ROMANIA

Advisory Services Agreement on Improving Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity in the Context of EU-funded Programs in Romania (2021–2027) (P174133)

Output 1b

Report on institutional, procedural, and legislative assessment

Annexes 1-6

March 2021

"Project financed from European Structural and Investment Funds"

Acronyms

AA	Audit Authority
AIR	Annual Implementation Report
BEP	MEIP Evaluation Unit
BS	Beneficiaries' Survey
CBC	Cross-border cooperation
CEF	Connecting Europe Facility
CF	Cohesion Fund
CFR SA	Romanian Railroads Society (*Romanian abbreviation*)
CLLD	Community-led local development
CNAIR	National Company for Road Infrastructure Administration
CORINA	Core Indicators for Absorption
CPR	Common Provision Regulation
CPA	Certification and Payments Authority
CRD	Council for Regional Development
DGOIT	General Directorate for Intermediate Transport
DPMPAC	Directorate for Program Management, Project Appraisal and Contracting
DGPCS	General Directorate for Programming and System Coordination
DGPEC	General Directorate for European Competitiveness Programs
DGPECU	General Directorate for European Human Capital Program
DGPECA	General Directorate for European Programs in Administrative Capacity
DGPECP	Directorate for Program Management, Project Appraisal and Contracting
DGPECP	Program Management, Project Contracting, and Evaluation Directorate
DGPEIM	General Directorate European Programs Large Infrastructure
DGPEMP	Directorate for Program Management, Project Appraisal and Supervision
DMP	Project Monitoring Directorate
DR	Regional Directorate
DRI	Regional Directorates of Infrastructure
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
EC-DG REGIO	European Commission - Directorate-General REGIO Regional and Urban Policy
ECC	Evaluation Coordination Committee
PEOEIB	European Investment Bank
eMS	Electronic Monitoring System
EP	Evaluation Plan
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
GD	General Directorate
GDETCP	General Directorate for European Territorial Cooperation Programs
HRD	Human resources development
IB	Intermediate Body
IB-R	Intermediate Body - Research
ICT	information and communication technology
IP	Investment Priority

IS	Institutional Stakeholders' Survey
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
JASPERS	Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions
JS	Joint Secretariat
KII	Key informant interview
LR	Literature review
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MEIP	Ministry of European Investments and Projects
ME	Ministry of Education
MRID	Ministry of Research, Innovationa and Digitalization
MEWF	Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests
MDPWA	Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration
MS	Member State
MTI	Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
NA	National authorities
NEET	Not in education, employment, or training
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
OI-PSI	Intermediate Body for the Promotion of the Information Society
IB-T	Intermediate Body for Transport
OP	Operational Program
OPAC	Operational Program Administrative Capacity
OPDP	Operational Program Support for Disadvantaged Persons
OPTA	Operational Program Technical Assistance
PA	Priority Axis
PEO	Programs Evaluation Office
PF	Performance Framework
PNRR	National Recovery and Resilience Plan
POC	Operational Program Competitiveness
PODD	Operational Program Sustainable Development
POIM	Operational Program Large Infrastructure
POS	Sectoral Operational Program
POSDRU	Human Resources Development Sectoral Operational Program
POT	Operational Program Transport
RAS	Reimbursable Advisory Services
RDA	Regional Development Agency
RDI	Research, development, and innovation
RegAS	Romanian State Aid Register
RIB	Regional IB
ROF	Regulation for Organization and Functioning
RO-HU	Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary
RO-BG	Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria
RPM	Project Implementation Responsible
RPMP	Responsible for Program Management and Monitoring
SC	Scientific Committee
SCAP	Strategy for Strengthening the Public Administration
SECP	Service for Project Appraisal and Contracting
SFC	System for Fund Management
SGP	Service for Program Management
SGPECP	Service for Program Management, Project Appraisal and Contracting

SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
SMP	Service for Project Monitoring
SO	Specific Objective
SSP	Service for Project Supervision
TA	Technical Assistance
ToR	Terms of Reference
UWWTD	Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive
WB	World Bank
YEI	Youth Employment Initiative

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A. Large Infrastructure Program (POIM)

POIM Monitoring System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Description and Program Structures

1. **The POIM is the largest OP of the 2014–2020 programming period, with a budget of €9 418.53 million, representing 38 percent of the budget of the 19 OPs.** The program's scope encompasses the transport, environment, and energy sectors. In 2019, it was added to finance medical equipment related to the COVID-19 crisis.

2. **(DR) The Romanian legislation has carefully implemented at a formal point of view the provisions of the EU regulations**, including the main M&E principles and objectives described in EC Regulation no. 1313/2013 and complementary ESIF regulations.

3. **The MEFI is responsible for setting up OP MAs and their M&E processes.**[1] POIM is managed by a MEFI Directorate, the DGPEIM,[2] which has the role of Managing Authority (POIM MA) and supervises the activity of subordinated structures, namely the IB for Transport (IB-T)[3] and the Regional Directorates of Infrastructure (DRIs) within the MEFI's organizational structure.

4. **The MEFI ROF[4] describes the institutional set-up, roles, and functions of the POIM MA departments.** The monitoring activities are shared between two Directorates within the DGPEIM, and two categories of IBs:

- For the entire program, by the Program Management, Project Contracting & Evaluation Directorate (DGPECP).[5] The responsibilities of this Directorate that relate to M&E are mostly covered by the Office for Program Management. This office ensures the macro-monitoring of the program (physical progress, performing framework, results and achievement indicators, financial progress, risk of decommissioning) and drafting centralized periodic reports regarding the evidence of POIM projects, contracted amounts, requested reimbursement requests, and payments performed, based on information transmitted by the relevant structures from the POIM MA.
- At the project level by the Project Monitoring Directorate (DMP),[6] together with the eight DRIs and the IB-T. The DMP is the specialized structure responsible for monitoring the implementation of projects financed by POIM 2014–2020 and verifying the institutional capacity of the beneficiaries. The DMP consists of three organizational structures, namely the Environment Projects Monitoring Office, the Transport Projects Monitoring Office, and the Energy Projects Monitoring Office.

5. **The DRIs are MEFI structures responsible for the technical and financial verification of pre-financing applications, payments, and reimbursement**, including onsite verification and monitoring of projects financed from POIM Priority Axes (PAs) 3–8.[7]

6. **The General Directorate for Intermediate Transport (DGOIT) is the MTI department that embodies the IB-T and has as its main objectives the transport projects management** (PA 1 and PA

[1] Governmental decision (HG) no. 398 of May 27, 2015, establishing the institutional framework for the coordination and management of the European Structural and Investment Funds and to ensure the continuity of the institutional framework for the coordination and management of structural instruments.
[2] Directia Generala Programe Europene Infrastructura Mare: DGPEIM/ENG. General Directorate for Large Infrastructure European Programs.
[3] Which operates within the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure (MTI).
[4] ROF—Internal Rules of Operation.
[5] Direcţia Gestionare Program, Evaluare şi Contractare Proiecte: DGPECP/ENG. DPMPAC.
[6] Direcţia Monitorizare Proiecte (DMP, ENG DPM).
[7] MEFI ROF — November 2020, Art. 189 (1).

2) fulfilling and functions for project selection and evaluation, project implementation monitoring, technical monitoring, verification of invoices, and verification of the implementation of public procurement[8]. The IB-T fulfills all delegated functions of the POIM MA for the relevant, detailed by both the delegation agreement and the Ministry's internal regulation. The IB-T acts with a Performance Framework defined by Annex 2 of the MEFI-MTI Delegation Agreement of July 26, 2016. The interlocutor of the IB-T in POIM MA is the Transport Projects Monitoring [9]Office in MEFI, which controls capacity and supervises the activities of the [10]. [11]

7. **Within DGPEIM, some offices still implement projects for the former programming period for POS-Transport and POS-Environment.** According to MEFI rules of organization, officers can operate simultaneously within such units and the other units implementing the 2014–2020 projects, ensuring the continuity of program management of large projects.

8. **(DR) Overall management at the OP level—Monitoring Committee. The POIM Monitoring Committee (MC) is a national partnership structure, without juridical personality, with a strategic decision-making role in the OP implementation process**. The composition of the MC is established by the MA in compliance with the principles of partnership and representativeness. Five ministries have representatives in the MC, together with the National Regulatory Authority for Community Services of Public Utilities and Competition Council. MC is also composed of several representatives of public syndicates and civil society, such as the National Union of County Councils in Romania; Association of Romanian Municipalities; Romanian Airports Association; Romanian Water Association; WWF Association Danube Carpathian Programs Romania; and Romanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. EC-DG REGIO, EIB, EBRD, and JASPERS are participants with a consultative role, and as observers, there are 26 entities, among which are the AA, organizations from the transport/energy/environment sectors (CNADNR, CFR, METROREX, TRANSGAZ, TRANSELECTRIA, National Administrator "Romanian Waters"), and regulatory authorities such as ANRE.

9. **(DR) Beneficiaries' profiles are diverse.** Within the transport sector (PA 1–2), there are only 16 beneficiaries of major importance (such as CFR SA or CNAIR). For the other sectors (PA 3–9), the beneficiaries are much more diversified (over 200): regional water operators, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and private companies with activity in the field of environment, public hospitals, and the administrative-territorial units (counties, cities, villages); regional or national administrations (such as the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve or the National Meteorological Administration), public institutions (such as the Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forestry or the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations or County Councils) are also counted among beneficiaries.

10. **(DR) Key procedures regarding M&E can be classified into two categories:**

- The procedures describing the cycle of monitoring, from data collection to data dissemination. There is a procedure for transport projects (mainly related to the management of IB transport)[12] and another for the non-transport projects [13] (managing the relation with the MEFI DRIs). One other related key procedure involves establishing the processes for monitoring

[8] In accordance with the provisions of GD no. 398/2015 for establishing the institutional framework for coordination and management of European Structural and Investment Funds and to ensure continuity of the institutional framework for coordination and management of structural instruments 2007–2013.

[9] In Romanian, "Serviciul Monitorizare Proiecte Transport."

[11] In accordance with the MEFI internal process, "PO.DGPEIM.41 Operational procedure for monitoring transport project."

[12] PROCEDURA OPERAȚIONALĂ MONITORIZAREA PROIECTELOR DE TRANSPORT—Cod PO.DGPEIM.41.

