

Proposed Model for Evaluation of the Romanian National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013 and Operational Programmes during their implementation

(as approved by EWG members on 12th of April 2006)

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to propose a model for the evaluation of the 2007-2013 Romanian National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) and its Operational Programmes. This model is restricted to evaluation during the period of implementation of the OPs, and thus does not deal with either ex-ante or ex-post evaluation of the OPs. The paper uses as its basis the "Evaluation Standards" approved by the Evaluation Working Group.

The key points of the Standards document are that:

- The evaluation function shall be clearly visible in the MA's structure, the Organisation chart or Internal Rules giving details of the unit, sector, coordinator, network members and persons responsible.
- Evaluation shall be clearly identified in the list of each MA's operations so that the financial and human resources set aside for evaluation can be easily identified.
- Each MA shall define the tasks, responsibilities, organisation and procedures for running, consulting and informing the evaluation function in coordination with the Evaluation Unit of the MACSF.

Annex 1 includes the relevant articles from the latest draft EU Council Regulation on the ERDF, ESF and Cohesion Fund, which provides the overall guidance for Member States (as well as Romania and Bulgaria) on the future structure of the Structural Instruments implementation system.

2. Objectives of the Evaluation

The objective of evaluation is to "make an assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfillment of objectives, developmental efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors."¹ The draft EU Council Regulation states that "evaluations shall aim to improve the quality, effectiveness and consistency

¹ OECD/DAC (1998), Review of the DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance.

of the assistance from the Funds and of the strategy and implementation of the operational programmes.”

3. Proposed Evaluation Model

1. Ongoing evaluations during the period of implementation of the NSRF and the OPs shall be one of three types – i) interim, ii) ad hoc, or iii) with a cross-cutting theme.

Interim evaluations – All OPs will be subjected to two interim evaluations during implementation of the OP, in 2009 and 2012. The first interim evaluation will serve to the improvement of the efficiency of the OPs' implementation to that point, focusing on issues such as the speed of the project pipeline, etc., while the second interim evaluation will focus more towards the preparation of the next programming period (although both evaluations will not be restricted to these two tasks). The interim evaluations will be managed by the evaluation function of the individual Managing Authorities and will be conducted externally, by independent evaluators.

2. **Ad-hoc evaluations** – The focus of ad-hoc evaluations will be restricted to individual OPs. They can address either implementation or management issues of an individual Priority or Key Area of Intervention, or can be “thematic,” by looking at a particular theme as it affects that OP, for example, the impact of the OP's implementation on ethnic minorities, rural development, etc. Ad hoc evaluations will be managed by the evaluation function of the individual Managing Authorities and will be conducted externally, by independent evaluators. They will be triggered wherever:
 - a. monitoring data reveals a departure from goals initially set for any Priority or Key Area of Intervention.
 - b. according to the OP Evaluation Plan proposed by the Managing Authority;
 - c. a request is made by the Monitoring Committee;
 - d. a request is made by the Evaluation Working Group.

Quality controlling of the internal evaluation reports will be done by the MACSF Evaluation Central Unit.

The indicative number of ad hoc evaluations to be carried out over the lifetime of the Operational Programme is 2.

3. **Evaluations with a cross-cutting theme** – will examine issues at the NSRF level and thus will examine issues across a number of Operational Programmes. They will be commissioned to external consultants by the Evaluation Central Unit of the Managing Authority for Community Support

Framework. These evaluations will examine the evolution of all or a group of Operational Programmes in relation to Community and national priorities. They might also examine particular management issues across all OPs.

After consultation with DG Regio, the number and components of the strategic evaluations to be commissioned to external consultants by the MACSF Evaluation Central Unit will be submitted by the Evaluation Central Unit to the National Coordination Committee for Structural Instruments for approval.

