when the press showed reservations towards the promotion of SI, so to not be associated with a specific political stand (e.g. PRO TV refused to broadcast spots).

[223]. During the programming period, several partnerships were put forward (e.g. with Euractiv), but nothing ever emerged from that.

[224]. Communication with the press could be enhanced by direct cooperation between communication officers within ACIS/MA/IB and press offices in ministries, advisers to ministers and departments of communication, avoiding instances when the MA would learn from the press about events attended by ministers and pertaining to the topic of SI-funded projects. Moreover, in some cases, the press offices would reject the MA's communication initiatives, despite them being mandatory according to regulations or agreed upon in the WG with ACIS.

Promotional material	Pens, office supplies, bags, mobile media etc. with the SI in Romania logo	General public	ACIS MA IB CTS

[225]. Promotional materials were developed in both OPTA-funded projects. Thus, the SMIS 1173 project included 12,500 pieces of promotional materials (bags, shirts, pens, balloons, key chains) for the event organised by ACIS on Europe Day, and materials to promote SCF and OPTA in Romania between 2011-2012 (pens, bags, mugs, badges, notebooks, and pen-pencil sets, key chains, planners, paper bags, business card holders). These materials were distributed at the events organised or attended by ACIS.

[226]. The same as for outdoor billboards, stakeholders agreed that the materials were useful, contributed to increasing SI and OP visibility, the opinions expressed being generally positive.

Publications, print or electronic material	Overview of the NSRF, of the OP; • procedures, manuals, reports (annual); • studies, analyses; • best practices, success stories; • newsletters; • various posters and leaflets etc.	General public Potential beneficiaries Institutions in the SCF implementation system Project promoters	ACIS MA IB CTS

[227]. The number of publications produced by ACIS was relatively low. No communication procedures or manuals (except VIM) have been prepared, the studies and analyses are strictly related to conducting surveys and campaigns. The managing authorities have developed their own communication procedures and, in some cases, communication manuals (e.g. ROP).

[228]. In terms of presenting success stories, several materials have been compiled, with positive appreciation from stakeholders, who nevertheless deemed them insufficient.

[229]. Various posters and leaflets have been developed under the two projects, with positive appreciation from stakeholders.

Newsletter	Developing and publishing a regular newsletter covering in particular:	Potential beneficiaries	ACIS MA

		Internal public Stakeholders Media	
	- the latest statistics on SCF already used; - the latest information on the implementation, describing (any) change(s) in the programming, selection, implementation, payment process etc. - Monitoring Committees' decisions; - dates and information about events/communication campaigns.		

[230].The newsletter was regarded by stakeholders as a positive example of initiative from ACIS, since it was a useful tool for best practices dissemination and exchange of experience. During the operation of IC-SI, eight newsletters were published, which was deemed insufficient by stakeholders.

Surveys	Surveys on the quality and the ease with which one can find information (which will provide the basis for I&P activities, evaluation activities and future information activities): • public opinion surveys, focus group studies; • questionnaire-based studies; • questionnaires; • studies, analyses and evaluations	**All target groups**	**ACIS** **MA**

[231]. Four general population surveys were conducted under OPTA PA3. Apart from the 2006 survey, no further sociological researches were conducted on other target groups.
An analysis of the conducted surveys can be found under Assumption 1.

Digital media (CD, DVD)	• collections and summaries of published information; • presentations of successfully-implemented projects, reports etc.	**All target groups**	**ACIS** **MA**

[232].Digital materials were produced in the two funded projects and distributed during the events held.

Events	Preparing and organising various public events and fairs, according to the (current) needs of the target groups: • seminars, workshops, conferences; • special training courses; • fairs, caravans etc.	**General public** **Media** **Main stakeholders** **Potential beneficiaries** **Internal public**	**ACIS** **MA** **IB** **CTS**

[233]. Between 2007-2013, a total number of 36 events (conferences, seminars, workshops) were conducted under the OPTA PA3 projects in order to promote Structural Instruments interventions, which - although appreciated by stakeholders - were insufficient.

[234]. With respect to the topic of the events, stakeholders particularly appreciated the events of the information caravans in the first part of the programming period. Beyond the fact that they provided relevant information to beneficiaries, the participation of multiple MAs was seen as a good opportunity to learn more and gain a better understanding of the funding opportunities and the specific features of the programmes, straight from their representatives.

[235].As the OP implementation moved forward, public interest towards general information events/sessions dropped and the focus shifted to more specific information.

Education and training	• trainings on project cycle management and I&P for the staff involved in the NSRF and OP implementation; • coordinating training activities for potential beneficiaries and new beneficiaries on the	**The staff of the institutions within the SCF implementation system**	**ACIS** **MA** **IB** **CTS**

requirements of project cycle management and I&P. • training activities for media representatives, partners etc.		Potential beneficiaries		

[236].Trainings on project cycle management did not receive funding under OPTA PA3. The trainings on information and communication topics were limited in number and appreciated as "basic-level."

Cooperation with ECR	ACIS will work closely with ECR by: • participating in joint information networks • organising joint information activities • providing information and promotional materials • encouraging the MA to organise joint publicity actions with the EC Representation in Bucharest	All target groups	ACIS

[237]. Cooperation with ECR was achieved on several levels and consisted in providing information and material, participation in joint events, collaboration in the context of the Europe Direct network.
This cooperation was also achieved through joint events at MA level.

[238].The implementation of the communication tools described above was assessed based on the criteria in the following table. The evaluation is based both on the direct findings of the evaluation experts and the views expressed by stakeholders during interviews:

Table 14 Multi-criteria assessment of communication tools for SI

Tool / Criterion	Appropriateness of choice	Quality of implementation	Usefulness	Quantity	Average score
Web page development	5	3	5	5	4.5
Central Call Center	5	3	2	2	3
Extranet	0	0	0	0	0
Visual Identity Manual	5	5	5	5	5
Networking	5	3	3	3	3.5.
Media campaigns	5	5	5	3	4.75
Outdoor publicity	5	5	5	5	5
Media relations, cooperation with the media	5	4	5	3	4.25
Promotional materials	5	5	5	5	5
Publications	5	5	5	3	4.5
Newsletter	5	5	5	3	4.5
Surveys	5	5	5	3	4.5
Digital media	5	5	5	5	5
Events	5	5	5	3	4.5
Education and training	5	2	2	2	2.75
Cooperation with ECR	5	4	5	4	4.5

[239]. The information and publicity activities planned in the above-mentioned strategic documents concerning **OPTA communication** are described in the Table below. ACIS is responsible for this activities, in cooperation with the MAs of the sectoral OPs:

Table 15 OPTA-related communication activities implemented under OPTA

Activity	Description	Comments
Web page	Development and implementation of a dedicated OPTA website, containing information on OPTA MA OPTA will also work with ACIS in order to enhance and update the www.fonduri-ue.ro web page	The www.ampoat.ro webpage has been developed and updated, providing relevant information to beneficiaries and the general public. MA OPTA cooperated with ACIS in order to enhance and update the www.fonduri-ue.ro webpage
Information Center and Call Center	MA OPTA will work with IC-SI in order to provide full and accurate information about OPTA and the other topics mentioned in the web page content	MA OPTA and IC-SI had a positive collaboration experience.
Visual Identity Manual	Using the logo of SI in Romania Contribution to updating and ensuring compliance with the visual identity manual	The SI logo was developed and used as provided by EU regulations and VIM.
Participation in networks	Participation in communicators' networks in order to facilitate the exchange of experiences, best practices and other relevant information on the implementation of funds and the information and publicity measures (both nationally and internationally)	The MA OPTA delegate took part in the Communication WG and the SI Communicators' Forum. OPTA delegates also attended events or contributed with materials and information whenever it was considered appropriate. Participation in international events was low.
Local information centres and information point	Contributions with information and publicity material to the information centers and information points, so as to facilitate direct contact with citizens, with potential beneficiaries and project promoters.	OPTA representatives attended events or contributed with materials and information whenever it was considered appropriate.
Cooperation with the EC Representation in Bucharest	MA OPTA will work closely with the EC Representation in Bucharest by: • providing the EC Representation in Bucharest with information and promotional materials • encouraging beneficiaries to organise joint publicity actions with the EC Representation in Bucharest	OPTA representatives attended events or contributed with materials and information whenever it was considered appropriate.
Media relations, cooperation with the media	Journalists can act as "disseminators of information", therefore a steady flow of information to the press will be ensured, through: • press releases • cooperation with the media on specific issues	MA OPTA has maintained a constant relationship with the media through press releases, by inviting journalists to events and providing information.
Promotional materials	Pens, office supplies, bags, mobile stands etc. bearing the logo SI in Romania and the name of the OP	Promotional materials were made under the two OPTA-funded projects and were distributed to various stakeholders (MA, ECR, ACIS directorates) or during the events
Digital media (CV, DVD)	• collections and summaries of the published information • presentations of projects successfully implemented, reports etc.	The materials developed under the funded projects have also included information on OPTA.

Events	Organising and participating in various public events and fairs in accordance with the needs of the target groups: • seminars, workshops, conferences • special training courses • fairs, caravans etc. Also, on May 9 each year, the EU flag will be raised in front of the MA OPTA premises for a week. 9 May will also be celebrated through joint events with ECR and with relevant social partners. Every year, a major event will be organised to highlight the OPTA and EU contribution to Romania's development and modernisation.	The events held also included information/ sections / materials on OPTA. No special training courses were organised. 9 May events were held under the funded projects, including communication on both SI and OPTA.		
Education and training	• organisation and coordination of trainings on project cycle management and information and publicity requirements	No trainings on the two topics were organised with PA3 funding.		

[240]. The implementation of the communication tools described above was assessed according to the criteria below, based on both the direct findings of the evaluation experts and the views expressed by stakeholders:

Table 16 Multi-criteria assessment of communication tools for OPTA

Tool / Criterion	Appropriateness of choice	Quality of implementation	Usefulness	Quantity	Average score
Web page	5	5	5	5	5
Information Center and Call Center	5	4	3	4	3.75
Visual Identity Manual	5	5	5	5	5
Participation in networks	5	4	3	3	3.75
Local information centres and information point	3	3	2	5	3.25
Cooperation with the EC Representation in Bucharest	5	5	4	4	4.5
Media relations, cooperation with the media	5	5	4	4	4.5
Promotional materials	5	5	5	4	4.75
Digital media (CV, DVD)	5	5	5	5	5
Events	5	5	5	4	4.75
Education and training	5	2	5	2	3.5.

[241]. The following key findings have been drawn upon the testing of Assumption 2:

• In general, the communication tools have been well chosen in terms of needs and purpose, both in terms of SI-related communication and OPTA-related communication;

• Moreover, the variety of tools offered a wide range of implementation options, so, from this perspective, there are no longer any obstacles in meeting the objectives according to the original planning.

- The tools were appropriately carried out, for the most part. In terms of SI communication, the main challenges were to make the IC-SI and website (www.fonduri-ue.ro) operational. Also, the Extranet was not done.

- According to the opinions expressed by stakeholders, the actions were deemed insufficient. Thus, out of the 16 actions proposed for SI communication, a number of five actions were deemed sufficient (maximum score).

- The existing communication networks at the time of programming (e.g. EuropeDirect) could not be used to their full potential. Education and training, although highly necessary, have not been achieved to the specified parameters.

- The practical utility of the communication tools generally pertains to the manner in which they were carried out, so the main challenges concern the actions that have not been deployed at the optimal level. In terms of OPTA communication, the evaluation indicates that the local information centers and information points did not have a considerable practical utility, given the specific nature of the OP.

- **Overall, though most of the instruments were properly chosen and well implemented, in many cases, the number of actions implemented proved insufficient**.

5.3. Timely implementation of communication tools

Assumption 3 - The communication tools used were implemented in time for the different target-groups and according to the defined purpose (general public, project promoters)

[242]. Apart from the message sent and the tool used, the timing of the message to the public is a key element for a successful communication.

[243]. From this perspective, in 2007-2013, the communication tools have been implemented as follows:

Tool / Criterion	Launch / use	Explanations / Causes
Web page development	The webpage worked constantly, but only became useful later on, along with the changes brought by the SMIS 38416 project	The website has undergone repeated changes, both in terms of form and content. At the moment when it truly became a portal of useful information for the target audiences (especially potential beneficiaries), other information websites were already established.
Central Call Center	IC-SI became operational in 2012 and functioned until 2014	IC-SI was launched very late with respect to the information needs and its operation was interrupted abruptly, at the end of the service agreement with the provider. The main cause of the delays resided in the sluggish procurement procedures.
Extranet	Did not become operational	Not known
Visual Identity Manual	2008 initial version, 2010 updated version	The VIM development followed the overall process in terms of communication. By the time when the SI Communication Strategy and VIM-SI were completed, managing authorities (especially those who had experience with pre-accession programmes, such as

		the MA ROP) had already developed their various versions of VIM. Although they have been subsequently aligned, the action "in different gears" between MA/ACIS contributed from a very early stage to the specific identity of each OP.
Networking	The networks have existed since the pre-accession period	There were no issues in this respect.
Media campaigns	2011/2013	The launch and implementation of the campaigns was significantly impacted by the sluggish procurement procedures, the overlaps with election periods, the options of the decision-makers in MEF.
Outdoor publicity	During the campaigns	Their development and distribution on the progress of the procurement procedures and the approval from MEF decision-makers
Media relations, cooperation with the media	Existed since the pre-accession period	There were no issues in this respect.
Promotional materials	In projects	Their development and distribution depended on the progress of the procurement procedures and the approval from MEF decision-makers
Publications	In projects	Their development and distribution depended on the progress of the procurement procedures and the approval from MEF decision-makers
Newsletter	In projects	Their development and distribution depended on the progress of the procurement procedures and the approval from MEF decision-makers
Surveys	In projects	Their development and distribution depended on the progress of the procurement procedures
Digital media	In projects	Their development and distribution depended on the progress of the procurement procedures and the approval from MEF decision-makers
Events	In projects	Their organisation depended on the progress of procurement procedures and the approval from MEF decision-makers
Education and training	In projects	There were no issues in this respect.
Cooperation with ECR	Cooperation with ECR has been in place since pre-accession	There were no issues in this respect.

[244].After testing these assumptions, the following key findings can be drawn:

- **Only part of the communication tools provided have been implemented on time**, as follows:

  - **IC-SI saw major delays in the implementation of the actions** , which significantly impacted its usefulness;

  - apart from it, other two crucial elements – **the website and information campaigns – have been influenced by various external factors, which impacted the timing of the messages**;

- Public procurement procedures are the main negative factor affecting the implementation of the communication actions;

- The involvement of MEF decision-makers significantly influenced the time when the communication actions were implemented.

- **The delays in the implementation of the communication tools have impacted both beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries** (in the case of delays with IC-SI and the web page development) **and the general public**, given the delays in the preparation and launch of the campaigns and delays in the website development.

5.4. Effectiveness of the website www.fonduri-ue.ro

Assumption 4 - The development of an official website, providing links to other official sources of information, has helped raise awareness and increase transparency on the use of SCF.

Creating and modifying the webpage www.fonduri-ue.ro

[245].According to OPTA 2007-2013, under the National Communication Strategy for SI (NCS-SI) for the period 2007-2013, the core element of the public information process is the **Information Centre for SI**, as central point that all those interested will turn to, including after the campaigns. Along with the one-stop-shop for information and the call center, the launch of a webpage with national coverage was also planned within the Centre.

[246]. According to the relevant programming documents [24] , the www.fonduri-ue.ro website is an important tool in ensuring the consistency of the sent messages. Thus, the website has been envisaged as the main webpage of SCF and the main source of information and functions as a virtual information centre on SCF. The site provides detailed information about grants on an ongoing basis and is interlinked with the websites of the European Commission, the Ministry of Public Finance and of the institutions in charge of managing SCF. According to the NCS, the management of this web portal is ensured by ACIS and the Communication Working Group.

[247].According to NCS-SI, the ACIS website would include at least the following information:
- brief description of the funds and EU institutions in Romanian;
- programming documents (NSRF, POs);
- EU regulations and national legislation in the field;
- calls for tenders;
- annual and final reports;
- notices about events (seminars and conferences);
- presentations of case studies, best practices and success stories;
- latest information and newsletters;
- Frequently Asked Questions section;
- the list of funded projects;

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[24] OPTA 2007-2013, National Communication Strategy for IS, Communication Plan for OPTA 2007-2013

• links to the websites of the MAs (Operational Programmes), IB, CTS and other sources of information;

• logo and organisational identity manual;

• contacts (of the call-center, information centre, addresses, e-mails etc.)

[248]. According to the same document, the responsibility for the administration and provision of information was entrusted to ACIS and the MA and information was to be provided for all target groups covered by OPTA.

[249]. Although originally planned as part of IC-SI, the dedicated web page on SI, www.fonduri-ue.ro , has been operational since 2007 and was launched under the coordination of the Authority for the Coordination of Structural Instruments (ACIS). The launched page was funded from pre-accession funds and was launched as a platform for SI, including general and specific information on the institutional framework, relevant legislation, a description of Structural Instruments, as well as detailed information on the NDP, NSRF and of all Operational Programmes. For a short period, the www.fonduri-ue.ro web page worked alongside the information sub-page created on the website of the Ministry of Finance (www.mfinanţe.ro/fonduri-ue).

[250]. In the first part of the OP implementation period, before starting the operation for the set-up and the activity of IC-SI, the maintenance and the translation into English of the www.fonduri-ue.ro web page were funded under the SMIS 1173 project "Support for the implementation of ACIS' communication plan." Through the activities implemented in 2008-2012, the project helped increase the number of visitors of the www.fonduri-ue.ro web page and of www.poat.ro , with a total of 780,517 hits, reaching a total of 1,020,517 visitors (and exceeding by almost four times the set target of 260,000 visits throughout the project). The project continued until the end of March 2014, after which the required maintenance and site operation activities were supported by the MEF staff, at a minimum level.

[251]. With the approval and start of the SMIS 38416 project for the "Set-up and support for the operation of IC-SI" (financed under OPTA KAI 3.2), the development and maintenance of the www.fonduri-ue.ro website have been implemented under this project. The project had an overall value of about RON 13 million and was implemented over a period of 30 months, as of the end of December 2011.

[252]. One of the five components of the SMIS 38416 project aimed to ensure administration and updates to www.fonduri-ue.ro, from a double perspective: technical, including content-related maintenance, and promotional. Thus, the project developed a new website, www.fonduri-ue.ro, with a friendly interface, based on a CMS (Content Management System) framework, which allows greater flexibility in editing, previewing and advertising content of any kind, while, at the same time allowed for new functionalities to be easily added. At the same time, an mechanism for real-time data updates (with a dedicated e-mail address) was created, enabling project officers to source data from the responsible MAs and to quickly process it in order to be published on the website.

[253]. The website was launched at the first regional conference "Increasing Structural Funds' absorption" in Brasov, on 6 April 2012, and recorded a significant number of hits from day one. This "revitalisation" of the www.fonduri-ue.rowebsite, following its restructuring in the project for the operation of IC-SI, translated into a total of approx. 970,000 hits during the implementation of the project for Technical Assistance for the

set-up and operation of IC-SI, reaching a final value of approx. 1.2 million hits by the end of the contract. The percentage of new visits was around 52%.

[254]. Subsequently, in March 2013, the www.fonduri-ue.ro web page became MEF's official website, which went to limit the objectives of the website, which primarily focuses on providing information about the activity and programmes covered by MEF.

[255]. A new update of the site took place in 2014, when the www.fonduri-ue.ro web page resumed its role as a platform for all Operational Programmes, outlining – in a user-friendly format – the relevant documents, the conditions for accessing funds and the results achieved by both the 2007-2013 OPs and the funding available for the new programming period (2014-2020).