[13] PROCEDURĂ OPERAŢIONALĂ MONITORIZARE PROIECTE POIM—Cod PO.DGPEIM.28.

project sustainability.[14] Monitoring of the program (macro-monitoring) is the subject of a major procedure.[15]

- The procedures supporting specific outputs, such as MC preparation, preparing project selection grids, guidelines for beneficiaries, or other types of reports.

11. **Processes regarding monitoring are not totally homogeneous within the MA.** There are some slight differences between transport project monitoring and non-transport project monitoring (environment, energy),[16] mirroring different organizations in charge and types of projects. There is no monitoring plan for POIM, providing a vision of the whole monitoring organization and a justification for the way the system was designed.

12. **Also, there are no global indicators of performance related to the activity of monitoring itself**, across the whole system, nor are objectives set for its improvement. This may be a disadvantage when trying to assess, for instance, the needs in terms of human resources, the needs for training, or mitigating any internal issues related to the monitoring activity in particular. POIM puts scant emphasis on the program's overall logic, which is not supported by any type of intersectoral indicators.[17] On the contrary, there is a performance contract between the POIM MA and the IB-T with some performance indicators related to monitoring; for instance, the obligation to make at least one field inspection per month per project.[18]

Specific Monitoring Tools

- (DR, KII) SMIS is the main IT instrument used for monitoring projects. Data collection starts at the applicant level using the module MySMIS2014+, which is the SMIS client interface. If, following the evaluation process, the project has been selected and contracted, these become reference data and the starting point in the project's implementation. All elements monitored at project level need to be validated in the IT system (SMIS) by the project officer.
- ARACHNE is an integrated IT tool developed by the EC whose objective is to support MAs in their administrative controls and management checks in the area of ESIF.
- The Romanian State Aid Register (RegAS) was developed by the Competition Council in order to meet one of the criteria to comply with the horizontal conditionality on state aid. RegAS offers state aid providers the ability to verify the eligibility of state/de minimis aid beneficiaries. The use of the RegAS system is mandatory for the project officer.
- CORINA (Core Indicators for Absorption) is a monitoring system (featuring Excel files) that is used by MEFI on a daily basis for various data (e.g., payments, data about applicants, etc.). Among its multiple facilities, the system generates reports showing new projects for their repartition to the project officers. It also generates relevant data sheets and graphs necessary for the absorption indicators.

Assessment of the monitoring system's institutional and procedural framework

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

13. **POIM inherited the two 2007–2013 operational programs for transport (POS-T) and environment (POS-E), augmented by some energy-related projects.** The whole system of following up on projects and activities seems to mirror this former division. Two administrative systems for project monitoring are moving in parallel, and coordinated by POIM MA, which is in charge of

[14] MONITORIZARE PRIVIND DURABILITATEA PROIECTELOR—Cod PO.DGPEIM.39.
[15] PO.DGPEIM.32 Gestionare Program (Program Management).
[16] AP9 (Hospital equipment to face COVID-19 crisis) is included in this category.
[17] However financial reallocation from one major sector to the other occurred with no particular issue. The POIM was modified 6 times, according to interview with MA.
[18] Delegation Agreement of 22.07.2016.

eliminating the inconsistencies of the approach.[19] In addition to the IB-T, eight DRIs support non-transport projects. The DRIs were IBs during the 2007–2013 period (according to MEFI ROF), but they no longer have this status. They are currently integrated into the MEFI, but still represent an intermediary level of management. However, their attributions are not separated from the MEFI as clearly as are the IB-T attributions. However, this fragmented organization should disappear in the next programming period, with the creation of an OP specialized in transport development (POT) and an OP for environment and energy efficiency (PODD–OP for Sustainable Development).

14. **(KII) The Partnership Agreement identified several potential IB to support the implementation of the POIM, however, after having evaluated the administrative capacities of the Ministries involved, only the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure was confirmed as IB. Following the COVID-19 crisis, the EC accepted a reallocation of resources**,[20] and an additional PA (no. 9) was created to provide emergency response. It was quickly implemented and intends to provide support (mainly medical and protective equipment) to benefit health institutions facing the consequences of the crisis. It is implemented under the supervision of the Ministry of Health. This introduces a new logic in POIM management, based on a flexible response to the health crisis, which strongly differs from infrastructure development. However, POIM MA considers this addition (PA 9) easy to manage, as the projects are limited in size and complexity, and their cycle of approval and implementation is clear and flexible in terms of monitoring.

15. **(DR) The institutions in charge of implementing the program have received a clear, written mandate that defines their core responsibilities and the boundaries of their action**. The MEFI ROF[21] describes the exact attribution of each directorate and office and the procedures describing their role in the monitoring process. There is a detailed agreement between the MEFI and the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure describing the delegation of responsibilities to the IB-T, and how the fulfillment of IB obligations is monitored.

16. **(DR, KII) However, both DGPEIM and IB-T are also implementing other programs**, both ESIF and non-ESIF. The DGPEIM is implementing the soon ending ISPA program, and also managing the end of the POS-T and POS-E. For the transport sector the IB-T is also managing the Connecting Europe Facility, in addition to POIM and POS-T, and is preparing to implement the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which according to the institution, should be implemented on a tight schedule and represents strong additional workload. There is a potential risk that the ESIF management specialization will be diluted, as EC intervention programs are multiplying. (KII) Some officers also worry about the possible lack of communication and overlaps with other public policy schemes (PNRR) during the course of creation.

17. **(KII) The management of phased projects was an excellent test for the capacity of monitoring units** to assess the exact status of ongoing projects at the time of their allotment in all points of view (financial, technical, legal) and their schedule of implementation. Efficient monitoring activities are clearly considered essential to the management of such projects, as they provide the capacity to reshape interventions on the basis of reliable data. However, there were several issues related to this type of project, mentioned by the EC's 2018 audit.[22] Clarifying indicators' calculations on such points, as well as associating the management of large projects for both past and present periods with the same directorate (and ideally having the same officers in charge), seems a good way

[19] As is clearly mentioned in the procedure for sustainability: "Any inconsistencies that may occur during the monitoring and reporting of sustainability, as a result of the existence of dissonant provisions in the two procedures [led by the IB-T and the DRI], will be regulated by instructions issued at the level of the POIM MA."

[20] COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION of 7.7.2020.

[21] Internal Rules of Operation.

[22] Audit no. REGC214RO0125. 29/10/2019, LIOP; For example, 06: IB Transport is asked to review all funding applications for phased projects, to identify contracts (lots) that were completed in the 2007–2013 programming period and to exclude their impact on the target values of the [2014–2020] performance indicators. The latter measure must be taken in cooperation with the beneficiaries to ensure the correct reporting of performance indicators in the progress reports.

to overcome the issue.

18. **(KII) The MC does not appear to play an active role in the monitoring cycle,** but rather comes in at the end of the process, delivering some statement of the situation, and with outputs directed toward the EC, but not influencing current monitoring activities. However, there is a more significant dialogue through the sub-committees in charge of transport and environment that can be considered more relevant.

19. **(DR) Procedures—analysis of data collection process.** Data is collected through a bottom-up **approach**. Data collection starts with the applicant, who introduces data in MySMIS2014+ when submitting the financing request. This data becomes reference data when the project is approved and contracted. At the implementation level, clear deadlines are provided for submitting relevant data, both for the beneficiary and MA/IB staff. Progress reports drafted by the beneficiaries are submitted based on a schedule established at the project level.

20. **Data collected at the project level is comprised of the following**: contractual management (procurement amendments and penalties/authorizations, such as construction permits loans); financial planning of the project (forecast reimbursements, status of reimbursements); modification of financing agreement; progress on outputs and results indicators; economic information, such as income generated by the project; state aid conformity; publicity; and alignment with horizontal policies. This information (which includes an update of indicators determined by the financing contract) is updated monthly or quarterly (IB-T), and reports should be addressed by beneficiaries to the upper level (IBs like IB-T or DRI and the three MEFI monitoring offices for transport, energy, and environment).

21. **(DR) Verification and monitoring—the stakeholders of project monitoring and their work processes.** For non-transport projects, a project officer is appointed at the level of one of the project monitoring offices (environment or energy) and a project administrator in the territorially relevant DRI, and supported by a technical coordinator. The project administrator receives the project progress report from the beneficiary, who submits it to DRI within 10 working days from the end of each month, accompanied by the supervisor/consultant report and, as appropriate, with revised implementation schedules for contracts. In case of unclear material in the progress report, the beneficiary is asked to review it or send additional documents. The term for verifying the monthly progress report is 10 working days from the date of its registration in the DRI, which is suspended if clarifications are requested by the officers, until the date of communication of the answer by the beneficiary. After drawing up a report checklist, the project administrator adds the updated data to the project progress report in the Implementation Module within the MySMIS2014+ IT system. Subsequently, the project officer receives the progress report and checklist completed by the administrator, and analyzes and verifies the data entered by the project administrator into the Implementation Module, within the MySMIS2014+ system. A technical coordinator in DRI (in the Monitoring and Technical Verification Department) also verifies and validates this data. This three-stage verification is likely to generate delays. The process is similar for transport projects, with double-checking from the MEFI transport projects monitoring office and IB-T. Once approved, data are circulated within the monitoring unit. The head of service within the DMP POIM is responsible for aggregating the data/information at the level of PA/SO based on project data from the project officer. Usually, this information is transmitted monthly to the POIM program management office.

22. **(DR) Inspections.** The exact scope and frequency of site inspections are agreed upon at the project's micro-management level (project officer, project administrator) and involves the beneficiary, contractors, and consultant in charge of project supervision. Monitoring reports are used to identify potential areas of risk.

Design of Indicators

23. **There are a reasonable number of indicators in POIM, given the diversity of interventions and the size of projects.** Output indicators are generally better defined than results indicators, as they are linked to precise, ongoing projects and other data to calculate, such as physical or financial progress. Currently there is an instruction (no. 21) containing the output indicators (2019), but it no longer covers results indicators. According to POIM MA, following an audit mission conducted by DG REGIO in 2019, the EC recommended revising the results indicators calculation. Consequently, the manual related to results indicators needs to be redesigned, with TA support.

24. **Some results indicators should better mirror the main actions of the PA**. For instance, PA5.2 aims to support the allocation of new equipment, training, and IT services for emergency entities reacting to major disasters such as floods, landslides, droughts, forest fires, earthquakes, and chemical and nuclear accidents. However, the chosen results indicator only captures the reaction time of the emergency services, measured in minutes.

