

1. Introduction

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

This report is the ex-ante evaluation of the Technical Assistance Operational Programme 2014-2020, its purpose being to ensure the consistency between the Operational Programme and the European, national strategies, to assess the intervention logic of the Programme, the programme performance and the strategic contribution.

Based on the terms of reference, these broad themes are addressed through 11 evaluation questions as presented in the table below.

Table 1: Evaluation themes and questions

External Consistency	Intervention Logic of the Programme
<p>EQ 1.1 To what extent is there consistency between the selected thematic objectives, the appropriate priorities and objectives of the programme, on one hand, and on the other, the Common Strategic Framework, the Partnership Agreement and the specific recommendations addressed to each country on the grounds of Art. 121 par. (2) of the Treaty and the relevant recommendations of the Council, adopted on the grounds of Art. 148 par. (4) of the Treaty?</p> <p>EQ 1.2 To what extent is there consistency with other relevant instruments (policies, strategies)?</p>	<p>EQ 2.1 How is the internal consistency of the programme ensured?</p> <p>EQ 2.2 Are the proposed support forms the most appropriate?</p> <p>EQ 3. To what extent is the allocation of financial resources consistent with the Programme objectives?</p> <p>EQ 4. To what extent the indicators proposed in the program are relevant and clear?</p> <p>EQ 5.1. How will the estimated outputs contribute to results?</p> <p>EQ 5.2. To what extent are the results influenced by external factors, including by other instruments?</p> <p>EQ 5.3 Are quantified target values of the indicators realistic, having in mind the funding available?</p> <p>EQ 6. To what extent are the selected indicators and intermediate and final targets (milestones) for the performance framework adequate?</p>
Programme Performance	Strategic contribution
<p>EQ 7. To what extent are the human resources and administrative capacity adequate to manage the Programme?</p> <p>EQ 8. To what extent are the monitoring and data collection procedures adequate to perform evaluations?</p>	<p>EQ 9. To what extent the programme contributes to the European Union strategy for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, considering the selected thematic objectives and priorities, taking into account the national and regional needs?</p> <p>EQ 10. Which is the relation of the Programme with other relevant instruments (policies, strategies)?</p> <p>EQ 11.1 Are the planned measures to promote equal opportunities between men and women and to prevent discrimination adequate?</p> <p>EQ 11.2 Are the planned measures to promote sustainable development adequate?</p>

Programme overview

The OPTA is structured into three priority axes that are consistent with the identified needs, and focus respectively on beneficiaries' capacity and information and communication (Priority Axis 1), the

strengthening the regulatory, procedural framework of ESIF and the information management system (Priority Axis 2) and human resources policy and salaries reimbursement (Priority Axis 3).

The first priority axis is divided into two specific objectives:

- ▶ SO 1.1 refers to strengthening the capacity of beneficiaries of ESIF projects, and two actions are envisaged for it: one that provides horizontal training and one that provides horizontal assistance, both for ESIF beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, and specific training for OPTA, LIOP and COP.
- ▶ SO 1.2 concerns the effective communication and transparency regarding ESIF and EU Cohesion Policy, and it is also composed of two actions: one regarding information dissemination activities and information and publicity activities regarding ESIF and OPTA, LIOP and COP, and one referring to activities targeted at the development of partnership culture for the coordination and management of ESIF.

The second priority axis includes two specific objectives:

- ▶ SO 2.1 refers to the regulatory, strategic and procedural framework for the coordination and implementation of ESIF, and two actions are aimed to contribute to it: one that refers to activities for the improvement of framework and conditions for the coordination and control of ESIF, and for OPTA, LIOP and COP management, and the second one which refers to evaluation function and evaluation culture at ESIF level.
- ▶ SO 2.2 refers to the information management system and it consists of one action that includes activities for the development, improvement and maintenance of SMIS 2014+, MySMIS 2014 and of other related applications.

The third priority axis has one specific objective.

- ▶ SO 3.1 concerns the development of an improved human resources management policy that ensures adequate stability, qualification and motivation for the staff and will be implemented through two actions: one is the implementation of a horizontal human resources policy and development of management capacity, and the other one refers to reimbursement of salary costs staff in the system for ESIF coordination, management and control, and management system of OPTA, LIOP and COP.

Ex-ante evaluation process

This report is based on the second official version of the Operational Programme Technical Assistance received by the Evaluator on 24 October 2014, and earlier assessments of draft versions of the OP that were provided between March and July 2014 on the existing sections of the programming document.

The *first feedback* of the Evaluator was provided on 07 April 2014 based on the first draft version of the Operational Programme Technical Assistance made available by the Ministry of European Funds on 19 March 2014. The report covered mainly the aspects of external consistency with European and National strategies, and the needs analysis included in the first section of the Programme.

A second revised version of the Programme was received by the Evaluator on 30 April 2014 and the *second feedback* was provided on 19 May 2014, covering the Intervention Logic and a benchmarking analysis with Member States concerning Technical Assistance actions implemented in the current programming period and planned for the future one.

On 15 June 2014 the evaluators received the third version of the OPTA, based on which the draft ex-ante evaluation report was elaborated and submitted on 27 June 2014. This report covered all the evaluation questions included in the Terms of Reference.

