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2 Introduction

2.1 Background and context

This report is part of the Ex-ante Evaluation of the Partnership Agreement (PA), commissioned by the Ministry of European Funds (MEF) to the Consortium Ecorys Nederland – LIDEEA Development Actions srl. The Ex-ante Evaluation of the PA 2014-2020 is delivered under the framework agreement no. 23/22.08.2011 for the evaluation of structural instruments during the period 2011-2015, lot 1 – evaluations, subsequent contract no. 5.

One of the three objectives of the Ex-ante Evaluation of the PA is

- To ensure the adequate administrative capacity of the authorities and beneficiaries for a good implementation of the CSF funds.

According to the ToR, the evaluators are asked to respond to the question: “Is the authorities’ and beneficiaries’ administrative capacity sufficient for an appropriate implementation of CSF⁴ funds?”

A first assessment of the administrative capacity of the authorities and beneficiaries was prepared and finalised in September 2013. The report aimed to inform the Ministry of European Funds on what is the current level of the administrative capacity, assessed on a selection of the most relevant dimensions and criteria, highlighting what worked and what did not work in the system, which weaknesses have to be addressed, and which strengths could be used in building the administrative capacity for the 2014-2020 period.

The present report is an update of the first assessment, aiming at reflecting the progress in strengthening the administrative capacity of the authorities and beneficiaries and the measures undertaken since 2013, when the first assessment was made.

Both reports presents comparatively the level of the administrative capacity in 2013 and 2014 using a selection of key dimensions, qualitative and quantitative indicators as well as a graphic representation.

The report includes the checklist of the administrative capacity of the authorities and beneficiaries as well as a database with the key indicators for the most relevant dimensions and variables of the administrative capacity, with the two measurements made in 2013 (for the first assessment) and in 2014 for the update of the assessment.

2.2 Evaluability of the administrative capacity of the beneficiaries and the authorities

The assessment of the administrative capacity of the authorities and beneficiaries is a very complex assignment, due to the large number of processes, institutions and factors that influence it. Therefore in this section we explain the frame, scope and limitations of the assessment that should be considered in interpretation and further using the conclusions and recommendations.

The general frame for the administrative capacity assessment is set by the European Funds and Investments Regulations 2014 2020 and by the regulations applicable for 2007-2013 programming

⁴ We will use in this report the term European Structural and Investment Funds for all European funds providing financial resources for National Strategic Reference Framework, National Rural Development Programme, Operational Programme for Fishery 2007-2013 and the Partnership Agreement 2014-2020.



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period. Referring to the 2014-2020 programming period we mention the Art 15 of CPR specifying that the PA has to ensure arrangements for effective implementation of the ESI Funds including an assessment of whether there is a need to reinforce the administrative capacity of the authorities involved in the management and control of the programmes and, where appropriate, of beneficiaries as well as, where necessary, a summary of actions to be taken for that purpose.

The **authorities responsible** for the efficient implementation of the ESI Funds are all partners involved in the programming and later in the implementation of the operational programmes. According the CPR Title 1, Article 5, the **partners include** competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities as well as economic and social partners, and concerned bodies representing civil society, environmental partners, nongovernmental organisations and bodies responsible for promoting equality, and non-discrimination.

In the sense of this assessment **“authorities” means** all organisations falling in the category described above and **“beneficiaries” means** any organisation involved in the preparation or implementation of a project funded from EU funds.

Because the scope of the assessment is to provide support to MEF to make value judgements and recommendations regarding the aspects related to administrative capacity of the authorities and beneficiaries of ESI Funds **the work is limited to the functions related to the policy/programme/project cycle** management and will not assess the authorities/beneficiaries organisations as a whole entity.

Similarly to the first assessment report, the present one looks at both programming periods 2007-2013 and 2014 -2020, which at this stage already overlap, in order to identify the specific challenges and weaknesses that have to be addressed in each case. This is particularly useful considering the fact that for 2014-2020 a new institutional architecture was created and readiness institutions (with structures, human resources and systems) is a challenging issue at the start of the PA and operational programmes (OPs) implementation.

At the date of the update of the assessment, the 2014 -2020 PA was approved by the European Commission and already in implementation. Only two 2014-2020 OPs, Operational Programme for Competitiveness (OPC) and Operational Programme for Technical Assistance (OPTA) are approved and ready for implementation. The other OPs are in advanced stages of preparation and are expected to be approved by mid-2015

The update of the 2013 assessment is less extensive, from the point of view of the methodologies used, than the previous one. While the first assessment built up on an extensive number of studies and evaluations, a collection of evidences available in the organisations from internal analyses, completed and verified with information collected through interviews, online surveys and focus groups, the update was limited to a documentary study of studies, reports, technical assistance projects available since the previous assessment and a survey applied to representatives of managing authorities, intermediate bodies and coordinating structures in MEF. This option was justified by the fact that the new structures for the 2014-2020 OP are in an incipient phase more effort for an assessment at this stage would not add value to conclusions. The assessment of the beneficiaries' capacity was limited to identifying the progress in implementation of the measures planned /undertaken, studies and evaluations performed within TA contracts.

In instances where there has been an unavailability of good quality data and evidence, the findings are limited to opinions or to more general conclusions, e.g. previous conclusions maintained because there are not evidences of change and will require further analysis.



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In the case of the survey and based on previous similar experiences, the limited participation – 47 responses - imposed a precautionary interpretation of the results, mentioned upon each respective case.

The delay between the release of the reports and the period to which they refer is another aspect that has to be considered in the interpretation of the conclusions. For example the 2013 Annual Report of the Court of Accounts was released in January 2015 and does not refer to 2014, but it is still relevant for the update because it identifies progresses since the 2013 assessment.

The report is composed of five chapters

The first chapter is the **Executive Summary** presenting in a concise manner the assessment scope and method, the key findings of the analysis the conclusions and the recommendations for strengthening the administrative capacity of the authorities and the beneficiaries.

Chapter 2 is the **Introduction**, consisting of the background and context information, the scoping and the limitations of the assessment

Chapter 3, the **Approach and Methodology** inform about the methods applied in this second assessment, referring to a large extent to the first assessment methodology;

Chapter 4 comprises the **Assessment of the authorities** and includes a short presentation of the way the methods have been applied, the analysis with the findings of the current capacity of the authorities, the conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to the **Assessment of the beneficiaries** and includes similarly to the previous chapter the practical aspects of the data and information collection, the analysis, the findings regarding the current capacity of the beneficiaries, the conclusions and recommendations for the improvement of the beneficiaries capacity.

The methodology, findings, recommendations and conclusions of the update of the assessment are integrated throughout the text of the report in order to avoid repetition and in the same time to reflect the progresses.