25. **It would be useful if indicators tracked some selected intermediate results along the infrastructure cycle** (for instance, documentation prepared, contracts signed, construction permits obtained). In Romania, numerous delays occurred in the past during project preparation and gathering authorization, as well as the tender process, especially regarding claims—which also occurs with the contractor after the construction contract is awarded. The output indicators only capture a project's final results (completed infrastructure). These data are already collected (in the first tables of the beneficiary reports) but not reflected by any indicator.[23]

26. **Some results indicators for environmental protection need updates**. Regarding the results indicators in the wastewater sector, some updates were necessary and technical assistance is provided by World Bank to support this process (the ongoing WB-MEWF project), e.g., redefining the list of agglomerations with over 2,000 population equivalent. With regards to the water supply and sanitation, the POIM MA considers the results indicator target value (2023) to be overestimated, versus the obligations/commitments at the level of POIM project/program related to the achievement of the water infrastructure that will allow the population to further connect to WSS systems.

27. **The recent first POIM Environment Evaluation Report[24] recommended that the MA consider defining the results indicators for the 2021–2027** period across various territory levels, not just at the national level. This proposal could be useful, as the post-2020 results indicators will be closer to the operational level, compared to the existing 2014–2020 indicator framework.

28. **The logic of some results indicators is disputable.** In the transport sector, some results indicators are measuring macroeconomic values that can only be marginally affected by the program, and that mainly depend on external factors. For instance, APPA1.3 aims to fund some limited improvement projects regarding the navigability of the Danube river and port equipment, but intends to measure the effects of the action on the entire amount of freight transported along the Danube River.

29. **The effects of the road renovation program (AP 1.1 and AP2.1)** are measured by the increase of the average speed on the TEN-T road network, at the national level. This method presents several issues: (i) as mentioned, the effect of renovating just some sections of road may be negligible; (ii) speed depends on factors (signage, traffic, vehicle type) other than infrastructure condition; and (iii)

[23] EIB even produced (in the framework of their permanent technical assistance contract to the IB-T) a quantitative approach, based on a sample of projects, which identifies the areas where some issues occur (the most critical phase of the projects, or those entities that have recurring issues). This demonstrates that quantitative tracking is possible and can even support important improvements, such as, in the mentioned case, the optimization of the construction law.

[24] Implementation of the 2014–2020 POIM evaluation plan: Lot 1. Evaluation of POIM interventions in the field of environment—First Evaluation Report (October 2020).

the increase of speed on roads is not entirely beneficial to communities and cannot be an objective in and of itself. Other measurable effects would be more significant, such as the average condition of roads, the percentage of four-lane roads on some identified axes, or the Road Roughness Indicator on the renovated axes.

30. **(KII) According to the POIM MA, the results indicators were defined and analyzed positively in the ex ante evaluation report, by considering the measure-specific objective, clarity, realistic character, and relevance**; however, following the audit missions of the AA, a recommendation was issued concerning the initiation by POIM MA of the necessary steps to issue a renewed instruction to beneficiaries, in which the reporting system of results indicators would be revised and results indicators improved.

31. **(KII) POIM MA ensures the M&E of results indicators at the program level, on the basis of reporting conducted by the various POIM involved bodies, which use statistical data.** These indicators are not aggregated at the level of projects financed by POIM, as they follow the overall results of national policies. During the interviews,[25] POIM MA acknowledged that some indicators (output and result) are not always practical tools for monitoring projects, and also reports some issues related to updating the indicators in MySMIS with progressive results.

32. **(BS)** The majority of beneficiaries (54.39 percent) declare reporting less than 5 indicators; however, some report 5–10 indicators (10.53 percent), or 11–20 (15.79 percent), and even more than 20, (19.30 percent); but it may also include all budgetary and financial data that are also designated as "technical-economic indicators" in feasibility studies. Some of the beneficiaries (45 percent) collect additional indicators, but most of the time (68 percent) less than 5. The vast majority (77.59 percent) consider that indicators are sufficient for reporting the project's progress. The majority think the indicator accurately reflects the project's progress; however, only 50.85 percent of respondents consider them useful, while 33.8 percent think they are not useful, and merely a formal obligation. MySMIS is the main system for collecting the indicators (80.33 percent), but email is also used (52.46 percent). Some beneficiaries (9.84 percent) report not using any system.

Design of IT Systems

33. **(KII) The POIM MA staff acknowledged that the monitoring component of MySMIS has only recently been fully operational (for a few months), and thus still needs development.** The data on environmental protection, for instance, are not collected in MySMIS, but by separate Excel files.

- (KII) The use of the ARACHNE information is confirmed. The system is considered useful for identifying risks from the moment of contracting, which can be followed up on in the implementation phase.
- (KII) The use of the RegAS database is required, and it has been particularly useful for identifying beneficiaries who were awarded several grants and whose capacity for managing the entire project is questionable. The system helped in some cases to identify beneficiaries who had received state aid in recent years, which was contrary to funding conditions.
- (KII) For project monitoring, the MA uses ART4SMIS, which allows users to generate all types of project monitoring reports. Furthermore, the MA includes in the monitoring activity collection of global data/data at the level of economic contract, by a tool called "Monitoring Fiche" and the CORINA application. The Monitoring Fiche is submitted to the EC on a monthly basis.

[25] Interviews with POIM MA and IB-T staff were conducted by the WB team in December 2020.

Strengths and weaknesses in the monitoring system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

34. **(DR) There is no documentary evidence of a major discrepancy between EU or national regulations and the monitoring system as it is described in the internal processes of MEFI and MTI**. All bodies mentioned in EU regulations were created, their attributions properly defined, and their work processes logically link to upper-level regulations.

Efficiency of Monitoring Processes

35. **(DR) Referring to the EC Commission Audit (2018–2019), the efficiency of the monitoring system was recently called into question.** The findings of this audit report show that, of the five indicators in the sample related to IB Transport, four were erroneously reported in the 2017 AIR. In the case of MA, one of the five indicators in the sample was erroneously reported in the same AIR. Overall, five of the 12 indicators in the sample were not properly reported. … The auditors conclude that "the reliability of the data reported in the 2017 AIR (initial version) cannot be confirmed. [26]"

36. **(BS) Beneficiaries are at the beginning of the monitoring process, and should acquire the necessary knowledge to fulfill their role.** Fulfilling monitoring obligations was considered easy by 22 percent of respondents; 59 percent regarded it to be of average difficulty; and 19 percent reported it was difficult to fulfill monitoring obligations. The main issues are the large amounts of data to process (65 percent) and the short time allotted to prepare reports (40 percent). The number of institutions requesting the data was also mentioned. To resolve these issues, respondents mentioned a wide range of solutions, including asking for clarification and support from the MA, or allocating more human resources or more qualified agents to the monitoring tasks.

37. **(BS) The COVID-19 crisis has not obstructed the monitoring process (41 percent), or has only marginally disrupted it (34 percent).** However, 68 percent of respondents think the assessment and monitoring requirements have been adapted to the new challenges posed by the pandemic. They mention that specific actions have been taken, such as moving to online reporting or slowing down the reporting cycle (from monthly to quarterly). (KII) IB-T has replaced site visits with holding online talks and sending photographs.

Environmental monitoring and reporting systems in Romania. The shortcomings in the data collection and validation systems directly impacts the quality of monitoring and reporting.

Title **: Lack of effectiveness of environmental monitoring:** example of data collection in the wastewater sector (related to monitoring and reporting on the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, UWWTD).

The recent WB analysis[27] demonstrates that the current data collection necessary for an adequate reporting system is not suitable for properly tracking the implementation of the UWWTD. It is a repeated bottom-up (and mostly manual) data collection process, largely focused on thematic content, which almost fully ignores the IT

26 Audit nr. REGC214RO0125 - 29/10/2019 "This opinion is based on the following material aspects related to the operation of the management and control system: Incorrect selection and reporting of performance indicators; Reporting the values achieved in the previous programming period for the phased projects; Inaccurate reporting of performance indicators, with an impact on the performance framework; Insufficient audit trail when collecting data related to indicators for RAI; Unclear methodology for defining and reporting result indicators; Reporting of the infrastructure only partially completed as "completed"; Insufficient supervision of IB Transport reporting by MA".

[27] Report with proposals to improve data collection, validation of information regarding UWWTD reporting to the EC, including proposals for responsibilities and timeframe, World Bank, September 2020.

aspects. It relies on models and data definitions developed by other organizations (EEA) for the specific purpose of EU data collection, only slightly adjusted to also cover some national needs. An important gap in the current situation is the absence of a clear and shared strategy with priorities for the urban wastewater collection and treatment at the country level. The existing UWWTD implementation plan (dated October 2004) indicates that Romania should have been compliant at the end of 2018, but there is no national plan or priorities set up to address the pollution load. Although the WB team is currently working with the MEWF to prepare an updated implementation plan, this should be approved at the national level and communicated to the EC. The absence of IT-related aspects is probably the most prominent gap in developing a SIIF compatible system in Romania. This affects not only the back end of the information system—including the common data model, communication formats, data management rules, documentation, persistency within the system, including genealogy—but also the front end, with visualization and access. It also relates to the use of tools and requires considering the involvement of all people currently involved in data collection exercises.

38. **There is a need to develop a culture of data management, to make everyone aware of the importance of a well-organized data collection and processing system** that accurately reflects reality and can be used by all. IT can be improved along the same timeline as further staff trainings.

39. **(KII) Issues with project implementation are generally raised during informal dialogues between beneficiaries and project officers (or project administrators).** Site inspections are the best occasion to have in-depth exchanges regarding the project. Monthly visits (which are mentioned in the procedures) are considered to be frequent enough to give the monitoring officer a fair idea of what is going on. However, monthly site visits will become impossible if more projects are awarded to beneficiaries. (BS) In some cases, monthly/quarterly reports can help detect derivations. When project implementation is delayed, beneficiaries report that in 40 percent of cases, it generated some questions from the MA. The main consequence (62 percent) was to adopt a more realistic implementation schedule but leave indicators' final targets unchanged.

40. **(KII) The stakeholders have the capability to carry on continuous improvement actions.** Procedures are regularly revised to adapt to the situation. In general, it is considered that all procedures can be improved; IB-T even mentioned that it had had specific discussions about potential simplifications. During the IB-T interview, it was specified that the procedural changes are important, especially in the context of discussions to be held in the next period with the EC, on the new financial framework.