On 10 July a revised version of the OP was received, based on which the second version of the draft ex-ante evaluation report was elaborated and submitted on 21 July 2014. This report covered all the evaluation questions included in the Terms of Reference and was aligned with the first official version

of the OP submitted to the EC on 6 August 2014.

The assessments included in this report are therefore based on the iterative evaluation process and references are made, in the report, to earlier assessments and comments provided by the ex-ante evaluator.

Report Structure

The report is structured according to the evaluation themes and questions included in the Terms of Reference, which are briefly summarized as follows:

- ▶ **Overview** of the ex-ante process and methodology (Chapter 2).
- ▶ **External consistency** with European and National Strategies as well as other Operational Programmes (Chapter 3).
- ▶ **Intervention Logic** of the Programme in terms of internal consistency (Chapter 4), appropriateness of financial allocations (Chapter 5) and system of indicators (Chapters 6, 7, 8).
- ▶ **Programme Performance**, including Human resources and administrative capacity (Chapter 9) and Adequateness of the procedures for monitoring and data collection (Chapter 10).
- ▶ **Strategic contribution** to Europe 2020 (Chapter 11) and other relevant instruments (Chapter 12) and treatment of horizontal themes (Chapter 13).

Each chapter provides a brief overview of the methodology planned in the Inception Report, of the evaluation activities performed, tools used and of the evaluation findings. Conclusions and recommendations are presented at the end of each question as well as in a summary table of included in Chapter 14.

Overview of the evaluation process

This report was elaborated by the following evaluation team: Klaudijus Maniokas, Darius Zeroulis, Indre Motijunaite, Vytautas Krasnauskas, Michele Scataglini and Iulia Băiașu. The duration of the evaluation project was 18 months, between 11 November 2013 – 10 May 2015. The initial execution period of six months was extended in order to adjust to the programming process steered by the Ministry of European Funds and the European Commission, until the approval of the Operational Programme and elaboration of the Evaluation Plan and Guideline on Indicators according to EU requirements and guidance provided by the Ministry of European Funds. The total budget of the ex-ante evaluation contract was 346,987.73 RON, excluding VAT (430,253.63 RON with VAT).

The cut-off date of the evaluation process is 31 December 2014 for the ex-ante evaluation report, the date at which the evaluation team submitted the report based on the OPTA version approved by the EC. For the Evaluation Plan and the Guideline of Indicators the cut-off date is 27 April 2015, the date when the Final ex-ante evaluation report was submitted to the Beneficiary.

Preliminary versions of the Evaluation Report (including the Evaluation Plan and the Guideline of Indicators) were submitted throughout the evaluation process, and they were presented in detail in the Intermediary Progress Report no. 1 (submitted in May 2014) and the Final Progress Report (submitted in May 2015). An overview of the draft evaluations report submitted and their correspondent versions of the operational programme is presented in the table below:

Version of the Evaluation Report	Version of Operational Programme Technical Assistance 2104-2020
<i>Concept note regarding the Operational Programme, received on 12.02.2014. This document presented the strategic orientation of OPTA</i>	<i>Feedback Report with respect to the concept note regarding OPTA strategy</i>
<i>Version 1 of OPTA from 19 March 2014. This version included Sections 1 and 2 of the OP and allowed answering the EQ</i>	<i>Feedback Report no. 1, regarding Sections 1 and 2 of the OP included in the first version of OPTA</i>

1.1, 1.2 și 2.	<i>Benchmarking analysis with other Member States</i> , regarding technical assistance interventions in 2007-2013 and initiatives for 2014-2020, submitted on 5 May 2014
<i>Version 2 of OPTA</i> from 28 April 2014. This version presented an elaborated version of Section 2 and allowed a more detail answer for EQ2	<p><i>Feedback report no. 2</i>, referring only to the detailed logic of intervention included in the revised version of the OPTA, as requested by the Beneficiary</p> <p><i>Punctual feedback regarding the actions proposed for the specific objectives</i>, based on the revised version of OPTA actions received on 16 May 2014. The feedback was submitted on 5 June 2014</p>
<i>Version 3 of OPTA</i> from 15 June 2014 was the first full version of the OP which allowed answering all EQs	<i>Draft Ex-ante evaluation report</i> – the first full report, based on the complete version of the OP received by the evaluation team in June 2014. This report answers all evaluation questions, and was submitted on 27 June 2014
<i>Version 4 of OPTA – the first official version of the OP</i> , from 10 July 2014 was a revised version of the OP received in June, and it was the first official version submitted to the European Commission for approval in August 2014	<i>Revised draft ex-ante evaluation report</i> , based on the revised OP received by the Evaluation team on 10 July 2014. This ex-ante evaluation report was submitted on 21 July 2014 and accompanied the first official version of OPTA
<i>Revised version of the first official version of the OP</i> received on 20 October 2014. This version was the second submitted to the EC, and approved by the EC on 18 December 201	<i>Ex-ante Evaluation Report</i> based on the second official version of the OP, received by the evaluation team on 20 October 2014. This version of the OP was approved by the EC. The report was submitted on 31 October 2014.