Aspects on the effectiveness of the www.fonduri-ue.ro website

[256]. The general opinion on the effectiveness of the website is positive, the general perception among the authorities in charge with the management and implementation of SI being that the www.fonduri-ue.ro web page had fulfilled its role, by providing sufficient and consistent information on SI.

[257]. Nevertheless, the representatives of the public authorities consulted believe that, over time, one can observe a decline in the interest towards general information on IS, as indicated by the requests received through the website.

[258]. The overall effectiveness of the website was evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Website visibility and notoriety;
- Information relevance (for different target groups);
- Providing transparent information on SI;
- Website structure (how information is displayed, ease in identifying the information sought);
- Providing up-to-date information on SI.

- **Website visibility and notoriety**

[259]. Both the visibility and notoriety of the website depend on the extent of Internet usage among the target groups covered by the SI communication. National data (2010) indicate that only 38% of the Romanian population used the Internet and the percentage of those who use it on a daily basis is even lower (20%). The most frequently used are e-mail websites (60%[25]), followed by newspaper and TV station websites (39%).

[260]. Another factor of influence on the visibility and notoriety of the site is public interest in the SCF. In 2013, 51% of Romanians stated that they were interested in knowing more about SCF, 3% more than in 2010. Studies indicate a growing interest and, thus, by November 2015, 55% of the Romanian population appeared very interested or interested in information about SCF-financed projects, while 22% were somewhat interested.

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[25] of all those who use Internet

Fig. 11 Evolution in the number of people interested in finding out more information on SCF
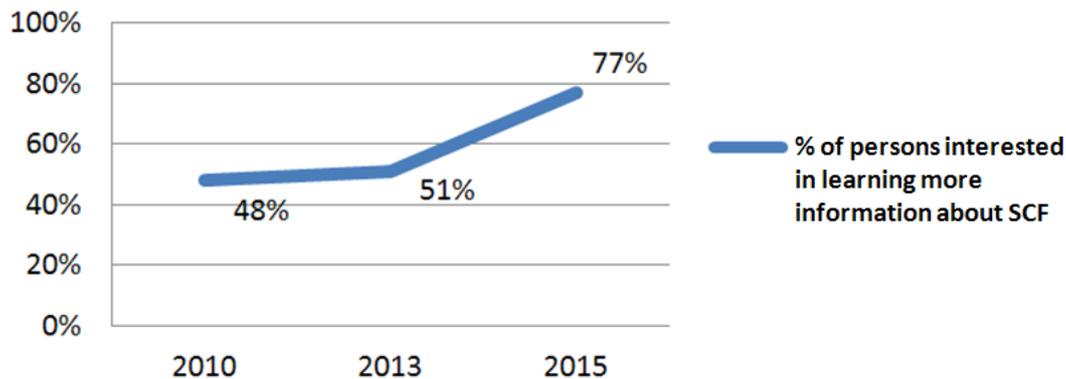
Source: own processing of survey data

[261]. However, the findings of the survey conducted in October 2015 on the visibility and notoriety of the www.fonduri-ue.ro website were not very optimistic, as only 7% of respondents stated that they were using the EU website as a source of information on SI. By comparison, in September 2013, the share of those who had visited the website stood at 13% (more than in 2010[26]). These results are even less encouraging if taking into account that 78% of the interviewees stated that they were interested in seeking information about SCF (2015).

[262]. The most visited sites for information on SI are news sites (15%), followed by other websites (9%)[27]. This data reflects both the general interest in SI and Internet usage, as well as preferences in the media of information on SCF.

[263]. Thus, in the 2015 survey, 65% of respondents stated that they preferred to obtain information from TV, while the percentage of those who preferred the Internet as a source of information was 31%. On the other hand, 19% of respondents chose to obtain information from discussions with other people, 16% from the press (print) and 13% from the radio. In comparison to the situation recorded by previous researches, the findings are as follows:

o   The role of the Internet is declining, given that by 2013, 44% of respondents said they would use the Internet as the first (37%) or second (7%) source of information on SCF. By comparison, in 2010, the share of those who preferred the Internet was 22%, far below the level in 2013.

o   The percentage of those who preferred to obtain information from TV in 2015 is returning to the 65% level of 2010, from 58% in 2013 (when this declining share was accompanied by a significant decrease in the share of TV as primary source of information – from 52% in 2011 to only 15% in September 2013).

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[26] when a similar percentage was reported, but relative to the number of respondents who used Internet

[27] Data according to the survey carried out in November 2015

Fig. 12. Preferred sources of information about SCF
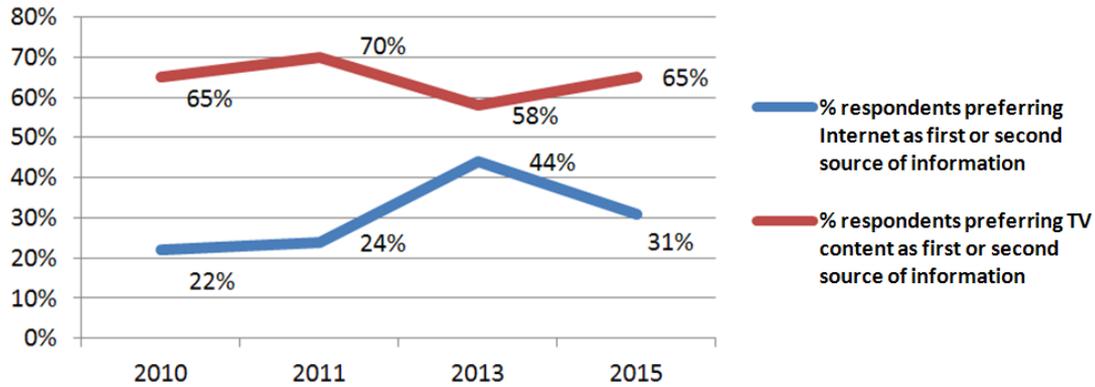
Source: own processing of survey data

[264]. In terms of organizations having informed the population about the EU funds, consultants are first (45%), followed by MEF (25%) and local authorities (14%). MAs only have a marginal role (7%), indicating potential confusions among the respondents regarding the status of the institutions consulted.

[265]. It is worth to take note that local authorities are among the top ranking sources of information, in conjunction with their place in the preferences for information on SCF, which – although declining (from 33% in 2010 and 35% in 2011 to 22% in 2013) – indicates, however, a significant potential to use these institutions as multipliers of information. Such an approach is all the more justified, given that, when asked about institutions that could better inform about the SCF, 36% of respondents[28] said they preferred to be informed by local administration (a preference which remains relatively constant over time), while only 15% of them indicated the Government, through ministries.

[266]. Data on the source of information about the www.fonduri-ue.ro website, although older, may be relevant in order to better promote it. 43% of those who visited the site (2010) found out about it from friends, 17% from Internet searches and only 6% from experts.

- **Information relevance (for different target groups);**

[267]. The effectiveness of the web page in terms of the information relevance should be interpreted according to the target groups. Communication tools and the information provided need to be tailored to the target group in order to obtain better results.

[268]. Issues such as ensuring an accessible language, an understanding of the information provided without the need for prior knowledge of European funds are essential in communication to the general public. Also, the publication of information on successful projects implemented, results and benefits for the targeted communities or throughout the country, are important to raise awareness of SI and their role for Romania.

[269]. On the other hand, communication to beneficiaries or potential beneficiaries should be more specific, by providing clear, real-time information on matters of interest to them and on issues relating to the eligibility of certain investments. Presenting project

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[28] September 2013 survey data

models, best practices examples and lessons learned from the SI implementation are useful elements in increasing the effectiveness of communication with this target group. The inclusion of support tools to verify eligibility for certain investments and directing potential beneficiaries to programmes/ funding lines of interest is an important element of added value, which can significantly increase site usage by providing a very useful tool. Some of these aspects (e.g. the presentation of model projects) have been mentioned by both beneficiaries and other stakeholders as desirable elements, which can help improve the usefulness of the site.

[270]. Providing specific information to other target groups – e.g. media or consultants etc. – can help sustain a catalytic approach, by harnessing the information multiplier factor.

[271]. Currently, the website does not envisage a differentiated approach by target groups, as the information presented is quite specialised and requires to a certain degree of Funds expertise in order to grasp the available information. Given its current structure, the www.fonduri-ue.ro website mainly targets the beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries of the funds.

- **Providing transparent information on SI**

[272]. Although there is no specific information on the role of the website in ensuring transparent information, it can be interpreted by correlating information on the perception of the ease of obtaining general SI information and the transparency of the process of accessing SI and on the use of the website www.fonduri-ue.ro

[273]. Thus, the available data indicate that in 2013 approx. 40% of Romanians considered that information about SCF can be obtained easily (7%) or fairly easily (33%). However, a more detailed analysis of the list of SI beneficiaries reveals a greater degree of scepticism, as only 15% of Romanians considered that such a list is public and could be obtained directly or upon express request. Almost two thirds of interviewees did not know how to answer this question, while 20% of them believed that the list of beneficiaries was confidential.

[274]. The share of those who believe that the SCF awarding procedure is transparent remains modest, as shown by the following findings: 48% (2015), steadily increasing compared to previous years, from a baseline level of 15% in 2010. These results are even more encouraging when correlated with data on the percentage of Romanians who suspect fraud in the management of European funds (63% in 2015, an increasing percentage compared to the perception in 2006) and with the increasing share of Romanians who think it is impossible or nearly impossible for anyone interested to obtain SCF financing.

Fig. 13. Perception regarding the transparency of the SCF-awarding process and the possibility of receiving such financing
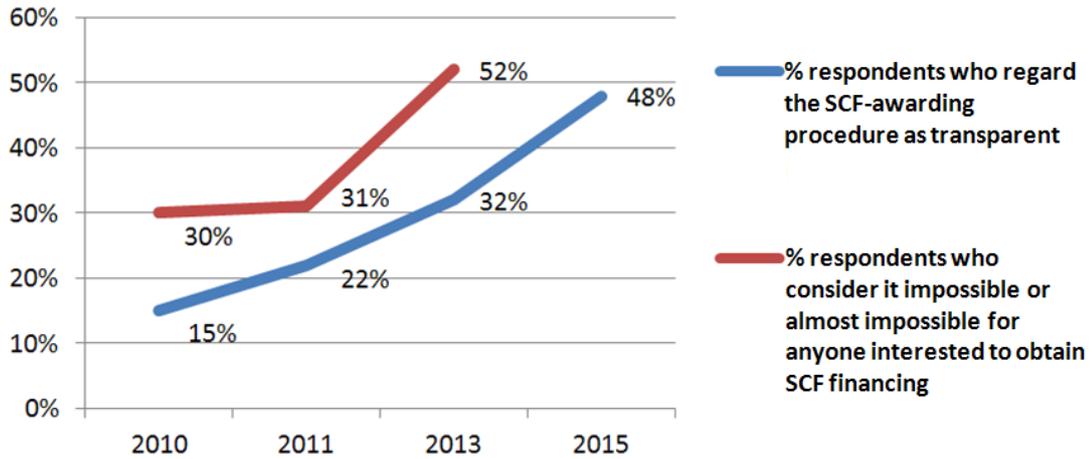
Source: own processing of survey data

- **Web page structure (presentation of information, clarity of information)**

[275]. With regard to the way information is presented on the website, 70% of those who visited the web page in the last 3 months prior to conducting the September 2013 survey were of the opinion that the information was somewhat structured, but that it required certain knowledge about European Funds in order to be understood. Only 13% of interviewees considered that the information was structured and easy to understand, while 16% believed that the information was not structured at all.

[276]. However, 84% of respondents considered themselves quite satisfied (77%) or very satisfied (7%) with the www.fonduri-ue.roweb page. By comparison, in 2010, this share amounted to only 71% (with only 3% of respondents declaring themselves very satisfied with the site).

[277]. An analysis of the website importance-performance matrix[29] indicates that the item with the greatest impact on satisfaction is **accessible language**. In this respect, the performance of the www.fonduri-ue.ro web page is average, with only 18% of satisfied respondents and 65% fairly satisfied. Also, the up-to-datedness of the information, the ease of finding it and its utility are basic expectations from a website, which are important, but without making a great contribution to increased satisfaction. The website design is considered an element of small importance and with little impact on visitor satisfaction. On the other hand, the volume of information provided is seen as an important factor and with an average impact on satisfaction.

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[29] September 2013 survey data, MEF

Fig. 14 Degree of satisfaction with the www.fonduri-ue.ro website

Category	DK/NR	Very unsatisfied	Fairly unsatisfied	Fairly satisfied	Very satisfied
Website design	12	3	1	58	27
Usefulness of information provided	0	3	15	62	20
Language of the information provided	0		15	65	18
Ease of finding the desired information	2	8	16	56	18
Up-to-dateness of the information provided	2	3	15	66	14
Amount of information provided	4	0	16	68	12

Legend: ■ DK/NR ■ Very unsatisfied ■ Fairly unsatisfied ■ Fairly satisfied ■ Very satisfied

Source: Comparative analysis OR, 2014

- **Providing up-to-date information on SI**

[278]. The SMIS 38416 project attempted to establish the www.fonduri-ue.ro website as one of reference in the field of SI. The relevance of the information on this site and the time of its publishing, compared with the postings of private competitors (e.g. www.fonduri-structurale.ro site is very prompt in publishing news and is being in real time, in an easily-accessible format), are crucial prerequisites in achieving this goal. In order to update information in real time, the SMIS 38416 project created an email address, where real-time updates from MA SOPIEC, MA SOPT and MA SOP Environment are received. At the same time, a number of mechanisms have been created – e.g. the possibility of a direct connection to the MAs' and IBs' RSS feed – in order to obtain real-time information, but they largely depended on the availability of dedicated human resources to source and post the information on the site.

[279]. After changing the site in 2014, it became once more a platform for all OPs. In the context of institutional changes in the period 2014-2015 and the shift of several OPs under MEF's responsibility, it is now easier to update information about these OPs. On the other hand, updating information on ROP and ACOP or on EAFRD- and EMFF-financed POs remains rather difficult, in the absence of an operational system of cooperation between the relevant MAs and given the challenges faced by the Communication and Public Information Unit within MEF, in terms of staff available for these activities.

[280]. In this context, it is necessary to deploy a mechanism that allows real-time updates to the information on the www.fonduri-ue.ro website, so as to enhance the effectiveness of this instrument and strengthen its position as a source of information relative to competitor websites, by providing beneficiaries with real-time, accurate and useful information through official channels.

[281]. Based on the analysis above, the following main findings can be drawn:

- **The visibility and notoriety** of the www.fonduri-ue.ro website has steadily improved, as reflected both in surveys and in interviews with stakeholders.

- In terms of **information relevance to the target groups**, the web page does not envisage a clearly differentiated approach by target groups, as the presentation of the information is rather adapted to beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries.

- The web page's contribution to **transparency on FSC** is closely linked to the way in which the general public and potential beneficiaries perceive the SCF awarding process, including the beneficiaries of funds. This stands at a medium level.

- **The web page structure is appropriate**, although the language sometimes seems difficult to understand without prior knowledge on EU funds. The adequacy of the website should be interpreted in relation to the adequacy of the web page for the various of target groups.

- **The real-time data updates** require the development and deployment of a mechanism that can operate even under certain constraints, given the low number of staff available for such activities.

5.5. Findings regarding the effectiveness of the IC-SI helpdesk

Assumption 5 - The helpdesk service of the Information Centre was effective and resulted in increased awareness amongst potential applicants for grants.

[282]. According to OPTA 2007-2013 and the National Communication Strategy for SI in the 2007-2013 programming period, the core of the public information process is the Information Centre for Structural Instruments. **IC-SI has been designed as the central point that all those interested will turn to as a result of the campaigns and as the place for answers to general questions, as well as referrals to specialised bodies, i.e. relevant MA, IB, CTS**, depending on their particular interest.

[283]. According to the planning, IC-SI was to have a single website, as well as a call center within ACIS, both with national coverage. Besides its role as information hub, the Centre was designed to function as a resource centre and to provide data on the situation in the field, including any malfunction or good practice example.

[284]. However, according to NCS and ACIS' Communication Plan, IC-SI was designed to include a number of local centres and information points, which would be managed by MA, IB and CTS. In addition to general information on SCF in Romania, they were to provide information on tenders, project development, the funding application form, implementation and payment procedures. These local centres and information points were to disseminate information regarding the materials published by the MA, IB, CTS and to organise events, fairs, including through the common internal information system (extranet). Each centre was supposed to have a direct telephone line and dedicated e-mail for communication with the public.

[285]. The set-up and operation of IC-SI were financed through the SMIS 38416 project "Set-up and support for the operation of the Information Centre for SI" under KAI 3.2 "Operation of the SI Information Centre", with a duration of 30 months (from 1 November 2011). IC-SI began operating in January 2012 and was officially launched in February 2012. The Centre had several components that distributed information on SI: a

front-desk, a Call center and an email address, where anyone could request information on accessing and implementing SI.

[286].The three-level approach to the SI communication, according to the NCS, aimed to channel the citizens' interest towards the development of projects, like a true "funnel" (see Fig. 15 below). For the flow of information to work properly, it must not be interrupted at any point. Thus, one of the messages to be transmitted through the communication campaigns and events focuses precisely on the role and availability of the website and specific green-line (call center).

Fig. 15. Strategic approach to communication
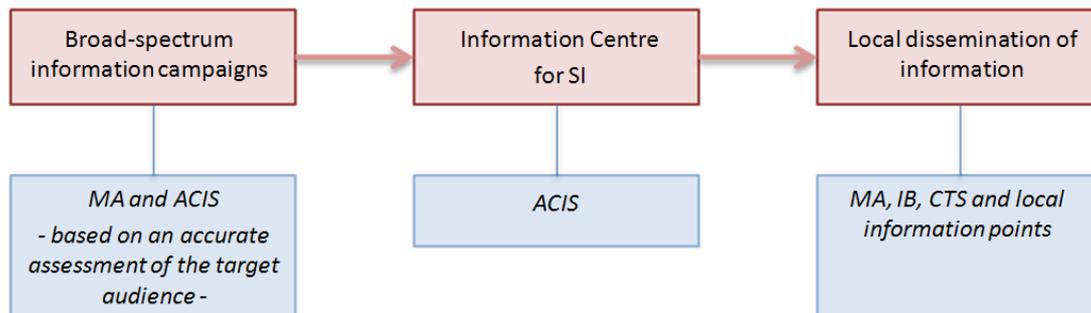
[287]. The activities supported under the project included:
- ensuring the set-up and proper functioning of the Centre

- implementing the communication, information and publicity actions

- ensuring the operation of the helpdesk, including the set-up and operation of the call-center service and the continuous training of agents and staff and addressing questions promptly

- ensuring the administration and information updates to the www.fonduri-ue.rowebsite, by constantly updating the website and ensuring interventions on online forums, European funding-related blogs and social networks.

[288].The SMIS 38416 project on the set-up and operation of IC-SI was completed in April 2014, but the technical assistance contract through which it was implemented had ended in December 2013. Since 2014, the Information Centre's specific activities have no longer received SCF assistance. These have been taken on by the MEF communication staff, until the signing a new technical assistance agreement and the functioning of the Centre on the MEF ground floor.

[289].The planned regional/local centres have not been established, so beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries from the regions are contacting either the MA/IB or the central IC-SI directly. In 2013, it was attempted to launch a grant scheme to support existing regional centres (under the responsibility of the County Councils, RDAs or the EuropeDirect centres of the ECR in Romania), but this project failed to be approved by the minister.

[290].One of the options for the future operation of IC-SI is to also cover the regional level, via the county Chambers of Commerce and Industry. These would ensure both services for the general public (general information, contact with MA, accessing and querying the database) and the provision of specialised information, as a one-stop-shop for

companies. The advantages of this option lie in the fact that the existing infrastructure could be used and it could involve human resources who already have knowledge of SCF.