41. **(BS) Beneficiaries participate in the improvement process**. It appears that 24 percent of beneficiaries have suggested some adaptation of the monitoring system to the MA; half of such suggestions received an answer from the MA, and they estimated that 30 percent of their requests were successful. Improvements suggested by beneficiaries include: (i) a slower rhythm of reporting (for instance, quarterly instead of monthly), with automatized processes; (ii) a single and simplified template, defined before project implementation; (iii) more flexibility in MySMIS; (iv) the possibility of allocating more funding to projects due to management costs; and (v) improved communication with the MA.

Performance of IT systems

42. **(BS) MySMIS attracts some criticism from beneficiaries when introducing indicator values**. Connection issues (e.g., a slow system) rank first (30.27 percent); issues for structuring data according to the system request are mentioned by 21 percent of respondents, but issues also appear when selecting the data (16.51 percent) and exporting them (16.6 percent). Only 16.51 percent of the respondents mentioned no issue. Requests for improvement are varied, most pointing out the limit of the system's technical capacities. In the IS, it was mentioned that it would be necessary for SMIS to use the same reporting formats as the IT tool of the System for Fund Management in the European Union (SFC). Problems are also reflected by the fact that beneficiaries use other data transfer tools for indicators. Thus, 52 percent of beneficiaries stated they also use email, and 13 percent still use the CD for data transfer.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities (including beneficiary capacities)

43. **(KII) POIM MA current staff.** There are about 360 civil servants (including DRI staff) who are currently working within POIM MA (not including the IB-T). In terms of number of personnel, POIM MA is the second largest MA structure (after MA ROP). The staff has considerably increased with the growing number of projects. The office for project evaluation (selection) is constantly under pressure to appraise new projects, and the DRIs were mentioned in the evaluation of project applications. POIM MA is monitoring the workload of its employees, but such statistics are not formally established.

44. **(KII, IS) There is much room for improvement regarding the HRD policy at the MEFI level**. Moreover, there is no HRD plan adopted by POIM MA, and newly employed staff usually only receive on-the-job training. There are two training options for POIM MA staff: the first is represented by the MEFI training plan drafted and implemented by the HR Directorate; the second refers to the PASSA EIB Agreement (technical assistance, TA), which provides training for both MA staff and beneficiaries, and adequately covers MA staff training needs.

45. **(KII) The need to outsource services for water project preparation and evaluation**. TA is needed to provide external experts who can prepare and evaluate water project proposals (POIM PA 3).

46. **(KII) IB-T staff.** At the present time, IB-T has 99 employees (the number of allocated positions was 107). IB-T considers it has enough human resources to fulfill its duties, but an increase in human resources will be necessary, taking into account the future installment of DGOIT as the MA for the 2021–2026 generation of ESIF as well as the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism, where much stricter deadlines are expected than on structural and cohesion funds.

47. **(DR, KII) The organization model for a specialized IB acting within the related line ministry seems efficient regarding the management of human resources and skills** compared to more general structures, as the IB benefits from having skilled people within its sector in the same building.

48. (**KII) The POIM MA acknowledges the need to increase beneficiaries' institutional capacity** with regards to project monitoring (e.g., increased capacity to properly fill in monitoring fiches). The interviewees, both from the MA and from the IB-T, considered beneficiaries' administrative capacity as a main problem in the M&E process. They referred specifically to the poor organization of the project implementation units, the insufficient number of allocated positions, and the frequent turnover of managers. (BS) However, as resulting from the surveys, beneficiaries consider they have enough staff, and only 9 percent of respondents have increased their team to meet the monitoring obligations. For 14 percent of them, consultants were appointed. Requests for additional training regularly mention two subjects: the MySMIS Implementation Module and assistance for calculating indicators. Activity costs remained constant for 68 percent of respondents. The average cost is 90 lei per hour, comprised of two groups, one around 60 lei and another around 150 lei, most likely reflecting the cost difference between permanent human resources and consultants.

Effectiveness of the Monitoring System

49. **(DR) Regarding effectiveness, the POIM MA and DGOIT aim to be compliant with the EU guidance on monitoring and evaluation**, which involves establishing a system of results-oriented indicators (outputs and results). Instruction no. 7 of DGOIT, the guide of results indicators related to the 2014–2020 implementing period, recalls the objectives of Art. 27 of the Common Provision Regulation (CPR) for setting up indicators to measure progress in program implementation aimed at achieving objectives. (KII) However, it seems that efficiency in funds absorption became the dominant priority, versus how effectively the program improves the sector. MA staff pointed out that the presentation of the evolution of POIM must be less focused on the absorption rate/implementation stage and more on achieving POIM objectives and targets (i.e., less quantitative and more qualitative).

50. **(KII) The M&E system can be better used to ensure complementarity with other programs**. At this time, complementarity with other programs is ensured to a small extent; for example, the funding in the water sector through the National Local Development Program and POIM (which have different eligibility requirements, as well as a different approach to ensuring sustainability and contributing to compliance, with negative effects at the sector level). Better complementarities are ensured for the transport sector given that, within each transport mode, the implementation beneficiary is unique (CNAIR, CFR), and several financing instruments are concentrated at the IB-T level (CEF, PNRR, POIM). Regarding the new programming period, IB-T stated that better complementarities with other sectors are expected; for example, the correlation of POIM projects with projects of the Bucharest City Hall, keeping in mind that the next program should also address connectivity in urban areas.

51. **(DR) A request to improve monitoring of OPs came from the EU level, which in the PA requested a drastic improvement of M&E capabilities.**[28] Further to the observation of the EC, the following improvements were undertaken: (i) supplementing the number of POIM MC members with non-institution partners , so that the representation of members of public institutions (12) on the committee is equal to representation of members of non-public institutions (12); (ii) new criteria used to select members for a higher degree of involvement in the programming process, better relevance in the field represented for POIM, expertise in preparing and managing projects financed from EC funds, motivation to participate in the MC works, relevance regarding the degree of sectoral and territorial representation; (iii) three sub-committees for the transport, environment, and energy sectors, chaired by representatives of line ministries, will meet one day before the MC meetings and adopt decisions/issues and formulate opinions/points of view on the topics included in the meeting agenda; and (iv) setting up thematic working groups that will analyze problems that occurred during the course of the program in a timely manner.

52. **(KII) Although it has the role of approving the Annual Implementation Report (AIR), the MC does not contribute to the monitoring process.** All proposals to change the program came from the MA to the MC, not from the MC to the MA.

53. **(DR) The analysis of sub-committee meeting minutes demonstrates a solid level of awareness of issues occurring in all aspects of project implementation**. In the transport sector, issues are precisely reported by members of the sub-committee, as the road or railway national companies, with a presentation of the blocking points in their respective project portfolio. The corresponding minutes of the MC usually approve the approaches that were taken at the sub-committee level. However, transversal/cross-cutting issues are discussed at this level (for instance, related to the public procurement law), but there are no proposals or recommendations.

54. **Monitoring as support for policy-related decision making.** (KII) Data aggregated at the lower level are sometimes used by other public entities for varied purposes. For example, the data from the monitoring of water and wastewater projects (SO 3.2) are used by Romanian authorities in reports on infringement proceedings opened by the EC (Case 2018/2019). Data from the monitoring of waste projects (SO 3.1) are used to evaluate the application of the legislative framework on the circular economy (GEO 74/2018).

Summary of the Strengths and Weaknesses of Romania's POIM Monitoring System, 2014–2020

[28] According to PA, "the Monitoring Committees proved poorly effective during the 2007–2013 period, with poor expertise and ownership of the members…The uneven composition of the committees overwhelmingly composed of public officials, largely explained such situation. It is therefore envisaged to review the composition of the committees, with more balanced participation of external stakeholders."

Strengths	Weaknesses
Strong institutional organization to follow-up on projects, with the regional network of DRI and good technical capabilities of the IB Transport, the capability to mobilize human resources Appropriation and effective use of IT systems at the POIM MA level A reported good level of dialogue between stakeholders, no major issues reported with beneficiaries	Incorrect data treatment reported by the EC audit shows issues in understanding the instructions for data registration or application of monitoring principles Many results indicators do not reflect the program's real influence No visible matrix or risks supported by the monitoring data and specific indicators capturing these risks No tool or no clear process to warn about transversal issues related to infrastructure management and the influence of policymakers Insufficiently developed IT information systems for reporting on water directives (e.g., UWWTD, etc.)

Success factors and good practices in monitoring

Good practices	Success factors
Specific tool to monitor strategic results such as absorption rate Integration of all EU instruments for transport sector in the same directorate	Capacity to train and support beneficiaries in reporting and monitoring activities Capability to issue clear and comprehensive instructions to beneficiaries covering all of the domains where they operate Capacity to prepare the MA, IB-T, and beneficiary staff to manage complex monitoring situations, such as phased projects

POIM Evaluation System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Assessment of the POIM evaluation system's institutional and procedural framework

Evaluation Strategy and Planning Process

55. **(KII) The evaluation plan was developed by the MEFI Program Evaluation Office (BEP) in a consultative and participatory framework with the main stakeholders**: the MA, members of the sectorial sub-committees on transport, environment, and energy, the EC, and the MC. (DR) In total, 14 evaluation assignments should be implemented, and 8 evaluation reports should be made, of which 3 are for the transport sector (in 2017, 2019, and 2023), 3 are for the environment sector (in 2017, 2019, and 2023) and 2 are for the energy sector (in 2019 and 2023). [29]

56. **(KII) For the transport sector, an evaluation report was made and published in 2019;** it is titled, "Evaluation of POIM interventions in the field of transport," contract no. 49 180/05.07.2018. For the environment sector, a first POIM evaluation report was made and published on the MEFI website in October 2020, titled, "Evaluation of POIM interventions in the field of environment" contract no. 1252/09.01.2020.

57. **The evaluations are concentrated on the assessment of the effects of the PAs** distinguished per sub-sector. For instance, evaluation no. 2 for transport concentrates on metro investment, with

[29] 2017 POIM evaluation plan.

questions related to the evolution of urban mobility and the reduction of the environmental impact since the adoption of the POIM, and to which extent the metro project influenced it. There is no transversal approach, seeking for issues common to several PAs/policies.[30]

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

58. **(DR) Monitoring is managed in the MEFI by the DGPEIM/directorates that supervise IB-T and DRIs activities, and through them, the beneficiaries' activities themselves.** However, the evaluation plan is prepared and carried out in large part by another directorate in the MEFI common to several OPs, which prepares and implements the evaluation plan, and the evaluations are performed mostly by external experts. The evaluation system is not part of the POIM MA Directorate and is managed in the MEFI by a coordinating directorate. The system warrants an independent approach (evaluators are also outsourced consultants), but limits the appropriation of the program by POIM MA Directorate stakeholders. (KII) During the interviews, it was clear that stakeholders are concentrated on daily activities, and although they can request ad hoc evaluation, they are not eager to add a supplementary layer of activity to their mandatory tasks.