4. General

1. For each evaluation, internal or external, Terms of Reference should be drafted. The Manual of Procedures for Evaluation shall provide general guidelines for drafting ToRs.
2. Template Terms of Reference for evaluations to be managed by the MA evaluation functions shall be drafted by the MACSF Evaluation Central Unit, following discussion within the Evaluation Working Group. Each Managing Authority will then adapt the Terms of Reference to suit their evaluation purpose.
3. Each OP should have an Evaluation Steering Committee, which should convene for each evaluation exercise. The core membership of the Committee will remain the same for the duration of its existence, with additional members to be invited on to the Committee as suits the MA for each evaluation.. All Evaluation Steering Committees will include members from the MACSF Evaluation Central Unit and the head of the evaluation function in each MA.

5. Staffing at the MACSF Evaluation Central Unit and the Managing Authorities

The MACSF and the Managing Authorities should ensure that an adequate number of staff is identified and assigned to the evaluation function.

At the MACSF level, the staffing complement of the ECU will be increased in 2006, to allow the ECU fulfil its mandate to direct the evaluation activity for both pre-accession and post-accession programmes.

At the Managing Authority level, the evaluation function should be assigned to an individual, stand-alone, MA evaluation unit, ensuring that the unit does not have other tasks related to audit, monitoring, etc. A workload analysis should be carried out in order to identify the appropriate number of personnel who will be

charged with management of the evaluation function, but at least 2 staff should be assigned full-time to the Unit from January 2007.

When selecting staff, MAs should ensure that:

- Staff possess an adequate level of experience required (this could involve familiarity and involvement with evaluations under the Phare IE system, prior involvement with appraisal of programmes within the public sector, or, at the very least, completion of the proposed MA training course);
- Staff are available to attend and complete all stages of the proposed MA training plan;
- Job descriptions of the staff selected to perform the evaluation function clearly state all the responsibilities that managing the evaluation function within the MA entails.

6. Budget

The MACSF Evaluation Central Unit evaluation tasks shall be financed from the Technical Assistance OP. Managing Authorities for the other 7 OPs shall ensure that adequate resources are provided for the management of the evaluation function. The OP Technical Assistance Priorities shall fund not only the evaluations to be commissioned, but also other costs related to supplying the evaluation function, such as participation of staff in conferences, etc. (it should not include salaries of staff). Indicative estimates of the cost of financing the evaluation function will be sent to Managing Authorities in a separate document.

7. Evaluation Procedures

Evaluations will draw on several data sources, including monitoring reports produced on a decentralised basis by the Managing Authorities, interviews with implementing authorities, and other evaluation methodologies (including surveys to task managers, etc.). The evaluation process will be based on 3 principle stages:

- i. An OP Evaluation Plan;
- ii. Operational procedures to be applied to each evaluation;
- iii. Follow-up procedures to implement evaluation recommendations.

i. The OP Evaluation Plan

An Evaluation Plan for each OP will be proposed by the MA and agreed upon with the MACSF Evaluation Central Unit, prior to submission to the OP

Monitoring Committee for its approval. This process should take place in late 2006/early 2007.

The OP Evaluation Plan should identify the number and type of the evaluations that the Managing Authority plans to carry out over the lifetime of the OP, and should be reviewed on an annual basis.

The template of the OP Evaluation Plan will be prepared by MACSF Evaluation Central Unit, who will prepare an NSRF Evaluation Plan, to be submitted to both DG Regio and the National Coordinating Committee for approval, on the basis of all the MA Evaluation Plans received from the MAs.

ii. Operational Procedures to be Applied During Each Evaluation Exercise

Once the OP Evaluation Plan is approved, the main procedural steps that should be followed in the course of an evaluation exercise are:

- Convening the Evaluation Steering Committee;
- Designing the ToR and selecting the evaluator;
- Organising the Kick-off meeting;
- Drafting/revising the draft report;
- Approving the final report;
- Publishing the report.