Results achieved by IC-SI

[291]. For the most part, the project indicators have been attained by over 90%, even peaking at 382%, in the case of the "Web page hits" PI. There is less performance in terms of the indicator "Information requests received by IC", whose target has only been reached in proportion of 25.6% and the indicator "Communication and promotion events", which has been 60% achieved.

[292]. The causes of this evolution include, on the one hand, the delay in launching IC-SI, in the context of cumbersome public procurement, which led to the late awarding of the contract late for the set-up and operation of the Centre. On the other hand, the events have not been held as planned, given the changes in the Beneficiary's needs and priorities.

[293]. From the perspective of the authorities involved (MEF/ACIS), IC-SI was a useful tool, including in view of the opportunity to finance communication much more easily and faster (without the need to launch and conduct of dedicated tenders for the implementation of each and every activity).

[294]. However, the consultations indicated the fact that IC-SI has not been very visible, being known in particular through the www.fonduri-ue.ro website developed under the project. The impact of IC-SI is considered to be low.

[295]. IC-SI's regional visibility has also been reduced, despite the need for additional - general and specific - information at this level. As indicated by the consultations conducted, regional bodies and their respective actions provide important sources of information, given that those concerned do not benefit from a (regional/county) hub to provide the necessary information, other than ad-hoc information. In this context, the events organised by the central authorities enjoy greater interest at local level, especially in the absence of alternative sources of information.

[296]. At the same time, one weakness is the fact that the IC-SI set-up was not accompanied by the deployment of a mechanism to regulate inter-institutional relationships (given the IC-SI's status within MEF, as a tool created from TA, with contractual staff, and not as a specialised department of MEF), which would have provided IC-SI with the necessary support from MA/IB and enabled it to respond properly and in real-time to the beneficiaries' and potential beneficiaries' queries. The consultations showed that the working procedures of certain ministries made it very difficult to reply to IC-SI requests, since they required several approvals/permits, regardless of the complexity of the questions. Moreover, the same working procedures did not acknowledge email correspondence and did not recognise IC-SI as a dialogue partner, it being outside MEF.

Helpdesk service

[297]. According to Final Project Report for SMIS 38416, the Helpdesk service involved 6 communication officers, as follows: two officers for face-to-face communication, two officers for the call-center and two officers in charge with the replies to electronic requests (in practice, all the officers have been involved in this activity). During its

operation, IC-SI replied to a total of 5,647 requests. Of these, most were via telephone (approx. 45%), followed by email (27%), directly on the www.fonduri-ue.ro website (17.5%), face-to-face (10%), by mail (0.4%) and fax (0.1%).

[298]. Businesses and individuals or registered sole traders accounted for approx. 84% of requests. The number of questions from the public administration, NGOs or academia was much lower, at 7% and 9% of all requests, respectively. With respect to the subject of the questions, they mostly covered SOP IEC (32%), followed by ROP (20%), as seen in the figure below.

Fig. 16. Distribution of information requests received by IC-SI, according to the OP of interest
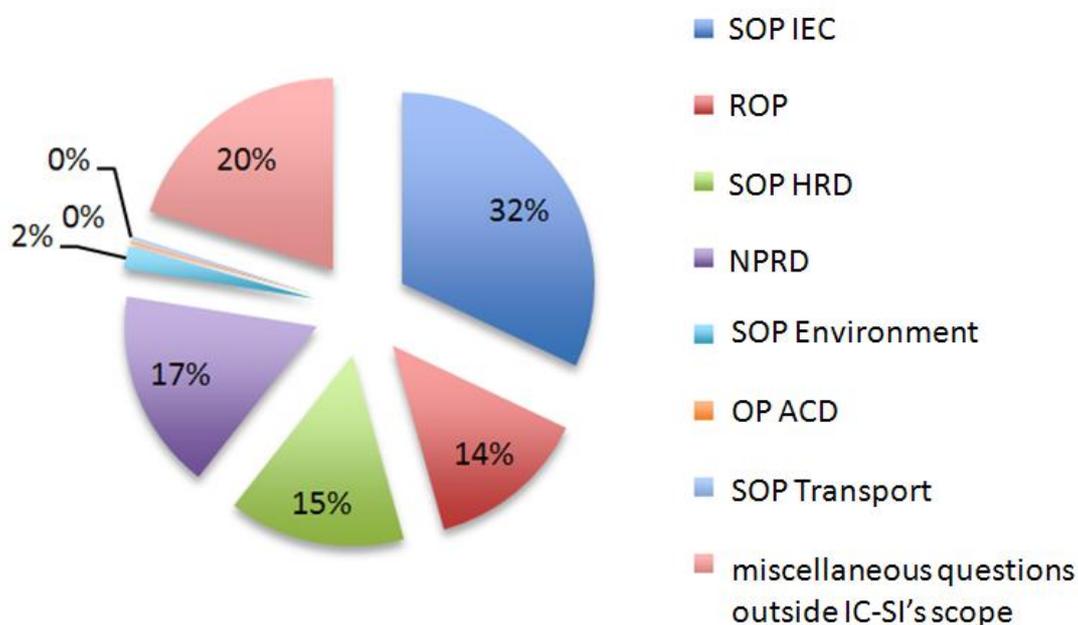
Source: IC-SI database

[299]. According to the database provided to the evaluation team, it was found that the total number of tickets resolved was 5,725, while the difference of 78 additional tickets relative to the value recorded in the project's final report is due to their settlement after the closing date of the project. Thus, the helpdesk service addressed a total number of 2,271 requests on behalf of SMEs, i.e. 39.67%. The largest proportion of tickets submitted out of the total 2,271 originate in the Centre Region, namely 58.82%. The large share of tickets from the Centre region can probably be explained by the existence of a regional factor, which helped promote IC-SI (it may be the RDA or other entity), but also by the fact that the main event of the SMIS 38416 project - the launch of the new www.fonduri-ue.ro website - was held in this region.

[300]. According to the ToR of the project for the set-up and operation of IC-SI, in order to assess the quality of services provided, it was planned to measure the level of client satisfaction with IC-SI, with the target of at least 75% satisfied clients. Out of the total information requests, satisfaction questionnaires have only been filled out for around 22% of requests (the rest of the applicants did not fill out such questionnaires), for which the answers were positive, thus exceeding the minimum required by ToR.

[301]. After running a survey-pilot among the SME beneficiaries of the IC-SI helpdesk within the Centre region, it was found that the share of those who had used other sources of information prior to contacting IC-SI was 66%, while the share of those who also used other sources of information after contacting IC-SI was 46%.

Fig. 17. Sources of information consulted by the recipients of IC-SI services, after contacting IC-SI
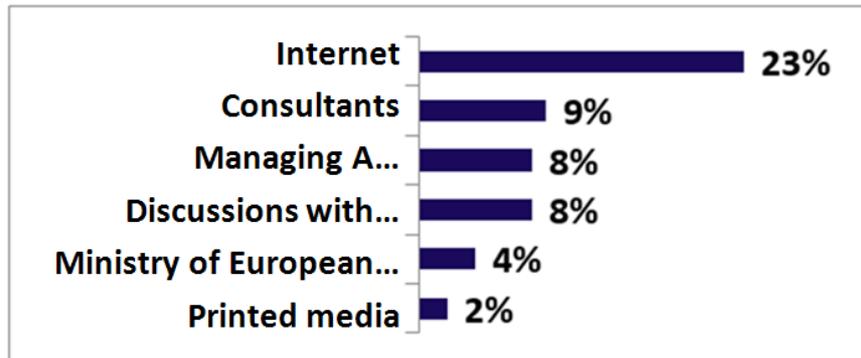
[302]. The top reasons for legal persons to contact the helpdesk is: Failed to find sufficiently clear information (45%), Did not know the main sources of information (19%), Did not know how to prepare the dossier (19%), or Did not have the time to search for information (9%).

[303]. The type of information requested from IC-SI primarily concerned specific information, but there have also been requests for general information. Thus, the questions to IC-SI referred to eligibility criteria (53%), aspects related to the guidelines for preparing applications (49%), funded areas (32%), the level of funds' absorption in Romania (17%), Institutions managing the funds (15%), open tenders (13%).

[304]. With regard to the users' opinion on the benefits of contacting IC-SI, 34% of respondents said that there were no advantages, while 58% of them saw the advantages in terms of clarity of information (23%), shorter search time (21%), ease of finding information (17%) and reliability (13%).

[305]. The counterfactual assessment carried out on a pilot-group of 24 beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, respectively, of the helpdesk services did not reveal significant differences between the two groups in terms of information-seeking efforts. These data confirm the view highlighted by consultations and the analysis of IC-SI results, i.e. that the impact of the Information Centre was low, it was merely one of several sources of information used by those interested. For example, the information sources used are relatively similar:

Fig. 18 Sources of information accessed by users and non-users of the IC-SI helpdesk
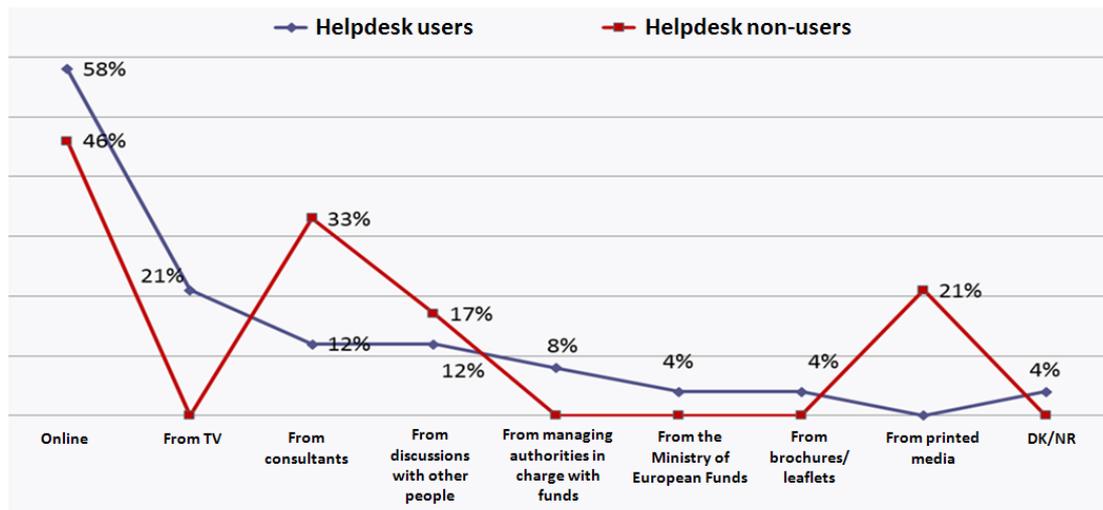
[306]. Upon testing Assumption 5, the following main findings can be drawn:

- The effectiveness of IC-SI was low, considering the following:

  o **IC-SI was launched too late to meet its purpose of providing general information**, since operational programmes had already shifted to the project implementation stage.

  o **The type of information and level of detail requested by those who contacted the help desk required support from the MA/IB** (through tickets). Simply referring callers to the MAs'/IBs' helpdesk offices was not an option in these cases, as it would have significantly decreased IC-SI's usefulness and it would not have been to the advantage of information seekers.

  o This situation has generated **further efforts on the part of MA/IB**, which, in addition to their own helpdesks, also had respond to the Centre's requests. On the other hand, the lack of functional working procedures to enable answers from the MAs prevented the IC-SI from operating under optimum conditions.

  o IC-SI was insufficiently promoted, **gaining a fairly low visibility,** even among those concerned with SI topics or involved in SI management.

  o **IC-SI operated for a far too short amount of time** for it to have a real impact on information activities.

5.6. Effectiveness of publicity campaigns conducted

Assumption 6 - The publicity campaigns conducted were effective and helped increase awareness amongst potential applicants for grants.

[307]. During the implementation of the OP, MEF conducted two publicity campaigns, as follows:

- A countrywide publicity campaign, broadcasting two TV spots and two radio spots on the role of SCF in the economic and social development of Romania. The

campaign ran for 21 days in December 2010, on three TV stations and three radio stations selected according to the general audience.

- An integrated media campaign, which developed and disseminated three TV spots, three radio spots, three online banners, three brochures, 12 press layouts, 6,000 posters, 115 outdoor billboards between 15 December 2012 - 15 March 2013. At the end of this campaign, a survey was conducted.

[308]. The two campaigns amounted to approx. RON 11.3 mil. (VAT included), of which the eligible amount requested was only RON 7.4 million[30]. Approx. 80% of this amount corresponds to the integrated campaign conducted in 2012-2013.

[309]. The campaigns were prepared taking into account the issues faced by the implementation of SCF, as well as the negative public perception of certain OPs, given the challenges in implementation, delays in launching calls, in the contracting process or the reimbursement of expenses, but also in context of existing suspicions of corruption. Thus, ACIS organised 3-4 focus groups in preparation of the integrated campaign conducted during December 2012 - January 2013, to analyse perception issues, while the design of the campaign was adapted so as to address these issues.

[310]. Although by 2012 the media had published several negative messages on SCF, MEF/ACIS' response was mainly reactive, translating into several press releases. The December 2012-January 2013 campaign was the only proactive initiative of its kind and has not been followed by similar actions designed to proactively assess the needs of the target groups (as well as complaints and/or the perception towards accessing/ implementing OP).

[311]. The lack of a proactive attitude was also caused by the difficulties in implementation, in the context of the national procurement limit for communication in 2009-2010. Although, upon the request of MAs and of other institutions in the European funds' management system, procurement funded from EU grants were exempt from this spending restriction, this regulation led to a standstill of approx. six months in communication procurement within MEF and other MAs, also due to the inertia caused by incorrect/ insufficient information.

[312]. On the other hand, the highly reactive attitude was also due to the limited staff: on the one hand, there is the low number of communication personnel in MEF/ACIS and, on the other hand, there is the inefficient use of available technical assistance (according to the statements of CPIU officers within MEF, this support has been relatively difficult to manage and assimilate due to the large number and the frequent changes of experts involved and their limited knowledge of these issues and system approach).

[313]. The determining factor in this respect is the change in MEF/ACIS' approach to communication in the second half of the programming cycle, with the establishment of the MEF. Thus, as of this time, the focus was more on communication with the media and engaging in other activities. It thus limited planning activities and proactive actions, such as defining the communication strategy, identifying optimal approaches depending on the target group (including the preparation and launch of publicity campaigns), which would have had an impact on the effectiveness of communication in the short and medium term. Since 2015, institutional changes have entailed a change in the approach, leading to progress in all communication activities.

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[30] Value recorded up to the date of this Evaluation Report

Evaluation of media campaigns

[314]. The March 2011 and September 2013 surveys also targeted the results of the national media campaign conducted by MEF in December 2010 (which included the broadcasting of two video spots and two audio spots of 30 seconds on the first three TV channels and radio stations, respectively) and of the integrated media campaign conducted during December 2012 - January 2013.

[315]. The surveys thus sought to assess the situation at the time of the research, as well as the progress relative to the situation captured by previous research (the 1st wave in 2010 and the 2nd wave in March 2011, respectively).

[316]. The evaluation took into account a number of factors which help to determine the impact of campaigns, depending on their content and their media, as follows:

- Aspects of **campaign impact** (understanding of messages, elements retained, elements that the respondents liked/ disliked, seeking to find out more about SCF);
- Aspects of **knowledge of SCF**;
- Knowledge of **SCF interventions' eligibility;**
- **Type of media preferred** by the population/ different segments of the population (according to age/ educational level/ environment etc.);
- Aspects of **clarity of information** retained from the campaigns;
- **Level of interest** in acquiring information about SCF.

Fig. 19 Viewing SCF campaigns in the last 6 months, by type of media
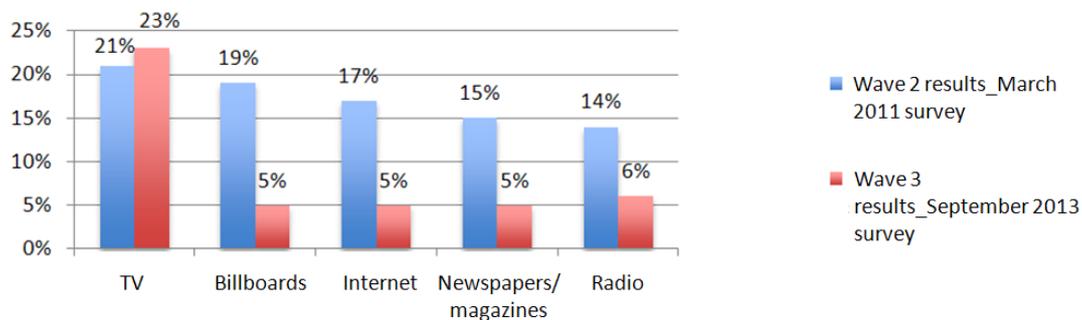
Source: own processing of survey data

[317]. In terms of **understanding the messages of the campaigns**, the results of surveys conducted under OPTA indicate a relatively higher clarity of the messages within December 2010 the campaign (and reflected by the results in March 2011), where 32% of respondents stated that they understood that such funds were accessible. In fact, the comparative analysis of the surveys conducted in 2010 and 2011 show an increasing percentage of those who felt that the information was clear and understandable (from 8% to 12%) and a slight decrease in those who say information was not at all clear (from 39% to 35%). However, approx. half of respondents (2011 survey) consider that the information provided was somewhat clear, but required previous knowledge (no differences between the 2 waves).

[318]. By comparison, in 2013, the percentage of those who understood that SCF were accessible drops to 9%, all results regarding any potential messages understood remaining below this value. At the same time, the percentage of those who did not

know or declined to answer this question is on the increase (388% in September 2013 compared to 17% in March 2011).

[319].In terms of the **elements retained from the spots on SCF**, the results achieved are not very encouraging, as most of the respondents did not know what to answer this question (66% in September 2013, well above the value recorded for the March 2011 survey, 32%). At the same time, 46% of those surveyed considered that the spots targeted the population, while 49% believed that they concerned companies (28%) and local administration (21%).

[320].65% and 75%, respectively, of those interviewed in September 2013 did not know or did not want to answer on **what they liked and disliked in the spots viewed** (as part of the integrated campaign conducted between December 2012 - January 2013). Although 10% of interviewees regarded the message sent or its presentation (8%) as positive aspects, the records indicate that – without a clear indication at the time of the survey on the possible contents of the spots – not very much is retained.

[321].Data on **the attempts to find out more about SCF** after viewing the spot indicates that 39% of those interviewed in September 2013 tried to obtain such information.

Knowledge of Structural and Cohesion Funds

Aspect analysed	Comparative analysis results: March 2010 - March 2011	Comparative analysis: March 2011 - September 2013	November 2015 survey data
Level of awareness of SCF	The level of awareness of SCF increased by 7% from one wave to the next: from 33% to 40%. However, more than half of those surveyed in both waves had not heard of SCF. The efforts for communication and increasing the visibility of SCF should concentrate on the under-35 age group and persons with low education. There is a slight decrease in the percentage of those who believe that SCF are important for Romania (from 44% to 43%), for the locality or at personal level.	The level of awareness of SCF (as level of knowledge) recorded a significant increase compared to previous wave (by 8%, reaching 48%). There was a significant increase in the percentage of those who believe that SCF are important for Romania (from 43% to 70%). A similar trend is recorded in terms of the importance perceived at regional or at a personal level.	The level of SCF awareness increased to 51%, exceeding the OP target (50%). On the other hand, the share of those who believe that SCF have an important or very important contribution to the development of Romania saw a significant decrease (by 13%, reaching 57%). 18% of those surveyed considered that their contribution was neutral. The recorded results confirm the need for sustained, constant information activities, so as to ensure the sustainability of communication efforts
Level of information on SCF	The level of information on SCF remains similar to that in the previous wave (14%). For the respondents in the shared sample, increase in the percentage of those who considered themselves informed increased by 5% (an increase from 13% to 18%).	31% of interviewees consider themselves very informed or fairly informed on SCF - a significant increase (17%) compared to the level recorded in the previous wave (2011).	There is a decrease in the share of those who consider themselves very informed (3%) or fairly informed (19%) on SCF, the cumulative share being 9% lower than the level recorded in 2013. The recorded results confirm the need for sustained, constant information activities, so as to ensure the sustainability of communication efforts.