Strengths and weaknesses in the evaluation system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

59. **There are no visible issues regarding the MEFI evaluation system's compliance with EC regulations and methodologic recommendations**. The action plan clearly mentions its legal basis and the perspectives adopted by the evaluation framework.

Efficiency of Evaluation Processes

60. **(DR) Available results.** Few evaluation documents were produced, but all final results are available in the evaluation section of the POIM website. However, the annual report to the MC that the evaluation plan mentions is not available.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

61. **The POIM evaluation plan is extremely precise regarding the human resources and job qualifications that are necessary to undertake evaluations and evaluation management during the ESIF cycle**. Job profiles and qualifications are described for external consultants (who will undertake the evaluation actions). The persons in charge of managing the evaluation fall into two categories: evaluation managers and members of the evaluation committees. All those involved in evaluation activities are requested to have a certain array of skills.[31] The position and qualifications of the Evaluation Office[32] are also defined precisely. Staff training needs are also included in the plan (in Table 3 of the plan).

Effectiveness of the Evaluation System

62. **Evaluation results are coming late, at the end of the programming period, which can be a serious issue, as the recommendations are basically addressed to institutions that are constantly in a state of reorganization**, and with a significant and natural turnover of officers due to the redistribution of the position in the state apparatus. This affects the relevance and legitimacy of evaluation results prepared for a different institutional organization. This can be mitigated by shorter assignments, with more limited ambition than to assess a large sector of the program. Another option could be to introduce in the mandates of future MCs the obligation to follow up on the

[30] For instance, tender process evaluation across the program, construction contracts implementation assessment.
[31] Which includes four areas of competence, according to the plan: institutional analysis, design of M&E systems, use of methodologic tools, and skills for using the information.
[32] Birou de Evaluare.

implementation of relevant recommendations of the previous period.

63. **In any case, the evaluation recommendations should be precise and the entity recipient of the recommendation must have the capacity to implement them, which is not always the case.** (KII) Recommendations related to the transport sector express a general point of view regarding transport policy and request changing elements that are totally outside the reach of ESIF stakeholders (for instance, requests to the municipality of Bucharest to build park-and-ride equipment in parallel with ESIF projects). The IB-T did not consider the results of the transport evaluation to be useful and that the evaluation process as a whole should be re-oriented around a more practical question, otherwise it will remain without effect.

Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses of Romania's POIM Evaluation System, 2014–2020

Strengths	Weaknesses
Qualification definitions and quality control in place	Late adoption of the evaluation program
Ambitious evaluation plan covering all the POIM sectors	Lack of practical focus generating a lack of appropriation of the evaluation tools by stakeholders
	Lack of transversal evaluation applicable to all infrastructure sectors
	(Transport) Recommendations beyond the intervention capacities of ESIF stakeholders

Success factors and good practices in evaluation

Good practices	Success factors
Evaluation culture and methodology is recognized and developed	The preparation of the evaluation program should identify direct benefits for all and each stakeholder
	Early implementation of the evaluation program and immediate implementation of the evaluation recommendations during the next ESIF programming period

B. Regional Operational Program (ROP)

Monitoring System 2014–2020: Strengths and Weaknesses

Description and Program Structures

OP-level structures

64. **(DR) In line with the procedures defined, ROP monitoring and reporting is the process of collecting data and physical and financial information on OP implementation.** The activity aims to adequately inform on the status of implementation and support strategic decision making. It is set up within a multilevel framework, involving multiple stakeholders and a variety of mechanisms.

65. **(DR) Delegation Agreements are signed between the MA and each RDA detailing the delegated tasks and providing information on the separation of functions**. The roles of different actors in the field of M&E complement each other to create a functional system. Tasks are delegated to the IBs in programming, project evaluation and selection, checking procurement and reimbursement/payment requests, project monitoring, information and communication, and support for beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries. Yearly absorption targets are set for each IB, in line with the regional allocation, together with qualitative requirements, about the quality of evaluation process, verification of public procurement and expenditure, etc.

66. **(DR, KII) In terms of process, monitoring starts at the project level, with key milestones being observed in the monitoring process**. Beneficiaries report on project progress with the help of technical progress reports, which are submitted quarterly and include details on both physical and financial progress. The reports are verified by the designated monitoring officer at the IB level, who also updates the consolidated registry on project progress, with details on each project verified. The IB submits the relevant documents and consolidated registry to the MA (Project Monitoring Directorate), where the designated regional managers (two per region) verify the data and overall progress registered and any bottlenecks or problems encountered. Site visits (during implementation or ex post) are also used to monitor progress by both IBs and MA.

67. **(DR) Key stakeholders with a decision-making role at the OP level include the MA management and ROP MC.** Alongside the MA management, the MC has a strategic decision-making role in the ROP implementation process by examining and issuing decisions on any issues affecting the OP's development, including the achievement of the program's performance indicators. The MC has a heterogeneous composition, and includes representatives of ministries where MAs are functioning and Councils for Regional Development (CRDs), as well as members of the business and academic community and civil society.

68. **(DR) An important aspect to consider about decision making is that IBs count for just a part of the RDAs, which have a wide-ranging role in regional development**. The RDAs are executive bodies of the CDRs and are responsible for preparing Regional Development Plans and coordinating and implementing relevant policies at the regional level. Such an approach facilitates complementarity between EU funds and other funding sources while encouraging participation and cooperation among various stakeholders.

Indicators

69. **(DR) ROP monitoring is achieved through output and results indicators and the Performance Framework (PF).** The ROP system of indicators comprises 40 unique output indicators (out of which 18 are common) and 27 unique results indicators. Each SO is assigned one or more output indicators and, respectively, one or more results indicators. All results indicators have target and baseline values, while only targets have been defined for the output indicators. Only the output indicators are aggregated from the project level. Results indicators go beyond the effect of support and aim to

capture the overall change at the area supported (e.g., microenterprises' survival rate at three years from set-up, participation rate to education, final energy consumption, etc.).

70. **(DR) The OP PF includes 56 indicators,[33] which include 18 financial and 38 physical indicators**. About a third of the physical indicators (12) are intermediary outputs, looking at the contracted projects/operations, rather than the direct yield of the support (companies supported, roads built, buildings rehabilitated, etc.), which takes much longer to achieve. The PF covers almost all PAs, except TA (PA 12) and PA 15 on the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) initiative.

71. **(DR) An Indicators Guide was prepared for the OP indicators as part of the ex ante evaluation exercise**. The document details the type of indicators and main data sources. It includes detailed fiches for each indicator, with the following information: baseline and target values, indicator descriptions, calculation formulas in case of compound indicators, and collection method (sample or exhaustive collection). The guide also includes details on the main responsible actors, guidance for reporting, and archiving data and data sources.

Specific Monitoring Tools

72. **(DR, KII) Detailed procedures are drafted for program monitoring and reporting and project monitoring**. The project monitoring procedure covers the monitoring activities carried out at the IB level and those at the MA level. Program monitoring is officially the MA's responsibility, with the IBs providing the necessary information (through SMIS and consolidated files showing information on progress). Verification of expenditure and of public procurement is carried out by separate units in the IBs and, respectively, in the MA (which also approves and makes the payments). Procedures are verified and updated twice a year to ensure consistency and relevance.

73. **(DR, KII) Data collected depends on the process in question** (i.e., project or program monitoring, project evaluation and selection) and covers all project cycle management.

- Data on calls launched and planned, project submitted values, contracting, etc., data on appeals.
- Extensive data on project implementation progress (from beneficiaries): payments, indicators, procurement, other aspects showing how the project progresses. Data collected is very detailed for making sure projects are on track and potential problems are identified in a timely manner. This approach is determined by the fact that projects are contracted in a very incipient phase (when only the feasibility study is prepared), so the MA perceives the risk of successfully completing the project as relatively high.
- Data on indicators (most indicators are collected at the end of the project). To understand the project's actual progress, an aggregated progress index (%) is estimated.

74. **(DR, KII) Reports prepared at the MA and IB level include the reports required as per the procedures, as well as customized reports, in line with the identified needs**. These include the AIR, the reports on indicators, as well as consolidated reports prepared by each IB for projects under responsibility, which are submitted regularly (monthly) to the MA. Other reports are prepared by both MA and IBs, as per the needs identified.

75. **(DR) SMIS is the official IT instrument used for monitoring projects in ROP**. Data collection starts at the applicant level (even before project selection); the applicant introduces the financial data and the targets assumed for the indicators. Further on, this becomes reference data and the starting point in project implementation. Data on progress registered in implementation is not registered directly in SMIS by the beneficiaries; these upload the progress reports in .pdf form in the system, and the IB monitoring officers record data.

[33] Not unique indicators.

76. **(KII) A series of IBs[34] have developed their own IT systems/applications, but official communication is carried out through SMIS.** The IBs' applications vary in terms of features and functionalities, with some allowing data to be introduced by the beneficiaries (e.g., RDA NW), while for others, data is introduced by the IB's officers. Connection with SMIS is not automatic, so data cannot be imported/exported directly. Depending on the application's capabilities, different arrangements have been made to update the necessary information and prepare the relevant analyses.

Assessment of the monitoring system's institutional and procedural framework

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

77. **(DR, KII, IS) The legislative and procedural framework of the OP is appropriate. Mandates of both the MA and IBs are very clear for all actors involved.** The ROP operational procedures comply with the requirements of the relevant EU regulations and with the institutional framework and the agreements for the delegation of functions developed through the national legislation.[35] Generally, they have a unitary character and ensure the uniform application of the ROP implementation rules. As per the consultations carried out,[36] both program and project procedures could be further improved in terms of clarity.[37] Analyses carried out also highlight the need to strengthen the communication and exchange of experience of the staff from different levels of implementation for a homogenous and prompt interpretation of the OPs.[38]

78. **(DR, KII) A series of aspects pertaining to possible overlapping of tasks between MA and IBs could also be further streamlined**. While the project monitoring procedures provide for the verification of beneficiaries' progress reports by both IBs and MA, in practice, roles are very clear. On the other hand, some overlapping occurs regarding the verification and approval of addendums to financing contracts, while in theory, the roles of different actors are very clear.