Procedures for each stage of this process will be elaborated in the Manual of Procedures for Evaluation, to be developed by the MACSF Evaluation Central Unit, during the second trimester of 2006. The Procedures will detail the chronology, and assign tasks to all stakeholders involved

iii. Follow-up of Evaluation Findings and Recommendations

As part of the final draft, the evaluator will prepare a recommendations table as a stand-alone document to be distributed with the report. The Monitoring Committee shall decide whether to accept, reject or adapt each recommendation. For recommendations that are approved by the Monitoring Committee, a systematic follow up will then ensue to ensure that the report's recommendations are taken up. This shall require:

- A debriefing meeting organised by the relevant OP MA, to focus on the means and the timing of implementing the recommendations;
- Submission of the follow-up table to the relevant institutions (including DG Regio);
- Examination of implementation progress at the next Monitoring Committee meeting.

8. Methodology, Format & Presentation of Evaluation Reports

The basic evaluation criteria to be examined in interim evaluations will remain the same as those used in the Phare IE process: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The evaluation questions to be addressed in ad hoc evaluations, as well as in evaluation with a cross-cutting theme, will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

With regards to presentation of the evaluation reports, the main sections of the report shall be:

- the executive summary
- the main text
- conclusions and recommendations.

Evaluation reports should be distributed to:

- the relevant OP Monitoring Committee
- the DG Regio Romania Country Team;
- the DG Regio Evaluation Unit;
- other units of the Managing Authority;
- implementing authorities;
- the General Director of the MACSF;
- the MACSF Evaluation Central Unit.

9. Summary roles of the MACSF Evaluation Central Unit and the Managing Authority Evaluation Units

Table 1 below outlines the role and main responsibilities of both the MACSF Evaluation Central Unit and the Managing Authority evaluation units during implementation of the NSRF and the OPs.

Table 1 – Summary roles of the MACSF Evaluation Central Unit and the Managing Authority Evaluation Units During Implementation of the NSRF and the OPs

MACSF Evaluation Central Unit evaluation role and responsibilities	OP Managing Authorities evaluation role and responsibilities
Direct, manage and coordinate the evaluation activity for the NSRF as a whole	Manage the evaluation activity for the Operational Programme, under the guidance of the MACSF Evaluation Central Unit
Act as chief Romanian focal point with the European Commission on evaluation issues	Draft an OP Evaluation Plan, to be reviewed annually, which will set out all the evaluation activities to be undertaken during implementation of the OP
Organise evaluation capacity building activity, in the form of training seminars, drafting guidelines, determining procedures, etc., for Managing Authority evaluation units and for itself	Attend and contribute to meetings of the Evaluation Working Group on behalf of the Managing Authority
Convene, chair and call meetings of the Evaluation Working Group	Participate in training and evaluation capacity building activities as organised by the MACSF Evaluation Central Unit
Finalise the NSRF Evaluation Plan, on the basis of the Plans submitted by the MA evaluation units	Convene, chair and act as Secretariat to the OP Evaluation Steering Committees
Guide, assist and coordinate the work of the MA evaluation units	Complete the Terms of References for evaluations to be carried out at the OP level, on the basis of templates received from the MACSF Evaluation Central Unit
Draft the template for the Terms of References to be provided to the MA evaluation units for evaluations to be carried out at the OP level	
Perform quality controls of all evaluation reports at all levels	

Draft the Terms of References and manage evaluations with a cross-cutting theme	
Convene, chair and act as Secretariat to the NSRF Evaluation Steering Committee (for evaluations with a cross-cutting theme)	
Attend meetings of the OP Evaluation Steering Committees as a member, and advise the Committees on evaluator selection, quality controlling of evaluation reports, methodological issues, etc.	

Annex 1 – relevant Articles from the draft EU Council Regulation

Articles 45-47 of the UK Presidency's 21 December, 2005 Compromise proposal to the Commission's 2004 "Proposal for a Council Regulation Laying Down General Provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund,"² detail the General provisions (Art. 45), the Responsibilities of the Member States (Art. 46) and Responsibilities of the Commission (Art. 47) with regards to evaluation of programmes funded by the Structural Instruments.