* Please note that this survey was conducted under the evaluation project and was not preceded by a publicity campaign, as was the case of two surveys contracted by ACIS/MEF (March 2011, September 2013), the results being presented in the context of this ER.

[322]. Overall, although the level of awareness of SCF has increased, the level of information decreased after 2013, in the absence of other campaigns to maintain a constant flow of information. The graph below shows the positive post-campaign impact in 2013, when the percentage of those who considered themselves "fairly informed" surpassed those who considered themselves "not at all informed".

Figure 20 Evolution in the level of information on SI among the population (positive impact example)
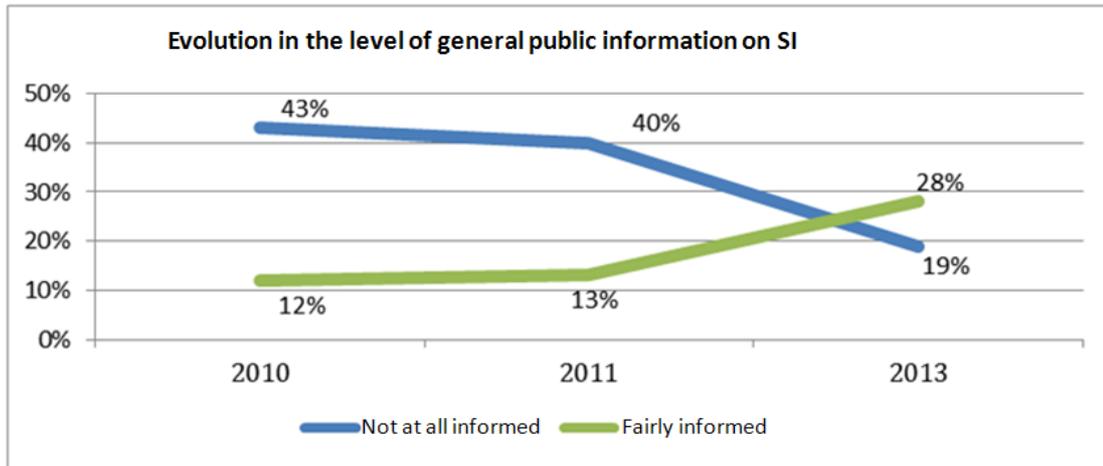
Source: Authors' calculation based o 2010-2013 survey reports

Knowledge of the eligibility of interventions from Structural and Cohesion Funds

Aspect analysed	Comparative analysis results: March 2010 - March 2011	Comparative analysis: March 2011 - September 2013	November 2015 survey data
Knowledge of the eligibility of interventions from SCF	The impression that certain non-eligible areas may be financed from SCF increased relative to the first wave (e.g. agriculture, rural development, culture, fisheries etc.). However, there are also increases among those who have correct knowledge on eligible areas (infrastructure, environmental protection, human resources etc.) SCF are perceived as "funds from the EU granted for projects" (25% of interviewees), targeting the modernisation/ development of Romania (approx. 10% of interviewees), without any major differences between the two waves.	There is a decrease in the share of those who know how to obtain detailed information on accessing SCF (from 33% in the 2nd wave to 25% in the 3rd wave). Similarly, the percentage of those who know the eligible activities for which SCF financing can be obtained decreased (from 26% to 22%), as well as regarding the responsible institutions (from 28% to 23%) or the ways to access SCF (from 25% to 20%). The share of those who deem as eligible certain areas that cannot be financed from SCF (e.g.: 85% believe that agriculture can be funded, compared to 65% in wave 2). Increases were also recorded in terms of those who have knowledge of the eligible areas.	Public knowledge regarding the eligibility of interventions under SCF were not subject to the 2015 survey. However, data on the notoriety of certain programmes give an indication of the respondents' knowledge. Thus, most of the interviewees (33%) have heard of the funding programmes for agriculture and infrastructure programmes (29%). 27% of respondents mentioned the human resources programmes (15%).

[323]. The population surveys' results reflect the confusion between SCF and the EAFRD, both being regarded, in fact, as "European funds" in general. However, infrastructure funds are associated with ROP/ REGIO and less with SOP Transport. The level of knowledge of the various programmes (name) is quite low (3-5%).

Sources of information on the Structural and Cohesion Funds

Aspect analysed	Comparative analysis results: March 2010 - March 2011	Comparative analysis: March 2011 - September 2013	November 2015 survey data
Media sources of information on FSC	There are no differences between waves in respect of the following sources: television (the main source of information, exceeding 80%, peaking at 86%, slightly lower in Bucharest), radio (around 20%, but, similarly to television, somewhat lower in Bucharest), Internet (5-6%), trainings and conferences (4-6%). There is a decline of print media as source of information (by 10% compared to the previous wave, from 29% to 19%) and a 7% increase of information acquired from acquaintances (from 11% to 18%). Both types of information are more common in Bucharest.	There is a decrease in the importance of TV content as primary source of information on SCF (from 52% to 18%) and an increase in terms of TV as a second source of information. Decreases were also registered for the other media, except the Internet, which saw a major increase (by 24%, reaching 37%), as first source of information.	The importance of TV channels as a source of information increased to 65%. At the same time, there is a 6% decrease in the importance of Internet as an information source (reaching 31%). Discussions with other people (19%) remain important and see a slight increase compared to previous years, bringing once again into focus the importance of events, along with campaigns and Internet, for the transmission and multiplication of information.

[324]. Data on the preferred sources of information, combined with the results on the growing interest in SCF, reveals the need to define and implement an appropriate mix of tools, which may include periodical campaigns, followed by events and other actions supported – including online – covering the full range of information sources preferred and thus responding in an effective manner to the preferences and level of interest of the target groups concerned.

The level of interest for information on the Structural and Cohesion Funds

Aspect analysed	Comparative analysis results: March 2010 - March 2011	Comparative analysis: March 2011 - September 2013	November 2015 survey data
The level of interest in obtaining information on SCF	Almost half of the Romanian population declare themselves interested in receiving more information about SCF, while the other half are reluctant, so there is a division of opinions. However, the share of those interested is lower in March 2011, compared to the first wave (2010). Interest is higher among those already involved in a project financed from post-accession funds, either directly or indirectly, for those with higher education and aged between 35 and 49 years.	The percentage of those interested in learning more about SCF increased by approx. 5% compared to the 2nd wave (March 2011), reaching 51%, while, at the same time, the share of those uninterested slightly decreased (by 2%, from 49% in the 2nd wave).	The level of interest in European projects was estimated as follows: • 55% of Romanians state that they are interested or very interested in projects financed by the SCF, while 22% are somewhat interested. • 78% of interviewees say they have tried to find more information about SCF. These results indicate a growing interest from previous years.

[325]. Compared to 2010, in 2011, the cause behind the lack of interest in SCF is no longer external to respondents, but rather tends to internalise, reflecting the lack of intent to access these funds in the near future. Therefore, by mid-term programming, even among the general public, there is a stratification according to the degree of interest. As regards the way in which the respondents' interest for SCF manifests itself, whereas in

2010 general aspects prevailed, such as "only as general information" and "I'm interested in how they can benefit Romania", opinions are becoming clearer from one wave to the next, concerning diverse, yet specific, elements, which demonstrates the increasing level of information and interest towards SCF[31].

[326]. Regarding the messages transmitted through campaigns, the results are mixed, meaning that, for certain aspects of SCF, the impact of the campaigns is visible and significant (e.g. information regarding the categories of eligible beneficiaries), whereas for other aspects, such as the role of SCF, the immediate effects of the campaigns are not as noticeable. This is reflected in the two examples below:

Fig. 21 Population perception of the impact of SCF in Romania (example of notable lack of impact)

Source: Authors' calculation based o 2010-2013 survey reports
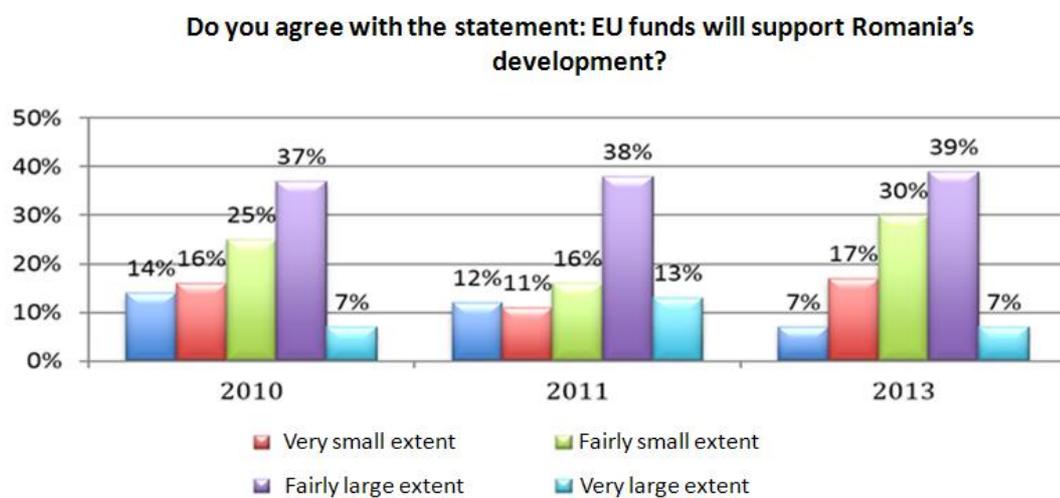
[327]. On the other hand, the people's perception of the eligible groups under SI is increasingly accurate:

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[31] Comparative analysis report on the results of the two surveys "The level of public awareness of the Structural Instruments in Romani", TNS CSOP Romania 2011

Fig. 22 Information to the general public about the categories of potential beneficiaries

From your knowledge, who can access Structural and Cohesion Funds? … (% YES)
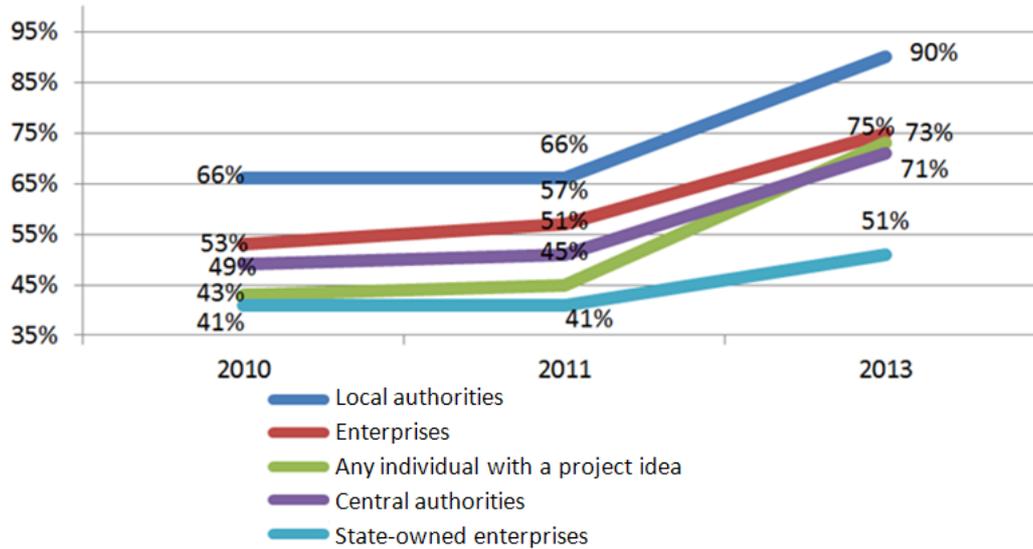
[328]. Upon testing the Assumption 6 , the following key findings can be drawn:

- The results regarding the **campaigns' impact** are not very encouraging in terms of the understanding or retention of the messages, as well as those regarding the positive or negative appreciation of the spots broadcast.

- Nevertheless, **the percentage of those who want to acquire more information about SCF as a result of the campaigns** indicates a significant positive effect (39%).

- Although it is difficult to assess the contribution of media campaigns to the evolution of the main relevant parameters regarding the degree of knowledge and information on the SCF, the recorded values of these indicators (level of knowledge of the SCF, level of information on the SCF, knowledge concerning the eligibility of certain investment for funding from SCF or the interest in obtaining additional information), correlated with the average media preferences of the respondents, indicate a **positive average influence of the publicity campaigns conducted**.

- **The campaigns partly led to an increase in public information and awareness of the SCF.**

5.7. The contribution of the selected institutional actions and mechanisms to the achievement of PA3 objectives

Assumption 7 - The selected institutional actions and mechanisms (conducting separate actions/ using a mix of own actions and coordinating actions implemented by other entities / catalytic approach – funding certain multiplication factors) had an optimal contribution to meeting the set objectives.

[329]. As previously described in the chapter on the Theory of Change Reconstruction, the mechanisms set out under the Communication Strategy for SI 2007-2013[32] for the coordination of information and publicity activities included:
- Communicators' Forum
- Communication Working Group
- Extranet
- Procedures Manual

[330]. The coordination role was entrusted to ACIS/MEF, where the **Communications Unit** was created, subordinate to the System Coordination Directorate, in charge with coordinating the information, communication and promotion of SI in Romania.

[331]. In practice, as detailed in chapter 4.2 "Aspects regarding the progress in achieving PA3 objectives", in the absence of an inter-institutional mechanism to create the necessary levers for ACIS/MEF's coordination role, the coordination remains only at a technical level. This mainly focused on synchronising the activities in time and was achieved mainly under the Communication Working Group.

[332]. This assumption aims to identify the best way to implement the interventions planned under PA3 in the given context. Thus, the intention was to analyse certain alternatives for implementation that could be considered when defining the institutional mechanisms and the strategy for achieving the PA3 objectives. In this regard, the following options have been considered:

- **Coordination option 1**: It is a scenario according to which MEF/ACIS would have delegated the responsibility of running all of the information and communication activities, either general or specific, to the AM, whilst maintaining only the coordinating role.

[333]. In fact, the managing authorities have fulfilled their role of transmitting general information, both before the launch of the IC-SI (i.e. during 2007-2012) and afterwards, when the Centre did not enjoy a considerable visibility. This is why the personnel involved in communication/ helpdesk activities within MA had to know, at a general level, all sources of SI funding and to redirect callers to the responsible MA/IB.

[334]. Moreover, the managing authorities would not have been able to avoid this role, whether a general information service had been available or not, since those interested could not have been prevented from using any of the sources of information at hand.

- **Coordination option 2**: the solution chosen at the time of programming and implemented, i.e. the strategy and mechanisms proposed through OPTA, complemented by entrusting MEF/ACIS with the necessary authority in order to exercise the coordination function over the MAs.

[335]. Entrusting MEF/ACIS with the necessary authority in order to exercise the coordination function and to define and deploy inter-institutional mechanisms enabling MEF/ACIS' coordination role, would have ensured a consistent approach to communication across the entire SI management system.

[336]. The advantages of this approach include a consistent view of SI and the coordinated implementation of communication activities, as well as the opportunity for joint actions, which would have contributed to a better understanding among beneficiaries of the

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[32] Communication Strategy for SI 2007-2013, p.9

accessing and use of SCF. This includes launching a joint Information Centre, comprising representatives from all MAs, in order to provide full and timely information to beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, while avoiding unnecessary revisions and reiterations.

[337]. On the other hand, an actual coordination by MEF/ACIS does not only involve defining and implementing communication. Streamlining the SI implementation and management system by defining and deploying standard procedures for all OPs could contribute to a better understanding of the SI system among beneficiaries (which is currently characterised by excessive complexity).

[338]. The disadvantages of this approach include the limited capacity of ACIS (in terms of personnel) to support such a role, but also aspects of institutional independence (given that some MAs functioned until 2015 within other ministries, outside MEF, while others are still within independent structures). Another aspect concerns the responsibility of each MA in the context of information and publicity allocations, as part of the TA for each PO, as well as the requirements for the visibility of the investments supported under the various OPs.

- **Coordination option 3**: involves a mixed approach, under which MEF/ACIS would have conducted the general information, including by deploying a regional/county-level network, and would have coordinated the MAs' actions in terms of specific information.

[339]. It envisages to complement the actions implemented by MEF with information activities carried out locally/regionally. This scenario is based on an initiative of Communication and Public Information Unit of MEF, aiming to capitalise on the resources allocated for local communication, namely the communication offices of the Chamber of Commerce and/or County Councils.

[340]. This implementation alternative is based on a number of assumptions, such as:

- ACIS has the necessary authority in order to exercise the coordination function over MAs;

- Communication is to be ensured at both central and local level;

- Communication activities are treated as a whole, through the implementation of coordinated actions, properly substantiated by relevant studies and analyses of the various target groups.

[341]. This would have enabled MEF to focus on a better planning of the actions supported from various sources, based on the information needs identified, and on the establishment of optimal intervention measures for certain areas, the identification of overlaps or needs to be covered.

[342]. Such an approach can lead, through good planning, to resource savings at central level and can help achieve synergies and complementary in the use of funds. On the other hand, there is a risk of providing incorrect information, due to the distance from the transmitter, misinterpretation etc. At the same time, considerable efforts are needed for training and constant information to the staff involved at regional/local level.

- **Coordination option 4**: envisages an catalytic approach, under which MEF/ACIS would have involved both MAs and the regional/local network, and a range of multiplying factors, such as opinion makers, project promoters or the media, in

order to promote SI and would have funded their actions through various mechanisms (including requests for project proposals, following the example of the Europe Fund).

[343]. This option entails identifying those players who can contribute to a better dissemination of information to the different audiences, through a multiplier effect, based on both their experience and their local connections. One good practice example in this regard is the management of communication activities implemented under ROP. Details of the activities undertaken by MA ROP and RDA-BI and of the mechanisms provided can be found in Annex 4.

[344]. It may concern several types of entities with a multiplier role, which can act at different territorial levels (locally/regionally/nationally). Their selection and their assigned role can be established based on a thorough analysis of the target group needs and at local level.

[345]. The advantages of this approach include facilitating the provision of general information at all relevant levels, as well as the possibility to adapt and present information according to the specific nature and features of the target groups. There are, obviously, several important assumptions underlying such an approach, so as to ensure the accuracy of the information and to guarantee the transparency of the communication process. These and other relevant aspects will be considered in the assumption testing process.

[346]. The potential players with a multiplier role include:
- media (national / regional / local);
- public entities acting as promoters of SI-related information (www.fonduri-structurale.ro, www.finantare.ro, AMCOR etc.);
- the banking industry;
- project promoters at regional / local level.

[347]. Although it would save a considerable amount of resources and efforts, the multipliers' involvement does hold potential risks pertaining to the provision of inaccurate information and lack of legitimacy.

[348]. After testing this assumption, the following main findings can be drawn:

- Since the Extranet failed to become operational and given the lack of a procedures manual, **the Communication WG and the Communicators' Forum undertook the coordination of the communication activities;**

- **The effectiveness of the Communication WG was significantly impacted by the lack of the levers** needed to implement the decisions in ministries;

- Both Communication WG and the Communicators' Forum could have provided very good coordination mechanisms, had they been optimally implemented.

- Good practices can be observed among the operational programmes (ROP) and in the NPRD, which can be implemented in order to ensure coordination in the future.