79. **(DR, KII, IS) Individual M&E responsibilities of the different actors (staff of MA and IBs, beneficiaries) are well-defined.** Organizational charts are stable and easily adaptable to changes; moreover, they are periodically updated according to the needs and modifications of the implementation system.[39] Some unclarities were signaled concerning the responsibilities related to performance management and dissemination of information (at both institutional and personal level).

80. **(KII, IS) While across the system, there is a good understanding of what M&E activity is and what it entails**, **variations can be observed about the role of each actor in the overall set-up**. Lower levels of understanding were observed about the performance management tasks (on the roles of different actors and what this activity entails).[40] The link between project and program monitoring appears quite clear at the level of all actors involved.

81. **(DR, KII) Streamlining the horizontal collaborative links at the MA/IB level would be beneficial for improving both the approval and decision-making processes**. Particularly, there is a need for enhanced collaboration between the M&E units and the project selection and contracting unit (e.g., through the monitoring unit's involvement from the write-up of the Applicant Guides)**.** The monitoring officers do not always understand the specificity of the areas supported and need further

[34] RDA NW, RDA W, RDA NE.
[35] Evaluation of ROP 2014–2020 interventions—Theme 12. Analysis of ROP implementation system, Lattanzio Advisory Spa, Lattanzio Monitoring & Evaluation Srl, August 2019.
[36] Institutional Survey carried out at the level of the ROP stakeholders at the national and regional level.
[37] 33 percent of respondents to the IS think the clarity of the program monitoring procedure is low and it is not that user friendly; these shares go down to only 15 percent of respondents in case of the project monitoring procedures).
[38] Evaluation of ROP 2014–2020 interventions—Theme 12. Analysis of ROP implementation system.
[39] Evaluation of ROP 2014–2020 interventions—Theme 12. Analysis of ROP implementation system.
[40] As per the IS carried out at the national and regional level.

clarifications once they receive the contracts signed.[41] A stronger link between the monitoring department and the departments responsible for financial verification may also be envisaged.[42]

82. **(DR, KII) Beneficiaries' contractual obligations related to M&E are too complex and quite challenging to understand**. This issue was caused by the need to adapt the standard contract (proposed by the MEFI at the beginning of the programming period), to reflect the OP's specificity, but led to significant redundancy as well as increased complexity of the contractual clauses, which are difficult to understand and comply with by the beneficiaries.[43] An updated form of the contract was approved in June 2019 at the MA level, for ROP to streamline and clarify the financing conditions, but the contract form remains very complex.

Design of Indicators

83. **(DR) ROP shows an overall good internal coherence, linking needs to objectives and actions**. The logic of intervention was built in collaboration with the EC and the participation of relevant stakeholders, and was validated through the ex ante evaluation.

84. **(DR) A series of shortcomings became evident during the actual implementation, as shown by the impact evaluations**. These referred to 8 out of 15 PAs and highlighted a series of problems, such as low achievement for PA 1, due to the novelty of interventions and potential competition with support from POC, which was much easier to access;[44] the poor results led to the need to change approach (which was supported by the EC). While the scope of the financing under PA 4 was deemed too narrow, PA 7 needed a more focused approach, one that was better adapted to regional specificities, and supported by national-level marketing strategies. With regards to PA 9, which supports community-led local development (CLLD), the evaluation shows a higher-than-planned concentration of investments in the more developed regions,[45] as well as problems caused by the long duration between the development of the Local Development Strategy and its implementation, which leads to the need to reevaluate community problems in the context of changing socioeconomic conditions. The lengthy procurement process and the need to clarify ownership-related aspects remain key issues for PA 6, which supports investments in road infrastructure. The main problematic aspect of PA 11 refers to the centralization of public procurement, which, while facilitating the standardization of the acquired services, does not seem to respond to the needs of public authorities.[46] In the case of PA 14, the delays in starting the three planned emergency hospitals led to a change in the logic of intervention for this PA. As such, support will only target the development of feasibility studies for this programming period, with the actual construction to take place in the following period. It is estimated that the PA allocation will be spent entirely on preparing the studies.[47]

85. **(DR) The OP was modified several times to adjust needs according to implementation experience.** A first modification was related to the allocation of €100 million from PA 2 to the "SME initiative" and the development of the OP SME, under the responsibility of the MDPWA. The modification also pertained to the reconfiguration of PA 2, considering the revised allocation and a new approach on PA 1 for technological transfer. In 2017, the program was modified again, with the main change involving reallocation between different PAs and IPs, and the introduction of a new PA for "Supporting the regeneration of small and medium-sized cities" (PA 13). An additional amount of €160 million was added to ROP from the Large Infrastructure OP in 2017. In order to avoid the decommitment risk, the OP was changed again in 2018, with the introduction of two new PAs: PA 14,

[41] MA, contracting unit.
[42] To be further checked after verification of financial management procedures (these were not available at this stage).
[43] Interview with project monitoring directorate.
[44] ROP Impact evaluation, PA 1.
[45] ROP impact evaluation, PA 10.
[46] PA evaluation—Evaluation of progress in meeting the targets of the PF indicators (Theme E), August 2020.
[47] PA evaluation—Evaluation of progress in meeting the targets of the PF indicators (Theme E), Aug 2020

"Creating the infrastructure of regional emergency hospitals," and PA 15 on the "SME initiative."

86. **(DR) The results orientation is embedded in the OP through the elements required by EU regulations**, namely the set of financial, output, and results indicators with baselines and targets and the PF. The PF includes both milestones and final targets for the indicators, showing whether the OP is on track or not. The results also reflect the change in the field of interest, thus creating a results orientation of the operations supported. There are no process indicators in ROP.

87. **(DR, IS) A series of gaps and challenges can be observed with regard to the implied results framework**. In some cases, objectives may be either too broad and too ambitious (e.g., increasing participation in education; improving quality of life for population in small and mid-sized cities in Romania) and results not explicit (such as, "increased access to medical services"). Moreover, not all relevant parts of the results framework are acknowledged (intermediary results and assumptions are not clearly identified). The results chain up to the national level is not clearly identified in the OP. Suggestions for improvement include the use of a limited number of indicators.

88. **(DR, BS, IS) Generally, it is considered that the majority of program-level indicators are well-designed and adequately reflect program progress.** There are a few exceptions (e.g., some indicators under PA 5, PA 7, or PA 9) for which evaluations identified the need to improve the indicators, as they may favor inequitable concentration of investments (PA 9) or to add composite indicators (e.g., PA 5). Clarity of indicators could also be further improved. [48]

89. **(DR, KII, IS) Targets set for the indicators build only partially on the lessons learned from previous experience with implementing such interventions**. These refer to the typically long duration of implementation (3–4 years), [49] which clearly affects the capacity to meet the set targets, as well as rather inevitable delays in launching implementation (including due to non-fulfillment of the ex ante conditionalities) and difficulties related to procurement. At the opposite end, underestimation of targets is another option, as shown by the high achievement rate registered for the indicator under PA 2 (which provides support for the SMEs, and thus is highly attractive).

90. **(DR, KII) As the majority of ROP output indicators can only be collected at the end of a project's implementation period, additional elements need to be monitored to understand projects' progress**. Data used to this end include information on procurement under the projects, specific aspects showing how the project progresses (e.g., preparing the technical project, construction or procurement progress, work start and reception times, estimating overall project progress, etc.). Such data allows identifying whether projects are on track, as well as spot potential problems in a timely manner. Additional project indicators are defined at the level of each IP. These go beyond the program-level indicators and aim to look at projects' achievements from a more practical perspective. They are specified in the Applicant's Guide, and beneficiaries do not have the flexibility to report on indicators other than those already provided.

Design of IT systems (including OP-specific systems, where relevant)

91. **(DR, KII) SMIS remains the official system for data collection and reporting, despite the challenges and problems in working with it.** All official information must be recorded in SMIS, so even if other databases or applications may prove more useful or user-friendly, institutional stakeholders have the legal obligation to record data in SMIS. The entire project evaluation and selection process is carried out through SMIS, with information being introduced as metadata, as well as by attaching necessary documentation. However, staff in the MA/IBs also use additional databases (Excel files) with data on calls, projects submitted and in different stages of the selection process, projects contracted

[48] Clarity of indicators was considered as a key challenge by 56 percent of respondents.

[49] 1st Evaluation report under the Partnership Agreement—Evaluation of progress in meeting the targets of the indicators included in the Performance Framework (Theme E), August 2020.

or cancelled, that consolidate all data in one place and in a more user-friendly format.

92. **(DR, KII) SMIS interconnectivity with other databases is minimal.** As such, it is not possible to consult or import data information directly from National Agency for Public Procurement (NAPP), the Trade Registry, Revisal, or other registries. Only population records data (e.g., for a company's legal representative) are verified directly through SMIS.

93. **(KII) Given existing challenges in using SMIS, alternative databases have been developed by the actors involved.** These include self-developed IT applications,[50] as well as Excel files and databases. Use of alternative instruments is differentiated by the various institutions; for example, the MA programming unit uses alternative databases (i.e., IBs files) only if SMIS data is not ok; ; on the other hand, other departments in the MA or IBs use such files on a regular basis, for compensating SMIS with more comprehensive parallel databases and collecting more specific, relevant data. The applications developed by the IBs cannot be used officially and are not connected to SMIS**.** Instead, they are used for data collection, based on the needs identified, as well as for data aggregation and to prepare reports. Their capabilities vary, but they do aim to better support the overall process (e.g., by predefining calls and conditions applicable, verifying information with the help of validation keys, or even allowing beneficiaries to directly access the application and provide more detailed information on the stage of works, procurement process, etc.).