Article 45, General provisions

1. Evaluations shall aim to improve the quality, effectiveness and consistency of the assistance from the Funds and the strategy and implementation of operational programmes with respect to the specific structural problems affecting the Member States and regions concerned, while taking account of the objective of sustainable development and of the relevant Community legislation concerning environmental impact and strategic environmental assessment.
2. Evaluation can be of a strategic nature in order to examine the evolution of a programme or group of programmes in relation to Community and national priorities. It can be of an operational nature in order to support the monitoring of an operational programme. Evaluations are carried out before, during and after the programming period.
3. Evaluations shall be carried out under the responsibility of the Member State or the Commission, as appropriate, in accordance with the principle of proportionality laid down in Article 11bis. Evaluations shall be carried out by experts or bodies, internal or external, functionally independent of the authorities referred to in Article 58 b) and c).³ The results shall be published according to the applicable rules on access to documents.
4. Evaluations shall be financed from the budget for technical assistance.
5. The Commission shall provide indicative guidance on evaluation methods, including quality standards, in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 104 (2).

Article 46, Responsibility of Member States

² (COM(2004)492 final, 14 Jul 2005.

³ Article 58(b) "a certifying authority...designated by the Member State to certify declarations of expenditure and applications for payment before they are sent to the Commission." Article 58(c), "an audit authority...provided that it is functionally independent of the managing authority and the certifying authority, designated by the Member State for each operational programme and responsible for verifying the effective functioning of the management and control system..."

1. The Member States shall provide the resources necessary for carrying out evaluations, organise the production and gathering of the necessary data and use the various types of information provided by the monitoring system.

They may also draw up, where appropriate, under the “Convergence” objective, in accordance with the principle of proportionality set out in Article 11bis, an evaluation plan which shall present the indicative evaluation activities the Member State intends to carry out in the different phases of the implementation.

2. Member States shall carry out an *ex-ante* evaluation for each operational programme under the “Convergence” objective. In duly justified cases, taking into account the proportionality principle as set out in Article 11bis, and as agreed between the Commission and the Member State, Member States may carry out an *ex ante* evaluation for more than one operational programme.

For the “Regional competitiveness and employment” objective, they shall carry out either an *ex-ante* evaluation covering all the operational programmes or an evaluation for each Fund or an evaluation for each priority or an evaluation for each operational programme.

For the "Territorial cooperation" objective, the Member States shall jointly carry out an *ex-ante* evaluation covering either each operational programme or several operational programmes.

Ex-ante evaluations shall be carried out under the responsibility of the authority responsible for the preparation of the programming documents.

Ex-ante evaluation shall aim to optimise the allocation of budgetary resources under operational programmes and improve programming quality. It shall identify and appraise the disparities, gaps and potential for development, the goals to be achieved, the results expected, the quantified targets, the coherence, if necessary, of the strategy proposed for the region, the Community value-added, the extent to which the Community’s priorities have been taken into account, the lessons drawn from previous programming and the quality of the procedures for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and financial management.

3. During the programming period, Member States shall carry out evaluations linked to the monitoring of operational programmes in particular where the monitoring of programmes reveals a significant departure from the goals initially set or where proposals are made for the revision of operational programmes, as referred to in Article 32. The results shall be sent to the

monitoring committee for the operational programme and to the Commission.

Article 47, Responsibility of the Commission

1. The Commission may carry out strategic evaluations.
2. The Commission may carry out, at its initiative and in partnership with the Member State concerned, evaluations linked to the monitoring of operational programmes where the monitoring of programmes reveals a significant departure from the goals initially set. The results shall be sent to the monitoring committee.
3. The Commission shall carry out an *ex-post* evaluation for each objective in close cooperation with the Member State and managing authorities.

It shall cover all the operational programmes under each objective and examine the extent to which resources were used, the effectiveness and efficiency of Fund programming and the socio-economic impact.

It shall be carried out for each of the Objectives and shall aim to draw conclusions for the policy on economic and social cohesion.

It shall identify the factors having contributed to the success or failure of the implementation of operational programmes and identify good practice.

Ex-post evaluation shall be completed by 31 December 2015.