- As shown by the analysis of the implementation options above, **the coordination of communication activities could have been optimised in terms of entrusting ACIS/MEF with the authority required for the performance of the coordination**

function, as well as by means of a catalytic approach aiming to set-up and use a regional information network and to harness multiplier factors.

5.8. MEF involvement in public communication activities

Assumption 8 - MEF's direct involvement in public communication activities provided legitimacy and credibility to the information.

[349]. ACIS/MEF was the only institution to send general messages regarding SI and, in this regard, its part in ensuring the understanding of the global picture of the role (and outcomes of the SI) was crucial. The balance between providing information that is too general or highly specific, as well as conveying information in an appropriate language, adapted to the level of information of the various target groups, are essential for the success of the communication.

[350]. This assumption aimed to assess the extent to which MEF's involvement has added value in terms of legitimacy and credibility of the information, given the high diversity of these activities and of the needs of the target groups concerned, but also the context-specific conditions, such as the delays in launching calls for proposals under the various PO or in processing payment documentation, the complexity of the procedures or relationship with EC.

Aspects of the added value of MEF's involvement in communication activities

[351]. Apart from its communication actions and the activities organised by other MA/IB or relevant public entities in the field of SI, MFE, through its delegates, participated in a series of activities carried out by other private or non-governmental entities. Its participation in such events has helped increase the level of awareness and information regarding SCF.

[352]. It is very important to define a clear line of action on tackling involvement and participation in such events, so as to capitalise on the opportunities for communication and to maximise their impact. In this regard, a series of very important aspects become apparent, such as:

- Ensuring adequate representation at such events;

- Knowing the communication needs of the various target groups;

- Providing relevant information to the different target groups;

- Sending messages in an appropriate language, according to the level of knowledge and interest of the target group concerned;

- Satisfying the need for knowledge by achieving a balance between the need for general information and the need for specific information;

- Coordination with the various relevant public bodies (MA/IB), so as to provide specific information, according to the interests of the audiences attending the event;

- Preparing support materials (information leaflets, publicity materials, contacts etc.) and promoting the communication tools created by the institution or other relevant entities, both for further contact, should additional information be needed, and to

enable the event and its participants to act as multiplier factors for the information provided.

[353]. At the same time, the impact of such events is also correlated with the level of representation of these entities, their ability to further transmit and promote information or its territorial level of representation.

[354]. In practice, MEF/ACIS's approach to attending events held by other entities, although not based on a clear plan of action, ensured in most cases an adequate representation at such events (depending on the availability of people with experience in the field of SCF, as well as by delegating the officers in charge with the sector deemed as most relevant to the topics addressed at the event)

[355]. At the same time, the coordination with other relevant MA/IB was ensured – although it often proved difficult, particularly as regards the organisation of large-scale events, such as 9 May – in order to provide specific information and information was provided regarding the communication tools set-up within MEF, i.e. the www.fonduri-ue.ro web page or the Information Centre.

[356]. However, available data indicate that MEF/ACIS' approach was consistent, without being necessarily adapted to the preliminary level of knowledge or to the communication needs of the target groups covered by the events. These communications have not been regarded as an opportunity to disseminate and multiply information, or from the perspective of the (potential) contribution to increasing SCF absorption, by providing better information about the role and areas of the SI.

[357]. Moreover, in the context of the negative perception faced by certain PO, there was no coherent approach to communication for such crises, including due to the lack of experience in the early stage of implementation. Thus, each MA was left on its own to address its issues, but a unified approach and a coherent strategy to address such aspects, including at events held by other entities (where the risk of spreading such negative information is higher) could have contributed to a more efficient settlement of these image problems.

[358]. Upon testing Assumption 8, the following key findings can be drawn:

- MEF/ACIS has not been proactive in participating to communication activities organised by other public or private entities;
  - MEF/ACIS' involvement was ad-hoc, upon the request of the organisers;
  - Partnerships have not been promoted, which could have contributed to the proliferation of information (by specific target groups, at less-accessible levels etc.)

- Overall, **MEF/ACIS' involvement brought added value to the communications and ensured the legitimacy of the information provided**, however without trying to maximise or enhance the effects of these actions.

6. Conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation

[359]. This section provides answers to the evaluation questions based on the findings and provides recommendations to improve the communication process. The conclusions and recommendations have been drawn in view of the actual progress in implementation, of the elements identified in the reconstruction of the Theory of Change and the assumptions tested.

[360]. The conclusions and recommendations are therefore substantiated by means of all the instruments used in the evaluation process.

6.1. Conclusions

Q1: What is the progress in achieving the objectives of PA3?

[361]. **The progress in terms of increasing SI awareness is very good**, as this indicator saw a significant evolution in time, particularly in the first part of the programming period (rising from 5% in 2006 to 30% in 2010 and 40% in 2011), in the context of the communication actions implemented, but also of the interest shown by the public and potential beneficiaries.

[362]. At target-group level, **the increase in OPTA awareness** is reflected by the beneficiaries' and potential beneficiaries' good level of knowledge on the financing opportunities provided by OPTA and on how to access the funds.

[363]. **The aim of ensuring a nationally-coordinated dissemination of the general messages about SI has been partly met**. Coordination was more effective in the first part of the programming cycle, but could not be sustained throughout the implementation period. The reasons for this included the difference of vision between the Managing Authorities, changes in decision-making, issues related to the need and desire of each institution to conduct promotion independently and to present the achieved results in an independent and visible manner.

Q2: How much of this progress can be attributed to OPTA?

[364]. The analyses showed that, **in terms of increasing awareness of SI**, **the recorded progress was triggered by the actions under OPTA 2007-2013 only to a small extent**.

[365]. Thus, **the communication tools**, although properly chosen in view of the identified needs and the defined purpose, have proven insufficient in order to cover general information needs. At the same time, the communication tools were not implemented on time (e.g. delays in rendering the Information Centre operational, lack of coordination of MA and ACIS in preparing the visual identity manual, carrying out further general information caravans when specific information was needed etc.).

[366]. **Surveys** , although representative of the level of awareness of SCF and comparable in time, have not been used consistently in order to adapt communication tools to the needs of the different target-groups in order to increase the effectiveness of

communication. Whilst providing information on the respondents' level of information on SI, surveys did not include data on the level of knowledge and information needs among the main target-groups.

[367]. At the same time, the **www.fonduri-ue.ro website**, only had an **average contribution** to raising awareness of SCF and increasing transparency on the use of funds during the observed period. Surveys and interviews with relevant stakeholders indicate that the visibility and notoriety of the website have improved steadily, but further efforts are still needed.

[368]. **The Information Centre**, throughout its operation, has addressed a total of 5,647 requests, reaching approx. 14% of the 40,000-request target set for OPTA 2007-2013. The analyses carried out showed that the IC-SI *has failed to fulfill its role as hub of information on SI*, given that the contribution of the centre's helpdesk service to increasing awareness among potential applicants for grants could not be accurately determined.

[369]. **OPTA-funded publicity campaigns, although effective, have only partially led to increased information and awareness of SCF among the population.** This result is due to various factors, which led to significant time fluctuations in applying these tools, such as suspending purchases for communication in 2009-2010, the focus on communication with the media and engaging in other activities upon the set-up of MEF, as well as low administrative capacity within the unit responsible for communication and information activities aiming to ensure a proactive approach, generated by the needs of the target groups.

[370]. Another factor behind this low contribution is the fact that **the selected institutional mechanisms** to coordinate communication activities, although appropriate, could not be optimally implemented due to external causes, related to the general institutional framework of the SI implementation. The effectiveness of the mechanisms (e.g. Communication Working Group) was significantly impacted by the lack of levers required to implement the decisions within ministries.

[371]. Furthermore**, MEF/ACIS' involvement in communication activities organised by other entities**, although providing added-value and legitimacy to the information conveyed, did not contribute to maximizing or enhancing the effects of these actions (thus, in the absence of a multiplier effect for the information).

Q3: Are there other effects, positive or negative, of the PA3 implementation?

[372]. The **positive effects include the development of alternative, private sources of information/initiatives**, in the context of growing information needs among beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries (due to insufficient coverage of these needs by MEF/ACIS and delays in implementing the communication actions set out in OPTA 2007-2013).

[373]. Both due to the institutional framework, which allowed for the development of individual actions, but also due to the insufficient coordination on the part of ACIS, certain managing authorities have implemented their own communication strategies, with significant success (i.e. mechanisms and actions promoted under ROP).

[374]. The multitude of sources of information sometimes led to **adverse effects**, **such as confusions among the public regarding the official sources of information** (the

www.fonduri-structurale.ro website has been/is still regarded by part of the beneficiaries as the official information website of MEF/ACIS), as well as **the provision of inaccurate/incomplete information**.

Q4: To what extent is this progress sustainable in the long term?

[375]. **The progress in terms of increasing SI awareness is sustainable under current conditions.** Nevertheless, the effects of communication actions could be enhanced by better planning, a better knowledge of the needs of the relevant public and by ensuring appropriate administrative capacity.

[376]. **The progress in terms of ensuring a coordinated dissemination of general SI-related messages is not sustainable under current conditions**, without changing implementation mechanisms and supporting the duties of MEF/ACIS, as coordinator.

[377]. Thus, **the delivery and sustainability of information activities coordination** rely on the existence of well-established hierarchical relationships between the institutions involved and the existence and well-functioning of coordination mechanisms. In this context, the definition and deployment of additional instruments at central and regional level are prerequisites for ensuring effective coordination.

Q5: What mechanisms have been implemented or are necessary to facilitate effects and their sustainability?

[378]. **Ensuring the proper functioning of the coordination mechanisms** set out in the National Communication Strategy 2007-2013 – i.e. Communication Working Group and Communicators' Forum **–** can facilitate effects. In this respect, it is essential **to implement the legal basis** (Decision no. 398/2015 establishing the institutional framework for the coordination and management of European Structural and Investment Funds and ensuring the continuity of the institutional framework for the coordination and management of Structural Instruments 2007-2013) **so as to ensure MEF's coordination function and relationships with other institutions**.

[379]. The interventions envisaged under PA3 of OPTA 2007-2013 have been appropriately chosen, but they were not implemented on time and were insufficient. In this context, it is necessary **to plan and implement interventions in an integrated, consistent and sustained manner**, in order to ensure a more effective communication process. Interventions must be based on a good knowledge of the information needs of the various target-groups.

[380]. **Supporting the overall operation of an information network at regional/ county level** may facilitate the desired effects in terms of increasing general information on SI/ESIF, whilst creating the necessary means (ensuring increased visibility of the information office, both online and within the structure where activity is to be conducted, well-trained and properly sized staff; access to a database containing the necessary information, updated in real time; ensuring proper communication with SI/ESIF managing and implementing authorities etc.).

[381]. **The creation and operation of a system for information dissemination and multiplication**, which may consider partnerships with relevant entities (NGOs and private organisations, with experience and results in this area), as well as media involvement may increase communication effectiveness. At the same time, **the**

deployment of a grant scheme may help promote SI/ESIF and their role in social and economic development.

[382]. Another **optional mechanism** that could be considered would be to create "**one-stop-shop**" structures (for SMEs or other types of beneficiaries) aiming to provide specific information about financing under the various Operational Programmes. Should it be decided to support such a mechanism, a thorough analysis on the accuracy and consistency of the provided information needs to be conducted. At the same time, it will be necessary to clarify any issues regarding the accountability for the information provided by the staff of these structures and acknowledging this perspective by the relevant authorities (MA, IB).

6.2. Recommendations

[383]. The proposed recommendations aim to promote the strategic role of the SI/ESIF communication and information process, as well as to improve the coordination of communication actions across the SI/ESIF management system.

[384]. R.1 MEF should coordinate communication activities implemented by the relevant authorities, so as to ensure a consistent dissemination of general messages on SI/ESIF. Messages will refer to the role and effects of SI/ESIF in terms of social and economic development in Romania, accessing funds, as well as ensuring a transparent use of funds in accordance with the provisions of the National Communication Strategy and other relevant policy documents for 2014-2020.

[385]. R.2 It is recommended to create a mechanism for the proper delivery of MEF's coordination function, by concluding protocols and conducting of an effective exchange of information between the institutions managing European funds.

[386]. **R.3. MEF should conduct general information activities through proper planning and a detailed analysis of information needs,** covering both the general public and the main target-groups (potential beneficiaries, media representatives, promoters of information), so as to improve the relevance of the conveyed information.

[387]. **R.4. MEF should support the operation of an information dissemination and multiplication system** through partnerships with relevant entities and media involvement, in order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of communication.

Annexes

Annex 1. The members of the Steering Committee for Evaluation

Name	Position	Institution
Serena Rizi	Assistant Counsellor	DCMIP
Claudia Muja	Counsellor	ECU/ DG APE
Claudia Măgdălina	Head of Unit	ECU/ DG APE
Sorin Bolduş	Counsellor	DECU / MEF
Marie-Jeanne Nica	Counsellor	MA OPTA
Maleta Marinescu	Counsellor	ECU/ DG APE
Valentin Barbu	Counsellor	Public Communication and Information Unit on SI
Ioana Pâslaru	Coordinator	Public Communication and Information Unit on SI

Survey among the beneficiaries of the helpdesk services of IC-SI (Information Centre for Structural Instruments)

The rationale of the survey among the beneficiaries of the IC-SI helpdesk services
a) Obtaining the answer to Evaluation Question 2, based on the "matching" counterfactual method
"To what extent did the operation of the help-desk service within IC-SI contribute to fulfilling the planned role of resource center and information hub, by streamlining the process of informing potential beneficiaries (measured by the number of alternative sources of general information regarding SI financing opportunities, used by potential beneficiaries?"
b) Enhancing / validating the answers to Evaluation Questions 1, 4 and 5

Research method: telephone interview
Duration – around 10 minutes

Questionnaire

Introduction [brief overview of the survey's background, purpose and objectives, expected duration and agreeing upon privacy terms (if applicable)]

Q1. Where did you obtain the most general information about the projects financed by the European Union? (multiple answers)

General information include information on: the available sources of funding, institutions managing the funds, funds' absorption rate, generally-applicable procedures.

From TV	❏1
From the press (print)	❏2
From the radio	❏3
From posters / billboards	❏4
From discussions with to other people	❏5
Online	❏6
From brochures / leaflets	❏7
From seminars and conferences held by central or local authorities	❏8
From consultants	❏9
From managing authorities responsible for the management of funds	❏10
From the Ministry of European Funds	❏11
From other sources. Which?	❏12
DK / NR	❏99

Q2. Where did you obtain the most general information about the projects financed by the European Union? (multiple answers)

> *Specific information includes information on: calls for proposals, the conditions for accessing funds, documentation relating to a specific operational programme.*

From discussions with to other people	❑1
Online	❑2
From seminars and conferences held by central or local authorities	❑3
From consultants	❑4
From managing authorities responsible for the management of funds	❑5
From the Ministry of European Funds	❑6
From other sources. Which?	❑7
DK / NR	❑99

Q3. On the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means very poor rating and 5 means a very good rating, how do you rate the general information on the Structural and Cohesion Funds 2007-2013?

	1. Very poor	2. Poor	3. Neither poor nor good	4. Good	5. Very Good	DK / NR
Efficiency	❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑99
Utility	❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑99
Sufficiency	❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑99
Clarity	❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑99
Credibility	❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑99
Accuracy	❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑99
Accessibility	❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑99

Q4. What do you think were the main advantages of obtaining information from IC-SI? (multiple answers)

It is clear	❑1
It is reliable	❑2
It shortens research time	❑3
It is easy to find	❑4
It is free	❑5
There were no advantages.	❑6
Another advantage. Which?	❑7
DK / NR	❑99

Q5. What information were you seeking when you contacted the IC-SI helpdesk? (multiple answers)

Areas funded	❏1
Eligibility criteria	❏2
Institutions managing funds	❏3
Guidelines for the preparation of the application	❏4
Level of funds' absorption in Romania	❏5
Open tenders	❏6
None of the above.	❏7
Other information. Which?	❏8
DK / NR	❏99

Q6. Did you use any other sources of general information before contacting the IC-SI helpdesk services?

Yes	❏1
No. Skip to Q8.	❏2
DK / NR	❏99

Q7. How many times did you have to seek different sources of general information on SI until you found the desired information?

_____ times

Q8. (If YES to Q6) What were the other sources of information you used before contacting the IC-SI helpdesk?

Press (print)	❏1
Discussions with to other people	❏2
Internet	❏3
Brochures / leaflets	❏4
Seminars and conferences held by central or local authorities	❏5
Consultants	❏6
Managing authorities responsible for the management of funds	❏7
Ministry of European Funds, through other channels	❏8
Other sources Which?	❏9
DK / NR	❏99

Q9. After receiving the information from the IC-SI helpdesk, did you resort to other sources of general information?

Yes	❏1
No. Skip to Q10.	❏2
DK / NR	❏99

Q10. What sources of information did you use after contacting the IC-SI helpdesk services?

Press (print)	❏1
Discussions with to other people	❏2
Internet	❏3
Brochures / leaflets	❏4
Seminars and conferences held by central or local authorities	❏5
Consultants	❏6
Managing authorities responsible for the management of funds	❏7
Ministry of European Funds, through other channels	❏8
Other sources Which?	❏9
DK / NR	❏99

Q11. Why did you contact the helpdesk?

I did not have the time to search for information	❏1
I could not find information that was clear enough	❏2
I did not know how to compile the application	❏3
I did not know the main information sources	❏4
DK / NR	❏99

Q12. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means very little, and 5 very much, how much do you consider that the helpdesk services have helped you in acquiring general information about SI?

Very little	❏1
Little	❏2
Neither little nor much	❏3
Much	❏4
Very much.	❏5
DK / NR	❏99

Q13. After receiving the information from the IC-SI helpdesk, did you also resort to sources of specific information?

Yes	❏1
No. Thank you for your time!	❏2
DK / NR	❏99

Q14. What are the sources of specific information you used? (multiple answers)

Seminars, info-days	❏1
Websites of the managing authorities responsible for the management of funds	❏2
Websites of the intermediary bodies / Regional Development Agencies	❏3
Consultants	❏4
Specialised websites	❏5
Helpdesk services of the Managing Authorities	❏6
DK / NR	❏99

Socio - demographics
D1. Activity sector: _____
D2 County: _____
D3. Locality: _____

D4. Place your company's turnover in 2014 in one of the following ranges:

Under EUR 500,000	❏1
EUR 500,000 – 1,000,000	❏2
EUR 1,000,000 – 2,000,000	❏3
EUR 2,000,000 – 10,000,000	❏4
EUR 10,000,000 – 50,000,000	❏5
Over EUR 50,000,000	❏6
DK / NR	❏9

D5. Current number of employees: _____ (figures)
D6. Phone (required): _____
D7. E-mail: _____
D8. Operator code: _____

Survey among the beneficiaries of the helpdesk services of IC-SI (Information Centre for Structural Instruments)

> **The rationale of the survey among the beneficiaries of the IC-SI helpdesk services**
> a) Obtaining the answer to Evaluation Question 2, based on the *"matching"* counterfactual method
> *"To what extent did the operation of the help-desk service within IC-SI contribute to fulfilling the planned role of resource center and information hub, by streamlining the process of informing potential beneficiaries (measured by the number of alternative sources of general information regarding SI financing opportunities, used by potential beneficiaries?"*
> b) Enhancing / validating the answers to Evaluation Questions 1, 4 and 5
>
> **Research method:** telephone interview
> **Duration –** around 10 minutes

Questionnaire

Introduction [brief overview of the survey's background, purpose and objectives, expected duration and agreeing upon privacy terms (if applicable)]

Q1. Where did you obtain the most general information about the projects financed by the European Union? (multiple answers)

> *General information include information on: the available sources of funding, institutions managing the funds, funds' absorption rate, generally-applicable procedures.*

From TV	❏1
From the press (print)	❏2
From radio	❏3
From posters / billboards	❏4
From discussions with to other people	❏5
Online	❏6
From brochures / leaflets	❏7
From seminars and conferences held by central or local authorities	❏8
From consultants	❏9
From managing authorities responsible for the management of funds	❏10
From the Ministry of European Funds	❏11
From other sources. Which?	❏12
DK / NR	❏99

Q2. Where did you obtain the most general information about the projects financed by the European Union? (multiple answers)

> *Specific information includes information on: calls for proposals, the conditions for accessing funds, documentation relating to a specific operational programme.*

From discussions with to other people	❑1
Online	❑2
From seminars and conferences held by central or local authorities	❑3
From consultants	❑4
From managing authorities responsible for the management of funds	❑5
From the Ministry of European Funds	❑6
From other sources. Which?	❑7
DK / NR	❑99

Q3. On the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means very poor rating and 5 means a very good rating, how do you rate the general information on the Structural and Cohesion Funds 2007-2013?