Strengths and weaknesses in the monitoring system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

94. **(DR, KII, IS) The quality of data across the system can be further improved**. Data accuracy, completeness, and delays in data provision are the main problems. Challenges exist regarding both the quality of the initial data introduced by the beneficiaries/IBs, and SMIS-related issues. Insufficient understanding of some indicators (at the beneficiary level and not corrected by the IBs), or delays in registering the necessary data by IBs are among the issues mentioned. The situation has improved over time, with problems seeming to be more prominent at the MA level. On the other hand, information in SMIS is not always updated, and not all the information needed is available (e.g., SMIS records the most recent information uploaded, which, if a project reports during the sustainability period, leads to loss of data reflecting the status of projects at completion).[51] Similarly, SMIS does not give a full image of the projects rejected for ongoing calls or those launched exclusively on paper, or related to SME projects that submitted an appeal and won. Actions taken to improve the quality of data in the system depend on the type of problem, varying from double-checking the data (going to the source files) to the development of dedicated IT applications.[52]

95. **(KII) Overall, data collected is deemed sufficient, provided that actions are also taken to improve its accuracy**. This pertains, however, to data collected cumulatively through SMIS and other databases used. As outlined by the majority of respondents to the IS, improvements needed in the data collection process include: the development of specific instruments for data collection, a clearer definition of data sources and frequency of data collection, and clearer guidance for those involved.

96. **Efficiency of Monitoring Processes (KII, BS, IS) While beneficiaries consider indicators to be adequate and sufficient for monitoring a project's performance, this view is not shared by all institutional stakeholders.** The majority of beneficiaries (60 percent) think that indicators adequately reflect a project's progress and were useful for monitoring, and are sufficient for tracking a project's progress (75 percent). The number of indicators reported is also acceptable (about 80 percent of beneficiaries declare they had to report on fewer than 5 indicators). Institutional stakeholders, on the other hand, think the indicators could be further improved (though this should have been done during

[50] RDA North West (Regio), RDA West, RDA North East.
[51] MA project monitoring unit.
[52] RDA North West, RDA West.

the programming stage, and changes are no longer possible now). Regarding performance in meeting the indicator targets, with the exception of PA 1, no methodology is defined for reducing financing in the event that targets are not met, beyond the provisions of the national legislation in this respect. The surveys mentioned the need for possible action in this area.

97. **(DR, KII) Given the specificity of the OP interventions (infrastructure-related support), monitoring and reporting are focused on project progress.** The entire system is oriented toward understanding whether the projects are on track, or if there are any bottlenecks regarding permits needed or the procurement process. Monitoring visits are key for checking if progress is as reported. The technical competencies of staff doing the verifications are equally important.

98. **(DR, BS, IS) While data accuracy is identified as the main challenge for reporting,[53] current reporting procedures need to be further streamlined.** This is mainly related to reporting in the IT system, but the frequency of reporting[54] and harmonizing the approach across different authorities (type of information included in the reports, how information is structured, etc.) also need to be streamlined. Improvements suggested[55] by the majority of survey respondents include connecting the databases, simplifying reports, and automating report generation. Training[56] can also play an important role in the process.

Performance of IT systems

99. **(DR, KII, IS) Although key to the overall process, SMIS fails to adequately respond to the needs of different stakeholders, in terms of both data collection and reporting.** Factors include the manual introduction of implementation data in the system (by the IB officers), lack of validation keys, difficulties in collecting all types of data needed, difficulty in automatically retrieving documents across modules, and the high administrative burden associated with its use. SMIS capabilities often lead to problems with data accuracy and completeness. Its limited capabilities for data aggregation and reporting add to the problem. Generally, data is extracted from SMIS in.xls or.csv format, and further aggregation[57] is carried out in Excel or with the help of applications developed by the IBs. Reports are also prepared with the help of the Excel databases or dedicated applications (either as predefined standardized reports or by extracting necessary data), in the case of IBs that have developed such instruments. At present, SMIS is regarded as not allowing for the proper monitoring of project progress, focusing only on meeting the EU's reporting requirements. As such, there is a need to simplify the current workflow, which involves two parallel systems for project monitoring (one in SMIS and the weekly monitoring/reporting, done by RDAs).[58]

Complexity of processes and user-friendliness of related guidance

100. **(KII, IS, BS) Preparing progress reports by the beneficiaries and corresponding verification by the relevant authorities are not seen as complex tasks**. Report writing by the beneficiaries is not a complicated task, in the view of the MA or IBs. On the other hand, it is more burdensome to verify reimbursement requests (high or very high administrative burden). Other reports, such as public procurement documentation or payment requests, are also seen as (very) burdensome by half of the respondents. About 90 percent of beneficiaries declared having been able to meet their projects' monitoring and reporting requirements. In terms of difficulties encountered, the short deadlines for responding to the (information) requests and the large volume of data to process are the main factors

[53] 62.5 percent of the respondents to the IS applied at the national and regional level.
[54] ROP impact evaluation, PA 3.
[55] As resulting from the IS, applied at the national and regional level.
[56] 89 percent of respondents to the IS.
[57] 29 percent of respondents to the IS regarded SMIS functionality as poor, in relation to both data aggregation and report generation.
[58] ROP impact evaluation, PA 3.

mentioned (by 40 percent of the respondents) for each criterion.

101. **(DR, KII, BS) While the existing data format is regarded as facilitating data analysis, better guidance on aspects related to monitoring and reporting (including indicators) is needed.** Research indicates gaps in understanding the scope of certain indicators and the method of collection and reporting. Guidance materials and relevant instructions in the field of monitoring and reporting are not adequately organized by theme (it is hard to find the information needed) and clarity should be further improved.

102. **(KII, BS) Support for beneficiaries is seen as one of the system's main strengths**. This is recognized by all actors involved, at the MA and IB levels, and by the beneficiaries. The support pertains to all project phases, starting with evaluation and selection. Explaining the relevant conditions of the financing contract, support for understanding the main obligations in the field of M&E, support during the monitoring visits, as well as part of regular activity, are but a few of the aspects mentioned in this area. Training also counts as a key tool for enhancing capacity in the field of M&E, with 86 percent of beneficiaries responding to the survey declaring they have participated in such a training.

103. **(KII, BS) While the authorities believe that an OP-specific approach is best, the majority of beneficiaries are in favor of a common approach across OPs.** As such, 71 percent of beneficiaries think it would help to have M&E procedures applied uniformly by all MAs, and 66 percent believe monitoring and reporting formats should be the same across all OPs.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

104. **(KII) In general, stakeholders have the capacity to fulfill their M&E responsibilities**. This is backed up by the experience with implementing EU funds during 2007–2013, as well as by the experience with implementing PHARE programs. The low personnel fluctuation, specific to ROP, was crucial in developing the necessary competencies. Balancing the workload between officers and mutual support were mentioned as key aspects in ensuring sufficient capacity. Increased workload in certain periods and the lack of a functional IT system to collect and report data across the system are the main drawbacks mentioned. Ensuring a better understanding of indicators, training on the use of RegAs and methodological guidance for a unitary approach among IBs add to these. Improving specific technical expertise[59] is key, along with other competencies that should be developed, particularly in terms of the less traditional interventions.

105. **(DR, KII) The perception of whether resources are sufficient differs among the actors consulted.** Human resources are deemed insufficient, particularly by the MA,[60] but high workload is mentioned as an issue by some RDAs as well,[61] in the context of monitoring officers' other tasks beyond simple monitoring. Support needed at IB level is mainly related to the future programming period, for strengthening the program monitoring capacity, aspects related to indicators, state aid, and technical skills. A focus on better planning is also needed.

106. **(DR, KII, IS) While beneficiaries' capacity has increased over time, there are still areas to be improved**. Most of the public beneficiaries, however, have good teams, with expertise in all relevant areas (reimbursements, procurement, report preparation etc.).[62] Difficulties remain regarding M&E obligations, public procurement, or project management.[63] Beneficiaries' capacity to prepare financing requests also needs improvement. As most beneficiaries hire consultants to write the project proposals,[64] they are often unaware of their obligations. This practice also leads to an overestimation

[59] ROP impact evaluation, PA 3.
[60] Interview with MA project monitoring unit; Evaluation: Analysis of the ROP implementation system (July 2019).
[61] RDA Centre, RDA West, RDA NE.
[62] Interview with MA program monitoring unit.
[63] ROP impact evaluation, PA 5.
[64] ROP impact evaluation, PA 2.

of targets. The structures created to prioritize the interventions (urban authorities, IDA ITI DD, and Local Action Groups) have also contributed to institutional development at local and sub regional levels.

107. **(DR) As per the evaluations results,[65] support for beneficiaries should be further enhanced.** The capacity of the **IBs** in this regard should be strengthened by consolidating the IBs' helpdesk function (for project design and implementation) or using JASPERS type of support (such as setting up a task force that could support implementation of some projects).

108. **(DR, KII) IT systems and instruments must be improved to reduce the administrative burden and support the actors involved.** Reducing bureaucracy and simplification, including in the field of public procurement, are key. As such, the IT system is seen as central to the process, as it can potentially support all actors in the system, help reduce errors, and enhance performance. Streamlining operational procedures and increasing the use of SCOs can also help reduce administrative burden for all parties involved.

Effectiveness of the Monitoring System

Utility of monitoring information provided for OP implementation (including OP modification and PA-level coordination)

109. **(KII, IS) Reports are the main sources of information for substantiating decision making.** Monitoring data is used for any decisions taken, as well as in the MC or for discussing/negotiating with EC. The reports considered most useful are those combining information on launching, contracting, and payments with actual information on project progress. Other reports are also considered very useful, especially those that provide detailed information on progress or that reveal common problems/issues. The IBs that have developed their own applications mentioned automatic or regular drafting of reports on different topics, allowing them to have a very good understanding of progress or main challenges. The AIR is perceived as a report for the EC, with most IBs considering it to have little relevance to their activity. In terms of format, qualitative analyses are considered equally or even more important than simple **presentation of data. Overall usefulness of the reports in terms of revealing problems with indicators has yet to** be improved, as per the consultations. [66]

110. **(KII) With some exceptions, M&E data is not necessarily used to ensure complementarity among OPs**. An exception is represented by the weekly monitoring report (on launches, contracted values, payments) submitted to the MEFI, though no information is available on what is actually done with this report. Otherwise, complementarity (as defined during the programming stage) is generally ensured with the help of the mechanisms defined (e.g., common committees, additional points in case of complementarity, etc.), but is not necessarily backed up by monitoring and further analysis of data from implementation. Some actors are more proactive in terms of complementarity with other OPs and, in some cases complementarity is ensured with interventions supported from other funds (in the field of IT, furniture production, etc.), in the context of regional planning by the RDAs.