	1. Very poor	2. Poor	3. Neither poor nor good	4. Good	5. Very Good	DK / NR
Efficiency	❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑99
Utility	❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑99
Sufficiency	❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑99
Clarity	❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑99
Credibility	❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑99
Accuracy	❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑99
Accessibility	❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑99

Q4. What do you think were the main advantages of obtaining information from IC-SI? (multiple answers)

It is clear	❑1
It is reliable	❑2
It shortens research time	❑3
It is easy to find	❑4
It is free	❑5
There were no advantages.	❑6
Another advantage. Which?	❑7
DK / NR	❑99

Q5. What information were you seeking when you contacted the IC-SI helpdesk? (multiple answers)

Areas funded	❑1
Eligibility criteria	❑2
Institutions managing funds	❑3
Guidelines for the preparation of the application	❑4
Level of funds' absorption in Romania	❑5
Open tenders	❑6
None of the above.	❑7
Other information. Which?	❑8
DK / NR	❑99

Q6. Did you use any other sources of general information before contacting the IC-SI helpdesk services?

Yes	❑1
No. Skip to Q8.	❑2
DK / NR	❑99

Q7. How many times did you have to seek different sources of general information on SI until you found the desired information?

_____ times

Q8. (If YES to Q6) What were the other sources of information you used before contacting the IC-SI helpdesk?

Press (print)	❑1
Discussions with to other people	❑2
page	❑3
Brochures / leaflets	❑4
Seminars and conferences held by central or local authorities	❑5
Consultants	❑6
Managing authorities responsible for the management of funds	❑7
Ministry of European Funds, through other channels	❑8
Other sources Which?	❑9
DK / NR	❑99

Q9. After receiving the information from the IC-SI helpdesk, did you resort to other sources of general information?

Yes	❏1
No. Skip to Q10.	❏2
DK / NR	❏99

Q10. What sources of information did you use after contacting the IC-SI helpdesk services?

Press (print)	❏1
Discussions with other people	❏2
Internet	❏3
Brochures / leaflets	❏4
Seminars and conferences held by central or local authorities	❏5
Consultants	❏6
Managing authorities responsible for the management of funds	❏7
Ministry of European Funds, through other channels	❏8
Other sources Which?	❏9
DK / NR	❏99

Q11. Why did you contact the helpdesk?

I did not have the time to search for information	❏1
I could not find information that was clear enough	❏2
I did not know how to compile the application	❏3
I did not know the main information sources	❏4
DK / NR	❏99

Q12. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means very little, and 5 very much, how much do you consider that the helpdesk services have helped you in acquiring general information about SI?

Very little	❏1
Little	❏2
Neither little nor much	❏3
Much	❏4
Very much.	❏5
DK / NR	❏99

Q13. After receiving the information from the IC-SI helpdesk, did you also resort to sources of specific information?

Yes	❏1
No. Thank you for your time!	❏2
DK / NR	❏99

Q14. What are the sources of specific information you used? (multiple answers)

Seminars, info-days	❏1
Websites of the managing authorities responsible for the management of funds	❏2
Websites of the intermediary bodies / Regional Development Agencies	❏3
Consultants	❏4
Specialised websites	❏5
Helpdesk services of the Managing Authorities	❏6
DK / NR	❏99

Socio - demographics
D1. Activity sector: _____
D2 County: _____
D3. Locality: _____

D4. Place your company's turnover in 2014 in one of the following ranges:

Under EUR 500,000	❏1
EUR 500,000 – 1,000,000	❏2
EUR 1,000,000 – 2,000,000	❏3
EUR 2,000,000 – 10,000,000	❏4
EUR 10,000,000 – 50,000,000	❏5
Over EUR 50,000,000	❏6
DK / NR	❏9

D5. Current number of employees: _____ **(figures)**
D6. Phone (required): _____
D7. E-mail: _____
D8. Operator code: _____

Population survey regarding the level of information
on post-accession funds

Survey rationale:
a) Obtaining the answer to Evaluation Question 1, based on "*before&after*" method of analysis
Q1: What is the progress in terms of the objectives of PA3 Dissemination of information and promotion of Structural Instruments?
b) Enhancing / validating the answers to the evaluation questions:
Q2: To what extent can this progress be attributed to OPTA 2007-2013?
Q4: To what extent is this progress sustainable in the long term?
Q5: What mechanisms have been implemented or are necessary to facilitate effects and their sustainability?

Research objectives:
Level of information about post-accession funds
Channels of communication with target groups

Research method: population survey via telephone – nationally representative – 1,064 persons, adult population (18-64 years), urban, rural. Margin of error +3%.

Duration – around 10 minutes

Survey preparation

Introduction [brief overview of the survey's background, purpose and objectives, estimated duration]

Identification data of the respondent / Demographics

D1. Age: _____ years

D2 Gender:

Male	❏1
Female	❏2

D3. Area of residence:

Urban	❏1
Rural	❏2

Questionnaire:
The proposed questions were developed based on a questionnaire applied in the population survey conducted in 2006 and taking into account the evaluation assumptions.

Q1. Since 2007, Romania has received funding from the European Union for projects with an economic and social impact. Have you heard about the available funding programmes?

Yes	❏1
No	❏2

Q2. (If YES to Q1) What available funding programmes did you hear of?

_____

Q3. To which of the following areas do you believe that the projects financed from European funds in 2007-2013 have contributed? (multiple answers)

Transport infrastructure	❏1
Social inclusion	❏2
Education	❏3
Supporting the corporate sector	❏4
Research-development	❏5
Urban development	❏6
Environmental protection	❏7
Rural development and fisheries	❏8
Other. Which?	❏9
DK / NR	❏99

Q4. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means a very insignificant contribution and 5 means a very important contribution, how would you assess the contribution of European funds to the economic and social development of Romania?

Very insignificant contribution	Insignificant contribution	Neither insignificant nor important	Important contribution	Very important contribution	DK	NR
1	2	3	4	5	98	99

Q5. How well informed do you consider yourself with regard to projects financed from European funds?

Not at all informed	❏1
Less informed	❏2
Somewhat informed	❏3
Well informed	❏4
Very well informed	❏5
DK / NR	❏99

Q6. How interested are you in receiving information about domestic projects financed from European funds? (one answer option)

Not at all interested	❑1
Little interested	❑2
Somewhat interested	❑3
Interested	❑4
Very interested	❑5
DK / NR	❑99

Q7. What were the most important sources of information about projects financed by the European Union? (multiple answers, 3 responses maximum)

From TV	❑1
From the press (print)	❑2
From radio	❑3
From posters / billboards	❑4
From discussions with to other people	❑5
Online	❑6
From brochures / leaflets	❑7
From seminars and conferences held by central or local authorities	❑8
From consultants	❑9
From managing authorities responsible for the management of funds	❑10
From the Ministry of European Funds	❑11
Other	❑12
DK / NR	❑99

Q8. If you checked the "online" option to the previous question – What websites have you visited in order to learn general information about SI? (multiple answers)

Ministry of European Funds website www.fonduri-ue.ro	❑1
Websites of the Managing Authorities for EU funds	❑2
Private websites	❑3
News websites	❑4
Other websites	❑5
DK / NR	❑99

Q9. Were you interested in searching information on structural and cohesion funds?

Yes. Skip to Q10.	❑1
No. Skip to Q13.	❑2
DK / NR	❑99

Q10. (If YES to Q9) What information on structural and cohesion funds were interested in? (multiple answers)

Areas funded	❑1

Eligibility criteria	❏2
Institutions managing funds	❏3
Guidelines for the preparation of the application	❏4
Guides on the proper implementation of projects	❏5
Level of funds' absorption in Romania	❏6
Other information. Which?	❏7
None.	❏8
DK / NR	❏99

Q11. (If YES to Q9) On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means a very poor rating and 5 means a very good rating, how do you rate the general information on the Structural and Cohesion Funds 2007-2013?

	1. Very poor	2. Poor	3. Neither poor nor good	4. Good	5. Very Good	DK / NR
Efficiency	❏1	❏2	❏3	❏4	❏5	❏99
Utility	❏1	❏2	❏3	❏4	❏5	❏99
Sufficiency	❏1	❏2	❏3	❏4	❏5	❏99
Clarity	❏1	❏2	❏3	❏4	❏5	❏99
Credibility	❏1	❏2	❏3	❏4	❏5	❏99
Accuracy	❏1	❏2	❏3	❏4	❏5	❏99
Accessibility	❏1	❏2	❏3	❏4	❏5	❏99

Q12. (If YES to Q9) Which of the following organisations had the most important role in providing the population with general information about structural and cohesion funds?

Ministry of European Funds	❏1
Managing Authorities	❏2
Local authorities	❏3
Consultants in the field of European funds	❏4
Other. Which?	❏5
DK / NR	❏99

Q13. Are you familiar with the visual identity elements associated with projects financed from European funds?

Yes	❏1
No. Skip to 16.	❏2
DK / NR	❏99

Q14. (If YES to Q13) Are you familiar with the Structural Instruments logo?

Yes	❏1
No	❏2
DK / NR	❏99

Q15. (If YES to Q13) Are you familiar with the European Union flag?

Yes	❏1
No	❏2
DK / NR	❏99

Q16. Do you know any example of European-funded project?

Yes	❏1
No	❏2
DK / NR	99

Q17. To what extent do you agree with the following statements

	1. Totally disagree	2. Partially disagree	3. Neither agree nor disagree	4. Partially agree	5. Totally agree	❏99
a. Grants support the development of Romania	❏1	❏2	❏3	❏4	❏5	❏99
b. The European funds do not replace investment from national funds, but complement them	❏1	❏2	❏3	❏4	❏5	❏99
c. The procedure for awarding funds is straightforward and transparent	❏1	❏2	❏3	❏4	❏5	❏99
d. Projects are assessed objectively, responsibly	❏1	❏2	❏3	❏4	❏5	❏99
e. There is a strict multi-level control on both the awarding of funds and the project implementation	❏1	❏2	❏3	❏4	❏5	❏99
f. The management systems for the Structural and Cohesion Funds guarantees equal opportunities to each potential beneficiary	❏1	❏2	❏3	❏4	❏5	❏99
g. Beneficiaries must be permanently up-to-date with current opportunities available to them and the rules to comply with	❏1	❏2	❏3	❏4	❏5	❏99

Socio - demographics

D4. What is your highest completed level of education?

Secondary education	❏1
Vocational / high school education	❏2

Higher education	❑3
DK / NR	❑99

D5. Your current occupation is:

Unskilled worker	Occupation requiring secondary education	Occupation requiring higher education	Pupil / student	Retired	Home-maker, no occupation	Independent / (freelancer / business owner)	Unem ployed	Other	NR
❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑6	❑7	❑8	❑ 9	❑99

D6. Please place the net monthly income of your household (from wages and from other sources (rents, copyright, dividends etc.)) in one of the following ranges:

Below RON 1000	❑1
RON 1001 - 2000	❑2
RON 2001 - 4000	❑3
Over RON 4000	❑4
NR	❑99

D7. Your civil status:

Unmarried	Married	Divorced	Widow	Consensual union	NR
❑1	❑2	❑3	❑4	❑5	❑99

D8. Locality of residence: _____

D9. County: _____

D10. E-mail: _____

D11. Operator code: _____

Interview Guide (indicative structure)

Introduction [introduction of the expert, of the context in which the interview takes place, purpose and objectives, expected duration and agreement upon confidentiality terms (if applicable)]

Short introduction of the interviewee – name, position, relation to OPTA PA3 (coordination/management, beneficiary, other) and expertise/experience in communication.

- What were the channels of information on SI in Romania during 2007-2013 and to whom they were addressed? How do you assess the quality of the information provided?

- What is your overall opinion on the implementation of OPTA PA3 and on the communication and information activities? Please provide details and justify.

- What are the challenges faced in implementing OPTA PA3?

- How do you assess the implementation and results of OPTA PA3, compared to what was planned? What had a positive/negative influence on the PA3 implementation and on the communication activities provided?

- How do you assess the communication tools used under OPTA PA3 in terms of suitability to the target group, their timing, the quality of information provided? (to be detailed separately for each tool identified, according to the information held by the interviewee)

- How do you assess the institutional arrangements for the implementation of communication activities?

- What are the lessons learned from the implementation of OPTA PA3? What should be maintained for the current programming period? What should be eliminated? What should be changed?

Annex 3. Counterfactual evaluation

The counterfactual analysis was used to measure the impact of the helpdesk service offered by the Information Centre for Structural Instruments (funded under KAI 3.2, project SMIS 38416), so as to determine the extent to which the activity of the helpdesk has led to an increase in the level of information of the direct beneficiaries of the Centre's services, but also through the analysis of elements such as the level of user satisfaction or the usefulness of these services.

Given the multitude of sources of information available, the complexity of the application process and the applicants' lack of experience in 2007-2013, it was assumed that all those who contacted IC-SI have also used other sources of information, including the MAs' help desks, websites, consultants etc. The evaluation sought to determine their behaviour after contacting the IC-SI helpdesk, thereby validating the Centre's role in disseminating information on SI and as catalyst for the other official channels.

In other words, this served to test the assumption that the beneficiaries who contacted IC-SI no longer had to consult other sources of general information after receiving answers from IC-SI and mainly turned to official sources for specific information on calls for proposals.

The pilot-survey among the SME beneficiaries of the helpdesk services in the Centre region provided 53 valid answers. It was attempted to identify the "identical pairs" for the IC-SI beneficiaries included in the sample, from among those who did not contact the IC-SI, based on the following criteria:

- SME (same size, area of interest (SOPIEC, HRD), county, environment);
- Applied for funding under the open calls during the operation of IC-SI (SOPIEC, SOPHRD)

The databases available at MA-level did not allow to extract the necessary information to determine a control group among those who contacted MA/IB helpdesks for general information on funding opportunities, as originally intended. Therefore, the decision was made to call funding applicants under the open lines (SOPIEC and SOPHRD), identified from the databases provided by MA SOPIEC and MA SOPHRD. Following the questionnaire on the control group, it was found that SMEs in the control group could not be regarded as direct correspondents of the helpdesk beneficiaries, the latter having a higher level of interest and information acquired during the application submission process.

Segmentation of the database of IC-SI helpdesk beneficiaries

Methodology to identify the SMEs for the counterfactual analysis

The helpdesk service that operated under the project "Set-up and support for the operation of the Information Centre for Structural Instruments", SMIS code 38416,

recorded and resolved a total of 5725 tickets[33], according to the database provided by the Beneficiary.

Step 1 - SME selection

Of the 5725 tickets or questions received, a number of 2271 were addressed on behalf of SMEs, i.e. 39.67%.

Step 2 - selection of a relevant region for analysis

An analysis of the regional distribution of the 2,271 tickets submitted by SMEs provides the following statistic:

- Bucharest-Ilfov Region, 414 tickets;

- Centre Region, 1336 tickets;

- North-East Region, 108 tickets;

- North-West Region, 92 tickets;

- West Region 62 tickets;

- South Region, 104 tickets;

- South-West Region, 43 tickets;

- South-East Region, 113 tickets.

The largest share of tickets submitted, out of the overall 2271, originate in the Centre Region, namely 58.82%. We will further focus on this region, which reported the highest number of tickets submitted to the helpdesk service and, thus, being the most likely to qualify for a more detailed assessment, including the counterfactual method.

Step 3 – selection of tickets that reflect a real intention of becoming financing beneficiaries

The next step was to analyse the questions and answers to the Centre through the 1336 tickets from SMEs based in the Centre Region, so as to assess how many questions reflect the intention of accessing funds in 2007-2013. For this purpose, the analysis discarded tickets with questions such as:

- Inquiries such as: general information about the programmes and the entire process of European funds, available trainings, recommended consultants, the stage of evaluations on different programmes, level of absorption, launch schedule, status of filed objections, status of reimbursement claims submitted, list of contracts signed with beneficiaries;

- Requests for contacts of different authorities and for documents such as the Applicant's Guide;

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[33] According to the final report of the project, 5647 tickets have been recorded. However, the database has been supplemented with a number of 78 tickets, as a result of requests being resolved after the completion date of the project.

- Notifications of irregularities;

- Technical questions from beneficiaries with projects being funded - VAT, eligibility of certain expenditure, public procurement procedures, contracts, legislation;

- Issues regarding the Actionweb system;

- Questions about the NPRD, POP, EEA grants, state aid;

- In the case of questions on eligibility, the tickets to which the Centre replied that the eligibility conditions were not met have been removed, as these beneficiaries could not submit proposals;

- Questions about the opening of new calls – in this case, the answer given by the helpdesk officer was also analysed and the tickets for which the answer was that no further calls would open in 2007-2013 and that it was recommended to follow the new programming period have been discarded;

- Questions about the 2014-2020 funds.

The number of tickets falling into the above categories is 836.

The analysis kept the tickets with questions about the possibility to submit eligible projects under certain programs, for certain types of businesses (in most cases, the business type is mentioned by the information-seeker). The answers aim to guide potential beneficiaries by providing accurate information or by referring them to the websites of the managing authorities of the programmes that could be relevant for them or to the www.fonduri-ue.ro website, the sections relevant to the question.

Following the qualitative analysis of the questions and answers, 500 questions have been identified to meet the criterion of reflecting a real intention to submit a project and the possibility to obtain financing in 2007-2013.

Step 4 – selecting tickets from potential beneficiaries who were referred to SOPIEC, ROP and SOPHRD

The 500 tickets matching the segmentation criteria, accounting for 37.4% of all the tickets submitted by SMEs from the Centre Region, have received answers. Upon the answers' analysis, the cases where potential beneficiaries were referred to other operational programs than SOPIEC, ROP and SOPHRD have been discarded.

By eliminating those who were referred to other operational programmes, the final set of 201 tickets was reached, matching all the segmentation criteria mentioned, i.e. 40% of the 500 tickets previously selected.

These 201 potential beneficiaries of funds under SOPIEC, ROP and SOPHRD, SMEs from the Centre Region, will be considered for the counterfactual analysis.

The survey among the 201 potential beneficiaries resulted in 53 valid responses.

24 representatives of the economic entities having contacted the IC-SI (Information Centre for Structural Instruments) helpdesk have been selected from among these respondents.

For the comparative analysis, another 24 respondents, who had not used the helpdesk service, were selected from among the legal entities in the Centre development region.

The structure of the selected sample had the following characteristics:

TURNOVER
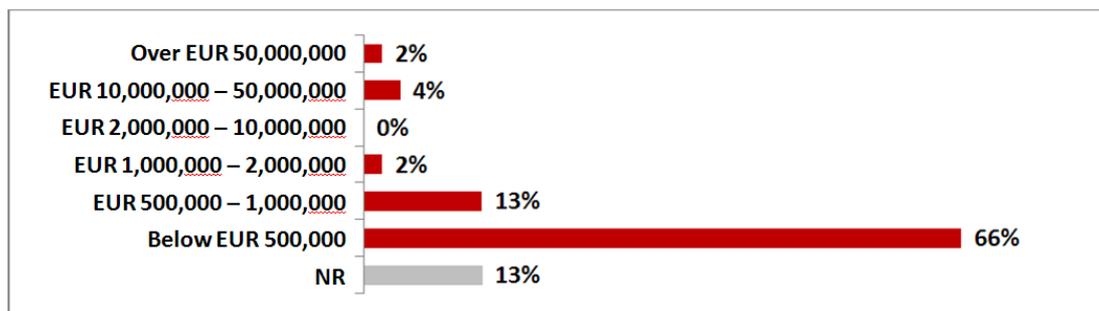
AREA
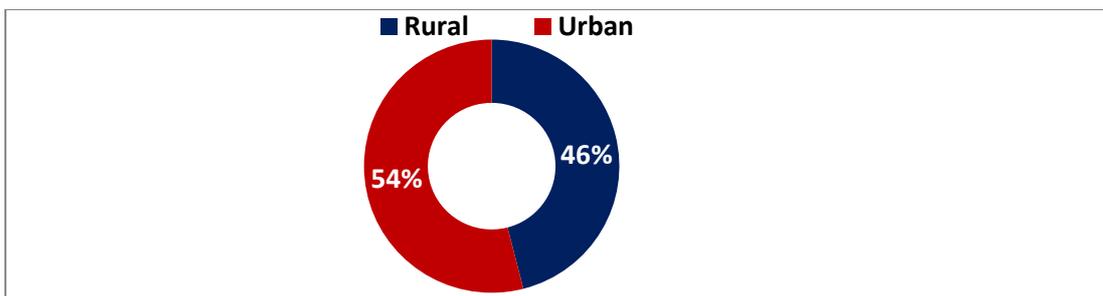
TYPE
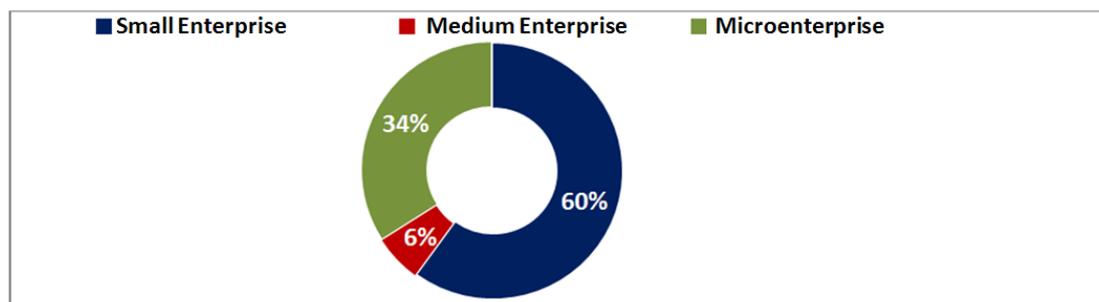
The research findings are as follows:

The significant differences in terms of the sources of information on EU-funded projects between the Helpdesk users and non-users are recorded in the case of assistance from consultants. One third (33%) of those who did not contact the Helpdesk required assistance from consultants, whereas a smaller share of those

who contacted the Helpdesk resorted to consultancy, i.e. only 12%. Another significant difference in this respect can be seen in the use of printed media as an information source; 21% of non-users use printed media as a source of information on EU-funded projects, while those who resorted to the Helpdesk did not use printed media in order to acquire such information.

The evaluation of general information activities on Structural and Cohesion Funds in terms of various aspects (Accessibility, Accuracy, Credibility, Clarity, Sufficiency, Usefulness and Efficiency) performed by Non-Users was one better than the evaluation of those who had contacted the Helpdesk. This can be explained by the fact that those who had contacted the Helpdesk went on to compare the sources of general information with the Helpdesk services, which were at a much higher standard compared to the general information campaigns and therefore, made them more demanding in their assessment.

The most frequent types of information required by both Helpdesk users and non-users is as follows: Eligibility criteria, Guidelines for preparing the application and Funded areas.

The share of those who turned to other sources of specific information stood at 44% among Helpdesk users and at 60% among non-users. These data show that the Helpdesk services have significantly reduced the number of information sources required by those having used this service.

The sources of specific information for Helpdesk users and non-users are the websites of the managing authorities responsible for the management of funds or other similar websites. There are significant differences in terms of assistance from consultants, as 42% of non-users turned to consultants for specific information, while just 12% of Helpdesk users have turned to consultants for specific information.

The POR communication programme was implemented by means of numerous communication tools in order to disseminate information on the structural funds available under ROP and on how to access them. This involved:

- Creation and regular updates to the website: www.inforegio.ro .
- Press releases upon the launch of new projects, events held, new information.
- Presence in the media: print, radio, TV.
- Organising events and inviting the representatives of the local public authorities, of the IBs in the region, the media, representatives of the business communities, embassies, private sector consultants, potential beneficiaries of the programmes etc.
- The existence of a Regio visual identity manual, adopted by all regional units; the Visual Identity Manual for the Regional Operational Programme has been developed in order to support the ROP Managing Authority, Intermediate Bodies and beneficiaries of ROP financing (local authorities, SMEs, NGOs and other institutions) in meeting their information and publicity requirements.
- Producing promotional materials to promote the visual identity
- Producing information material: a Practical Guide of the Regional Operational Programme, leaflets, brochures, electronic and digital magazines

  Communicators' brochure:
  http://www.inforegio.ro/images/Publicatii/Brosura%20Comunica torilor_mare.pdf
  Bimonthly magazine:
  http://www.inforegio.ro/images/Brosura%20POR.pdf

Communication materials and products made by MA ROP

- Financing opportunities for private-sector enterprises (February 2008)
  http://www.mie.ro/_documente/publicatii/2008/oportunitati_finantare. pdf
- Financing opportunities for local public administration (February 2008)
  http://www.mie.ro/_documente/publicatii/2008/autoritati_locale.pdf
- Financing opportunities for universities (February 2008)
  http://www.mie.ro/_documente/publicatii/2008/universitati.pdf
- Financing opportunities for non-governmental organisations (February 2008)
  http://www.mie.ro/_documente/publicatii/2008/ong.pdf
- Communication guidelines (February 2008)
  http://www.mie.ro/_documente/publicatii/2008/Ghid%20de%20comunicare _Ro_final%2013%20feb.pdf
- Brochure - Regional Operational Programme: funds for regions (December 2007)
  http://www.mie.ro/_documente/publicatii/2007/Brosura%20- %20Programul%20Operational%20Regional%20fonduri%20pentru%20regiuni .pdf
- Glossary (October 2007)
  http://www.mie.ro/_documente/publicatii/2007/glosar_termeni.pdf

- Regio leaflet (July 2007)
  http://www.mie.ro/_documente/publicatii/2007/Leaflet%20Regio.pdf
- Regional Operational Programme - short practical guide (May 2007)
  http://www.mie.ro/_documente/publicatii/2007/Ghid_practic_POR.pdf
- Organising meetings to ensure correlation between MA and IB on communication topics at the level of regional IBs.

- Organising REGIO communicators' forums.

- Organising REGIO caravans, in which experts provided explanations to the potential beneficiaries regarding the eligible areas for projects for economic and social development in the region and the required documentation in order to apply for financing from funds allocated through Regio - Regional Operational Programme, as well as through the other OPs.

- Establishing a communicators' network comprising representatives from central level, as well as from each development region, responsible for the dissemination of information about Regio - Regional Operational Programme. The network will also be open to the representatives of the civil society and of the corporate sector, in consideration of the eligible areas.

At regional level
BI-RDA:
The Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Agency has proven to conduct a highly effective communication, devised on the basis of a communication plan adopted at ROP national level, which is assimilated and adapted to regional level.
The RDA-BI communication plan:
-The strategic approach to communicating the priorities of the Regional Operational Programme – Regio is a necessity, given the obvious links between the success of regional development policy and a coherent system of information and publicity measures. These measures should reflect the content of the activities conducted under the programme and ensure a high degree of transparency in the use of funds, as well as a proper publicity of the concept of regional development.-
The objectives of the communication strategy:
- Ensure the transparent use of public funds in the region
- Establish BI-RDA as the main promoter of regional policy coordinated by the Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Council (BIRDC)
- Recognition of BI-RDA's role, responsibilities and services among the target audience
- Internal and external promotion of BI-RDA, BIRDC and the Bucharest-Ilfov region, with its entire social and economic potential.

Communication methods:

The existence of a BI Regio Communicators' Network in accordance with the communication strategy of MA ROP, comprising representatives of central and local public authorities, non-governmental organisations, professional associations, other categories of potential beneficiaries under Regio or interested in implementing the programme in the Bucharest-Ilfov region, designated in this regard by their management.

Organising events:

- **OPEN DAYS 2012 SIDE EVENT "Bucharest-Ilfov REGIOn Delivering Results"**, on 9 October 2012, the event "Bucharest-Ilfov REGIOn Delivering results". The meeting was held at 24, Rue Montoyer, Brussels. A series of events designed to promote best practices at international and European level and to ensure the transparency of funds used for the development of our region.

- **Conference 'REGIO – achievements and prospects in Bucharest-Ilfov region'**, on 12 December, 2012 at Radisson Blu Hotel (formerly Hotel Bucuresti), Atlas II hall.

- **Bucharest-Ilfov Region at Open Days 2013 – European Week of Regions and Cities**, held in Brussels by the European Commission through DG REGIO, in partnership with the Committee of the Regions.

- **Workshop - Urban Mobility, 5 June 2014** The Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Agency organised, in cooperation with the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration – MAROP and in collaboration with the team of JASPERS and EBRD experts, a workshop on urban mobility plans needed to develop the project documentation to be submitted for funding from the Regional Operational Programme 2014 - 2020 – the urban development priority axis.

- **Bucharest-Ilfov Region at Open Days 2014** – holding a series of events designed to promote best practices at international and European level and to ensure the transparency of funds used for the development of our region.

- **BI REGIO Cafe –** meetings with media representatives aiming to present the status of the projects, methods of communication used by BI-RDA for REGIO information and promotion, as well as the perception towards the programmes, development priorities etc.

- **Organising visits to project locations http://www.regioadrbi.ro/presa/vizite-la-proiecte.aspx**

- **Organising seminars on best practices**

Web pages updated and adapted to users' needs:

- www.adrbi.ro containing general information on available funds and the importance and benefits of accessing them
- www.regioadrbi.ro containing specific information on ROP projects, applicant's guides for each programme, detailed information on how to access the funds.

Creating a Facebook page, where innovations are promoted:
https://www.facebook.com/adrbi

YouTube channel with videos from the events held: https://www.youtube.com/user/ADRBI

Development and online publication of a map of contracted projects, with information about each project: http://www.regioadrbi.ro/proiecte/harta-proiecte.aspx

- Producing promotional materials to promote the visual identity

- Producing information material: leaflets, brochures

UNIUNEA EUROPEANĂ

GUVERNUL ROMÂNIEI

ROMANIA
MINISTERUL FONDURILOR EUROPENE

Instrumente Structurale
2007 - 2013

Regional Information Office Leaflet

Biroul de informare - Help-Desk

(asigurat de Departamentul Promovare Regională și Investiții)

Oferă informații generale cu privire la instrumentele structurale și îndeosebi cu privire la Programul Operațional Regional:

- Informații generale despre oportunitățile de finanțare prin REGIO: axele prioritare și domeniile majore de intervenție, criteriile de eligibilitate ale solicitanților și ale proiectelor, informații privind temele orizontale;
- oferirea pachetului informativ (sau indicarea surselor de unde se poate descărca) și pașii ce trebuie urmați pentru accesarea finanțării;
- Informații privind activitatea ADRBI și a altor instituții implicate în REGIO;
- Informații referitoare la aplicarea și respectarea prevederilor manualului de identitate vizuală (MIV).

Sprijin pentru dezvoltare de proiecte

(asigurat de Departamentul Planificare, Programare, Monitorizare și Portofoliu Proiecte)

Oferă informații tehnice privind:

- facilitarea și dezvoltarea de propuneri de proiecte prin consilierea și îndrumarea potențialilor beneficiari (autorități publice locale) în completarea cererilor de finanțare;
- documente anexă la cererea de finanțare.

Contact

București, Str. Leonida, nr. 19, sector 2

Birou de informare (Corp B, etaj 1)

Simona Curpăn, Expert
Departamentul Promovare Regională și Investiții

Tel: +4021 313.80.99
Fax: +4021 315.96.65
E-mail: helpdesk@adrbi.ro

Sprijin pentru dezvoltare de proiecte (Corp A, parter)

Gina Păun,
Șef Departament Planificare, Programare, Monitorizare și Portofoliu Proiecte

Tel/Fax: +4021 315.96.59, +4021 315.96.65
E-mail: gina.paun@adrbi.ro

Program de lucru

Luni – Joi: 9:00 – 17:00
Vineri: 9:00 – 14:30

www.inforegio.ro   www.regioadrbi.ro

Agenția pentru Dezvoltare Regională București-Ilfov

Biroul regional de informare

Primii pași în accesarea Programului Operațional Regional

Regio

REGIO - Programul Operațional Regional

REGIO este documentul strategic de programare, ce are ca obiectiv general "sprijinirea dezvoltării economice și sociale durabile și echilibrate teritorial, a tuturor regiunilor României, potrivit nevoilor specifice, cu accent pe sprijinirea dezvoltării durabile a orașelor".

Fondurile publice alocate regiunii București-Ilfov prin REGIO 2007-2013 vor sprijini investiții în cadrul următoarelor axe prioritare tematice:

Axa 1 - Sprijinirea dezvoltării durabile a orașelor - potențiali poli de creștere

Axa 2 - Îmbunătățirea infrastructurii regionale și locale de transport

Axa 3 - Îmbunătățirea infrastructurii sociale

Axa 4 - Consolidarea mediului de afaceri regional și local

Axa 5 - Dezvoltarea durabilă și promovarea turismului

Agenția pentru Dezvoltare Regională București–Ilfov (ADRBI)

ADRBI are rolul de Organism de Implementare pentru REGIO, având ca atribuții, printre altele, creșterea nivelului de informare, conștientizare și transparență în ceea ce privește finanțările europene și crearea unei imagini coerente a asistenței oferite.

Solicitanți eligibili

- Autorități ale administrației publice locale
- Asociații de Dezvoltare Intercomunitară
- Parteneriate între autorități ale administrației publice locale (și/sau între autorități ale administrației publice locale și ONG-uri/furnizori de servicii sociale)
- Furnizori de servicii sociale, acreditați în condițiile legii
- Universități de stat
- Instituții publice furnizoare de servicii de formare profesională continuă
- Întreprinderi mici și mijlocii
- Microîntreprinderi
- Instituții de cult
- ONG-uri

În cadrul activității de comunicare, unul dintre pilonii de bază este biroul de informare pentru beneficiarii potențiali și finali ai REGIO, creat prin programul de asistență tehnică pentru REGIO, domeniul de intervenție 6.2 - "Sprijinirea activităților de publicitate și informare privind Programul Operațional Regional".

Cum se pot informa potențialii beneficiari

1. Prin intermediul unei vizite la Biroul de Informare REGIO din cadrul ADR București-Ilfov: Str. Leonida, nr. 19, sector 2.

2. În urma unui apel telefonic la numărul rezervat biroului de informare generală: +4021 313.80.99.

3. Prin intermediul formularului existent pe site-ul www.regioadrbi.ro, răspunsul urmând să fie transmis în maxim 7 zile lucrătoare.

www.inforegio.ro   www.regioadrbi.ro
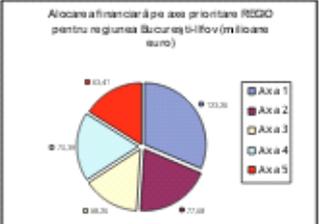
Annex 5. The link between findings, conclusions and recommendations

RECOMMENDATION I
MEF should coordinate communication activities implemented by the relevant authorities, so as to ensure a consistent dissemination of general messages on SI/ESIF. Messages will refer to the role and effects of SI/ESIF in terms of social and economic development in Romania, accessing funds, as well as ensuring a transparent use of funds in accordance with the provisions of the National Communication Strategy and other relevant policy documents for 2014-2020.

FINDINGS	CONCLUSIONS
[167] [...] ACIS/MEF, although responsible for the SCF system coordination, did not enjoy a higher position relative to the other MA or IB and did not possess the necessary levers for the actual coordination of the actions with the other MA. Therefore, the implementation cycle only saw a technical coordination, to correlate the activities implemented. This coordination has been mainly achieved within the Communication Working Group. [168]. The lack of coordination in terms of decision-making – in the context of the political factors' influence and of elements related to the need for organisational independence – prevented a uniform approach across the different OPs in terms of the applicable procedures or the type of actions implemented. [175]. [...] there is little progress in achieving the OPTA objective of ensuring a coordinated delivery of general messages on SI [348]. Upon testing this assumption, the following key findings can be drawn: [...] communication has been coordinated through Communication WG and the Communicators' Forum. Both Communication WG and the Communicators' Forum could have provided very good	Q1-[363]. **The aim of ensuring a nationally-coordinated dissemination of the general messages about SI has been partly met.** Coordination was more effective in the first part of the programming cycle, but could not be sustained throughout the implementation period. The reasons for this included the difference of vision between the Managing Authorities, changes in decision-making, issues related to the need and desire of each institution to conduct promotion independently and to present the achieved results in an independent and visible manner. Q4-[376]. **The progress in terms of ensuring a coordinated dissemination of general SI-related messages is not sustainable under current conditions**, without changing implementation mechanisms and supporting the duties of MEF/ACIS, as coordinator.. Q4-[377]. Thus, the delivery and sustainability of information activities coordination rely on **the existence of well-established hierarchical relationships between the institutions involved and the existence and well-functioning of coordination mechanisms.**. In this context, the definition and deployment of additional instruments at central and regional level are prerequisites for ensuring effective coordination.

coordination mechanisms, had they been optimally implemented.

[…] The coordination of communication activities could have been optimised in terms of entrusting ACIS/MEF with the authority required for the performance of the coordination function, as well as by means of a catalytic approach aiming to set-up and use a regional information network and to harness multiplier factors.

RECOMMENDATION II

It is recommended to create a mechanism for the proper delivery of MEF's coordination function, by concluding protocols and conducting of an effective exchange of information between the institutions managing European funds.

FINDINGS	CONCLUSIONS

[241]. Although most of the instruments were properly chosen and well implemented in many cases, the actions implemented were insufficient.

[244]. Only part of the communication tools provided have been implemented in time [...] Delays in implementing communication tools have affected both beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries (in case of delays with IC-SI and web page development), and the general public, given the delays in the preparation and launch of the campaigns and delays in the development of the website.

[197]. The surveys are comparable in time and accurately reflect the evolution in the level of general public awareness of SCF […] No sociological researches were conducted during 2007-2013 for the other target groups covered by OPTA PA3.

[281]. In terms of **the relevance of the information posted on the website for the specific target groups**, the web page does not envisage a clearly differentiated approach by target groups [...] The web page's contribution to ensuring **SCF transparency** is average [...] **The web page structure is appropriate**, although the language sometimes seems difficult to understand without prior knowledge on EU funds […] **The real-time data updates** require the development and deployment of a mechanism that can operate even under certain constraints, given the low number of staff available for such activities.

[306]**. IC-SI was launched too late** to meet the purpose of providing general information [...] The type of information and level of detail requested by those who contacted the help desk required support from the MA/IB. This generated additional efforts for MA/IB [...] IC-SI was insufficiently promoted, **its visibility being quite low** [...] **IC-SI operated for a far too short amount of time** for it to have a real impact on information activities.

[328]**. The campaigns partly led to an increase in public information and awareness of the SCF.**

[348]**. The effectiveness of the Communication WG was significantly impacted by the lack of the**

Q2-[364]. **In terms of increasing awareness of SI, the recorded progress was triggered by the actions under OPTA 2007-2013 only to a small extent.**

Q2-[370]. Another factor behind this low contribution is the fact that the selected institutional mechanisms to coordinate communication activities, although appropriate, could not be optimally implemented due to external causes, related to the general institutional framework of the SI implementation. The effectiveness of the mechanisms (e.g. Communication Working Group) was significantly impacted by the lack of levers required to implement the decisions within ministries.

Q5-[378]. Ensuring the proper functioning of the coordination mechanisms set out in the National Communication Strategy 2007-2013 – i.e. Communication Working Group and Communicators' Forum – can facilitate effects. In this respect, it is essential to implement the legal basis (Decision no. 398/2015 establishing the institutional framework for the coordination and management of European Structural and Investment Funds and ensuring the continuity of the institutional framework for the coordination and management of Structural Instruments 2007-2013), so as to ensure MEF's coordination function and relationships with other institutions.

levers needed to implement the decisions in ministries.

[358]**.** MEF/ACIS has not been proactive in participating to communication activities organised by other public or private entities [...]Overall, **MEF/ACIS' involvement brought added value to the communications and ensured the legitimacy of the information provided**, however without trying to maximise or enhance the effects of these actions.

RECOMMENDATION III

MEF should conduct general information activities through proper planning and a detailed analysis of information needs, covering both the general public and the main target-groups (potential beneficiaries, media representatives, promoters of information), so as to improve the relevance of the conveyed information.

FINDINGS	CONCLUSIONS

FINDINGS

[241]. In general, the communication tools have been well chosen in terms of needs and purpose, both in terms of SI-related communication and OPTA-related communication;

Moreover, the variety of tools offered a wide range of implementation options, so, from this perspective, there are no longer any obstacles in meeting the objectives according to the original planning.

The tools were appropriately carried out, for the most part. In terms of SI communication, the main challenges were to make the IC-SI and website (www.fonduri-ue.ro) operational. Also, the Extranet was not done.

Overall, although most of the instruments were properly chosen and well implemented, in many cases, the actions implemented were insufficient.

[265] It is worth to take note that local authorities are among the top ranking sources of information, in conjunction with their place in the preferences for information on SCF, which – although declining (from 33% in 2010 and 35% in 2011 to 22% in 2013) – indicates, however, a significant potential to use these institutions as multipliers of information. Such an approach is all the more justified, given that, when asked about institutions that could better inform about the SCF, 36% of respondents said they preferred to be informed by local administration (a preference which remains relatively constant over time), while only 15% of them indicated the Government, through ministries.

[244]. Only part of the communication tools provided have been implemented in time [...] Delays in implementing communication tools have affected both beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries (in case of delays with IC-SI and web page development), and

CONCLUSIONS

Q2-[363]. **In terms of increasing awareness of SI, the recorded progress was triggered by the actions under OPTA 2007-2013 only to a small extent.**

Q2-[364]. Thus, the communication tools, although properly chosen in view of the identified needs and the defined purpose, have proven insufficient in order to cover general information needs. Moreover, communication tools were not implemented on time

Q2-[365]. Surveys, although representative of the level of awareness of SCF and comparable in time, have not been used consistently in order to adapt communication tools to the needs of the different target-groups in order to increase the effectiveness of communication.

Q2-[366]. At the same time, the www.fonduri-ue.ro website was only moderately effective during the observed period in terms of increasing awareness on FSC and increasing transparency on the use of funds.

Q2-[367]. The Information Centre [...] has failed to fulfill its role as hub of information on SI, given that the contribution of the centre's helpdesk service to increasing awareness among potential applicants for grants could not be accurately determined.

Q2-[368]. OPTA-funded publicity campaigns, although effective, have only partially led to increased information and awareness of SCF among the population.

Q2-[370]. Furthermore, MEF/ACIS' involvement in communication activities organised by other entities, although providing added-value and legitimacy to the information conveyed, did not contribute to maximizing or enhancing the effects of these actions (thus, the absence of a multiplier effect of information).

the general public, given the delays in the preparation and launch of the campaigns and delays in the development of the website

[197]. The surveys are comparable in time and accurately reflect the evolution in the level of general public awareness of SCF [...] No sociological researches were conducted during 2007-2013 for the other target groups covered by OPTA PA3

[281]. In terms of **the relevance of the information posted on the website for the specific target groups**, the web page does not envisage a clearly differentiated approach by target groups [...] The web page's contribution to ensuring **SCF transparency** is average [...] **The web page structure is appropriate**, although the language sometimes seems difficult to understand without prior knowledge on EU funds [...] **The real-time data updates** require the development and deployment of a mechanism that can operate even under certain constraints, given the low number of staff available for such activities

[306]**. IC-SI was launched too late** to meet the purpose of providing general information [...] The type of information and level of detail requested by those who contacted the help desk required support from the MA/IB. This generated additional efforts for MA/IB [...] IC-SI was insufficiently promoted, **its visibility being quite low** [...] **IC-SI operated for a far too short amount of time** for it to have a real impact on information activities.

 [328]**. The campaigns partly led to an increase in public information and awareness of the SCF.**

[358]**.** MEF/ACIS has not been proactive in participating to communication activities organised by other public or private entities [...] Overall, **MEF/ACIS' involvement brought added value to the communications and ensured the legitimacy of the information provided**, however without trying to maximise or enhance the effects of these actions

[294]**.** However, the consultations indicated the fact that IC-SI has not been very

Q3-[373]. The multitude of information sources sometimes led to **adverse effects, such as confusion among the public about the official sources of information** (the www.fonduri-structurale.ro website was/ is still regarded by part of the beneficiaries as the official MEF/ACIS information website), and the **provision of incorrect/incomplete information**

Q4-[374]. The progress in terms of increasing SI awareness is sustainable under current conditions. Nevertheless, the effects of communication actions could be enhanced by better planning, a better knowledge of the needs of the relevant public and by ensuring appropriate administrative capacity.

Q5-[378]. The interventions envisaged under PA3 of OPTA 2007-2013 have been appropriately chosen, but they were not implemented on time and were insufficient. In this context, it is necessary to **plan and implement interventions in an integrated, consistent and sustained manner, in order to ensure a more effective communication process.** Interventions must be based on a good knowledge of the information needs of the various target-groups.

Q5-[379]. Supporting the overall operation of an information network at regional/ county level may facilitate the desired effects in terms of increasing general information on SI/ESIF, whilst creating the necessary means (ensuring increased visibility of the information office, both online and within the structure where activity is to be conducted, well-trained and properly sized staff; access to a database containing the necessary information, updated in real time; ensuring proper communication with SI/ESIF managing and implementing authorities etc.).

Q5-[381]. Another optional mechanism that could be considered is to create dedicated "one-stop-shop" structures (for SMEs or other types of beneficiaries) aiming to provide specific information about financing under the various Operational Programmes. Should it be decided to support such a mechanism, a thorough analysis on the accuracy and consistency of the provided information needs to be conducted. At the same time, it will be necessary to clarify any issues regarding the accountability for the information provided by the staff of these structures and acknowledging this perspective by the relevant authorities (MA, IB).

visible, being known in particular through the www.fonduri-ue.ro website developed under the project. The impact of IC-SI is considered to be low.

[295]. IC-SI's regional visibility has also been reduced, despite the need for additional - general and specific - information at this level. As indicated by the consultations conducted, regional bodies and their respective actions provide important sources of information, given that those concerned do not benefit from a (regional/county) hub to provide the necessary information, other than ad-hoc information. In this context, the events organised by the central authorities enjoy greater interest at local level, especially in the absence of alternative sources of information

[348]. […] **The effectiveness of communication activities could have been optimised in terms of entrusting ACIS/MEF with the authority required for the performance of the coordination function, as well as by means of a catalytic approach aiming to set-up and use a regional information network and to harness multiplier factors.**

RECOMMENDATION IV

MEF should support the operation of an information dissemination and multiplication system through partnerships with relevant entities and media involvement, in order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of communication

FINDINGS	CONCLUSIONS

[289]. Moreover, the planned regional/local centres (of IC-SI) have not been established, so beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries from the regions are contacting either the MA/IB or the central IC-SI directly. In 2013, it was attempted to launch a grant scheme to support existing regional centres (under the responsibility of the County Councils, RDAs or the EuropeDirect centres of the ECR in Romania), but this project failed to be approved by the minister.

[290]. One of the options for the future operation of IC-SI is to also cover the regional level, via the county Chambers of Commerce and Industry. These would ensure both services for the general public (general information, contact with MA, accessing and querying the database) and the provision of specialised information, as a one-stop-shop for companies. The advantages of this option lie in the fact that the existing infrastructure could be used and it could involve human resources who already have knowledge of SCF.

[295]. IC-SI's regional visibility has also been reduced, despite the need for additional - general and specific - information at this level. As indicated by the consultations conducted, regional bodies and their respective actions provide important sources of information, given that those concerned do not benefit from a (regional/county) hub to provide the necessary information, other than ad-hoc information. In this context, the events organised by the central authorities enjoy greater interest at local level, especially in the absence of alternative sources of information.

[348]. […] **The coordination of communication activities could have been optimised in terms of entrusting ACIS/MEF with the authority required for the performance of the coordination function, as well as by means of a catalytic approach aiming to set-up and use a regional information network and to harness multiplier factors.**

[358]. MEF/ACIS has not been proactive in participating to communication activities organised by

Q2-[370]. Furthermore, MEF/ACIS' involvement in communication activities organised by other entities, although providing added-value and legitimacy to the information conveyed, did not contribute to maximizing or enhancing the effects of these actions (thus, the absence of a multiplier effect of information).

Q3-[373]. The multitude of information sources sometimes led to **adverse effects, such as confusion among the public about the official sources of information** (the www.fonduri-structurale.ro website was/ is still regarded by part of the beneficiaries as the official MEF/ACIS information website), and the **provision of incorrect/incomplete information**

Q5-[380]. The creation and operation of a system for information dissemination and multiplication, which may consider partnerships with relevant entities (non-governmental and private organisations, with experience and results in this area), as well as media involvement may increase communication effectiveness. At the same time, the deployment of a grant scheme may help promote SI/ESIF and their role in social and economic development.

other public or private entities [...] Overall, **MEF/ACIS' involvement brought added value to the communications and ensured the legitimacy of the information provided**, however without trying to maximise or enhance the effects of these actions
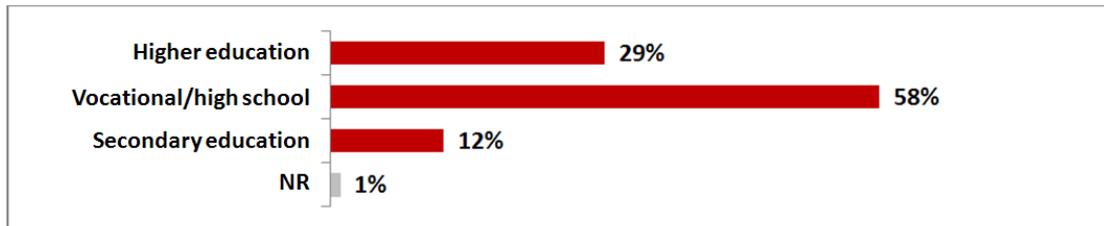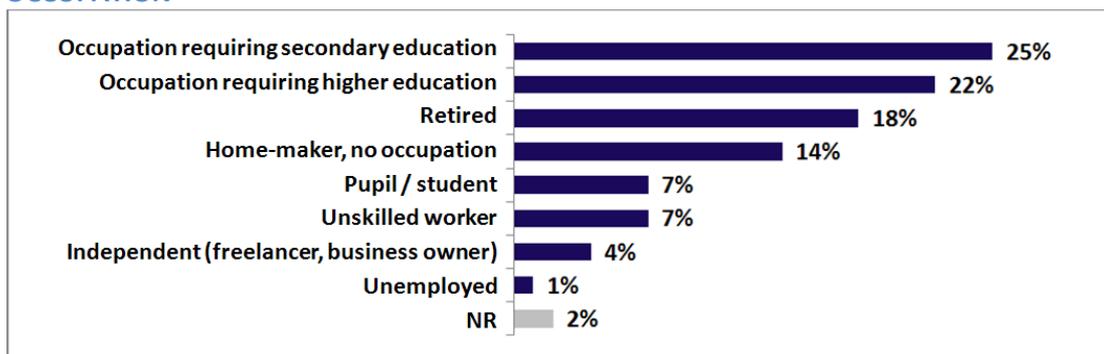
Annex 6 The population survey

In order to gain information about the progress in achieving the objective of increasing awareness of SI, it was necessary to analyse data from 2006-2015. Since MEF only held data for 2006-2013, the project involved a population survey to obtain data updated to 2015.

Thus, a representative population survey was conducted among 1200 respondents. The structure of the sample selected has the following characteristics:
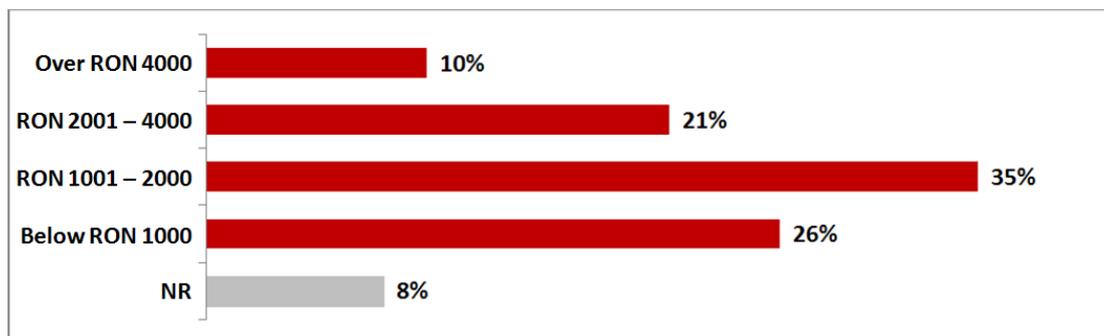
EDUCATION

Higher education	29%
Vocational/high school	58%
Secondary education	12%
NR	1%

OCCUPATION

Occupation requiring secondary education	25%
Occupation requiring higher education	22%
Retired	18%
Home-maker, no occupation	14%
Pupil / student	7%
Unskilled worker	7%
Independent (freelancer, business owner)	4%
Unemployed	1%
NR	2%

INCOME

Over RON 4000	10%
RON 2001 – 4000	21%
RON 1001 – 2000	35%
Below RON 1000	26%
NR	8%

CIVIL STATUS

Civil Status	Percentage
Married	62%
Unmarried	26%
Widow	6%
Divorced	4%
Consensual union	1%
NR	1%

DEVELOPMENT REGION

Development Region	Percentage
South-Muntenia development region	16%
South-East development region	15%
North-East development region	15%
Bucharest-Ilfov development region	13%
North-West development region	12%
Centre development region	11%
West development region	9%
South-West Oltenia development region	9%

AGE

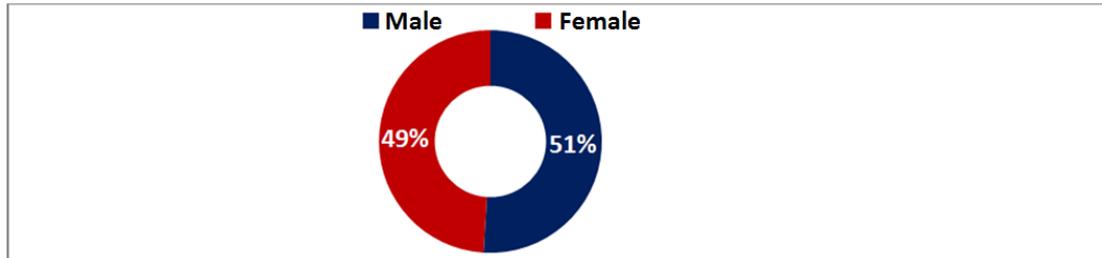| Age	Percentage
18 – 35 years	36%
36 – 45 years	24%
46 – 55 years	18%
56 – 65 years	15%
over 65 years	7%

The research findings are as follows:

The level of awareness of Structural and Cohesion Funds, assessed by the question "Since 2007, Romania has received funding from the European Union for projects with an economic and social impact. Have you ever heard about the Structural and Cohesion Funds?", has increased from 33% in 2010, 40% in 2011, 48% in 2013 to 51% in 2015. The general level of awareness of European funds stands at 77% in 2015.

Structural and Cohesion Funds notoriety recorded an upward trend over the years, throughout several waves of sociological studies (2011 – 33%, 2012 – 40%, 2013 – 48%, 2015 – 51%).

The share of those who have heard about the Structural and Cohesion Funds is 51%.

The level of awareness of at least one EU-funded project is 62%.

A comparison of the Structural and Cohesion Funds notoriety with that of projects financed from European funds indicates that 51% of respondents had heard about the Structural and Cohesion Funds and 26% had not heard about this type of funds, but knew examples of projects financed from European funds. These data show a notoriety of 77% of EU funds among interviewees (notoriety derived from the intersection of the terms "Structural and Cohesion Funds" and "projects financed from European funds").

Those who stated having heard about the Structural and Cohesion Funds were asked what available funding programmes they knew of. The best known funding programmes are: 33% Funds for agriculture, 29% Funds for infrastructure, 15% Funding for human resources, 11% SOP HRD, 5% SAPARD, 4% REGIO.

The areas to which the EU-funded projects have contributed are, according to the interviewees: 36% Transport Infrastructure, 35% Education, 30% Rural development and fisheries, 27% Urban development, 23% Support for the corporate sector, 22% Environment, 18% Research-development, 15% Social inclusion.

More than half of respondents (57%) consider the contribution of EU funds to economic and social development in Romania as important or very important.

The self-declared level of information on projects financed from European funds of those who participated in this survey is as follows: 3% - very well informed, 19% - fairly informed, 33% - not very informed, 44% - very little informed and 1% did not respond.

The respondents' interest in EU-funded projects is high, 65% declared themselves as interested or very interested.

The top sources of information on projects funded by the European Union are as follows: 65% TV, 31% Internet, 19% Discussions with other people, 16% Printed media, 13% Radio, 3% Brochures/leaflets, 2% the Ministry of European Funds.

The top sites accessed for information on Structural Instruments are: 15% News websites, 9% other websites, 7% the Ministry of European Funds website, 5% Private websites, 3% Websites of the Managing Authorities of EU funds.

Over a fifth (22%) of respondents said they were interested to seek information on the Structural and Cohesion Funds.

The top-ranking information of interest on Structural and Cohesion Funds are as follows: Areas funded, Guidelines for the preparation of the application, Guides on the proper implementation of projects, Institutions managing funds, Eligibility criteria, Level of funds' absorption in Romania.

In the opinion of respondents, the organisations with the most important role in providing general information to the population about the Structural and Cohesion Funds are: 45% Consultants in the field of European funds, 25% the Ministry of European Funds, 14% Local authorities, 7% Managing Authorities.

The interviewees' level of awareness of the visual elements associated with projects financed from European funds is 25%.
The level of awareness of the Structural Instruments logo is 34%.
The level of awareness of the European Union flag is 95%.
The level of awareness of at least one EU-funded project is 62%.

According to respondents, Structural and Cohesion Funds support the development of Romania 80%, Beneficiaries must be permanently up-to-date with current opportunities available to them and the rules to comply with 88%, European funds do not replace investment from national funds, but complement them 78%.

The perception on EU funds fraud is as follows: 57% consider to a large or very large extent that there is fraud in the management of European funds and 67% believe to a large or very large extent that there is fraud in the spending of funds within the institutions implementing the projects.