111. **(KII, IS) Coordination mechanisms have yet to be made more effective**. A series of mechanisms are active at the PA level, but their effectiveness is modest (the fluctuation of personnel might also be a reason). [67] Inconsistencies in the coordination mechanisms have been identified over time: e.g., support provided to the SMEs (between ROP and National Rural Development Plan, where the complementarity defined at the programming stage was not ensured during implementation); interventions financed by ROP and LIOP are not correlated from a temporal perspective. CLLD interventions also proved difficult to correlate, , although local development strategies count for a

[65] ROP impact evaluation, PA 7.
[66] 50 percent of respondents to the IS believe reports are useful in revealing problems on indicators, while 37.5 percent of respondents do not.
[67] MA program management unit.

good mechanism for coordinating interventions in this field (e.g., LAG's selection criteria are useful in this respect).

112. **(KII) The MEFI's role is seen as minimal, with the MA seen as more important in the provision of support (including training).** The MEFI's involvement is more important in terms of preparing for the future programming period (it has a more political role, which is important in some cases).

Usefulness of support provided by monitoring system to other related policy design

113. **(KII) M&E information can be better used to support decision making at the level of other departments (e.g., to prepare guidelines, or for the evaluation and selection process)**. The monitoring unit is consulted when guidelines are prepared, but data from monitoring is not provided regularly to inform guidelines development, based on implementation progress, lessons learned or problems registered in implementation. IBs actively contribute to the development of guidelines, but the general view is that information could be put to better use.

Value of monitoring in communication activities

114. **(DR) Information on the program's progress is published regularly on the OP website**. Publicly available information includes recent data on projects contracted and the financial implementation progress (authorized expenditure). The files are in Excel format, allowing a certain degree of data processing or analysis (within the limits of the information available).

Quality of monitoring input into evaluation processes

115. **(DR, KII) Monitoring data is a main source of data for evaluations, as is mentioned in the indicative methodology provided in the evaluation plan.** The monitoring database is built on the specific needs for monitoring the OP. The type of data most needed in evaluations cannot currently be obtained from monitoring, though theoretically it could be provided by beneficiaries—if there is a contractual obligation to do so—or collected separately, via surveys. As the impact evaluations show, "evaluation of the contribution of interventions to the diversification of local economies is difficult to quantify, in the absence of specific indicators in this regard and sources of collection for them." [68]

116. **(KII) Staff at the MA and IB levels are consulted when carrying out evaluations.** However, only some people are part of this process, usually the department managers or their replacers. As such, knowledge about evaluations is shared.

The ROP Evaluation System for ESI funds 2014–2020: Strengths and Weaknesses

OP-level structures

117. **(DR) As per the provisions of the CPR, the evaluation of the 2014–2020 ROP aims to improve the process of developing and implementing the OP, as well as increase interventions' effectiveness, efficiency, and impact.** The 2014–2020 Multi-annual Evaluation Plan was produced as part of the ROP ex ante evaluation, in line with the relevant EC guidelines. It also complies with the Operational procedure for drafting the PA and OPs' evaluation plans, and was subject to approval of the OP's MC. The main actors involved in coordinating and managing implementation of the plan are the ROP Evaluation Office, the Evaluation Coordination Committee (ECC), and the MC. The plan also includes a strategy for using and communicating the evaluation results.

118. **(DR) The plan details all aspects pertaining to evaluations, the relevant institutional and capacity building arrangements, as well as quality assurance**. Key procedural aspects are provided for each of the anticipated evaluations, including detailed methodological guidance. The evaluation

studies will assess the OP's contribution to the thematic objectives selected, as well as to the Europe 2020 strategy. Three sets of impact evaluations are planned for each PA of the 2014–2020 ROP, focused on methodological aspects (first set) and learning and knowledge acquisition (both sets); the evaluations planned for 2022 will focus on effects and the extent to which these are sustainable, and the measures needed in this regard. The plan also includes impact evaluations for 2017–2013, an analysis of the ROP implementation system and TA services for strengthening the evaluation capacity of the MA and IBs, for the entire period. The overall budget for the evaluations to be carried out under the plan is estimated at about €4.5 million, calculated based on the value and nature of the interventions to be evaluated.

119. **(DR) Actions to strengthen the evaluation capacity and coordination with other evaluation plans are also detailed**. Currently, the ROP Evaluation Office has five employees, including the manager. Further training is needed to develop technical specifications and Terms of Reference (ToRs), define the evaluation methodology and database management, and develop competencies in carrying out ad hoc evaluations and preparing evaluation reports.

Assessment of the evaluation system's institutional and procedural framework

Evaluation Strategy and Planning Process

120. **(DR, KII) The planned evaluations comply with the regulations, and even exceed the minimum requirements**. As such, about 40 evaluations are estimated in total, out of which 19 have already been carried out, corresponding to all PAs (except the newly introduced interventions under PAs 13–15). Compared to the initial planning, the timeline for evaluations was adjusted, due to the longer time need for procurement. The plan is flexible in terms of adding new evaluations, but no requests were received to date (e.g., for ad hoc evaluations).

121. **Institutional and Procedural Aspects (DR, KII) From an institutional point of view, the Evaluation Unit's current setup is adequate.** Complying with the EC regulations is not perceived as a difficult undertaking. At the MA level, the attitude toward evaluation is neutral: Evaluation is considered necessary, but not seen as the most important activity in the MA. Evaluations studies, on the other hand, are appreciated, but not used.

122. **(KII) It would be beneficial to enhance collaboration between MEFI and ROP Evaluation Units**. Currently, if there are specific needs, the collaboration is rather informal (direct communication between MAs), but those consulted think it would help improve the exchange on topics such as best practices or lessons learned, or even to analyze the opportunity of launching common evaluations for more OPs, based on the complementarities and synergies identified, to understand how these function in practice and what are the effects.

Strengths and weaknesses in the evaluation system's performance

Efficiency of Evaluation Processes

123. **(DR, KII) The current design of evaluations does not adequately support the decision-making process.** Current studies are considered too long and may use old data (2 or 3 years old), thus limiting their usability. More focused evaluations on different themes are needed, and quickly carried out. Future evaluations could cover ITI, EU Strategy for Danube Region, horizontal themes, or state aid.

124. **(KII) Institutional stakeholders have limited awareness of how the evaluation plan is designed**. Participation is often limited to data provision. Some IBs[68] report they have been consulted in relation to the evaluation plan, and MA respondents[69] declare they have been asked about their

[68] RDA SW Oltenia, RDA South Muntenia.
[69] MA program management unit.

evaluation needs.

Tendering and management of evaluation projects

125. **(KII) The entire evaluation management process should be improved**. Along with the lengthy procurement process of the big evaluations planned, a lot of time is lost with the project's management activities (e.g., the Inception Report). Experts' qualification is also perceived as too general given the ToR criteria, which are also deemed as too general.

126. **(KII) Alternatives to the current evaluation format could be considered**. Suggestions of the ROP Evaluation Unit include use of small-sized, targeted evaluations, to attract other tenderers (not just large companies), and to set up a mechanism for selecting experts directly, based on specific needs. Ad hoc evaluations, carried out by staff in the Evaluation Unit or by external actors, should also be undertaken more often.

Interfaces between monitoring and evaluation systems

127. **(DR, KII) While some of the data needed for evaluations can be provided by the MA monitoring system, most of the information required is not available at the MA level.** The reason is that the monitoring database was built in line with the need to monitor implementation progress, without taking into account evaluation needs. Additional data for evaluations are being collected by evaluators as part of the evaluation process (e.g., from beneficiaries, based on a support letter).

128. **(KII) The monitoring system's role in feeding necessary data for evaluations could potentially be enhanced.** As the main information source, beneficiaries do not have the contractual obligation to collect additional data, beyond what is specified in the financing contracts; however, a centralized approach for data collection, financed through TA, might be beneficial.

Quality of discussion on evaluation findings in MCs and other partnership groups

129. **(DR, KII) The results of the evaluations are discussed in MC meetings and formally used for decision making**. As such, the main findings and recommendations of evaluations are presented in the MC, sometimes in too extensive a format. With some exceptions (e.g., PA 1, PA 2), it is considered that the results of evaluation studies are generally not used to support decision making.

Accessibility of relevant information on evaluation results

130. **(DR) Information on evaluation is public and available to all interested parties.** Knowledge of evaluations is mixed among the stakeholders interviewed, and to some extent is usually higher for those involved in evaluation activities. The ECC is an important channel for discussing and disseminating the evaluation results. Its composition is very technical and includes relevant representatives from MAs, IBs, and other stakeholders (as observers), as potential users of evaluation findings (including those responsible for implementing recommendations).

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

Workload and related costs for MA/IB staff in contributing to evaluations, staff knowledge/expertise/training etc.

131. **(DR, KII) The allocation of tasks should be improved at the level of the Evaluation Unit, taking into account the limited number of staff.** ROP is very complex, and evaluators need to have extensive knowledge of the area being evaluated, so it would help to have tasks allocated by area, to facilitate better management. Staff specialization in the areas of responsibility is also needed, especially given ROP's diversity and complexity, but also because of the novelty of some areas (e.g., PA 1, on technological transfer). Other training needs pertain to the methodological aspects of evaluations, statistical analysis, and management of evaluations.

Management and communications

132. **(KII) Stability and availability of data necessary for evaluations are key for their success and relevance**. A dedicated structure with adequate capacity is needed to manage evaluations. Moreover, the existence of a comprehensive database of data required for evaluations is key to the undertaking. Managing evaluations can also be a very challenging task, including due to external factors, such as the availability or expertise of experts. Skills development in this regard is also needed.

Effectiveness of the Evaluation System

Utility of evaluation results for OP design (i.e., evaluations from 2007–2013 feeding 2014–2020 OPs)

133. **(DR, KII) Ex ante evaluations informed the development of the 2014–2020 OPs, as per the provisions of the CPR and EC guidance in this respect**. Impact evaluations for 2007–2013 interventions were also carried out during this programming period, as part of the Multi-annual Evaluation Plan. These include key lessons from implementation, which can potentially inform implementation and planning (also considering the traditional character of most OP interventions).

Utility of evaluation results for OP implementation (including OP modification and PA-level coordination)

134. **(KII) Evaluations are not considered useful to support decision making, with the exception of those that inform future interventions/the next programming period**. Decisions are usually made based on monitoring data rather than on evaluation results**.** Evaluations usually come very late, and in general, confirm decisions already known or taken. Management or other departments rarely communicate with the Evaluation Unit, either on themes of interest or on how evaluation results could potentially be used to solve problems. Evaluation results are not used to develop Applicant's Guides, either. Applicant's Guides are drafted at the IP level and are very specific, while evaluations look at more general aspects at PA level. Evaluation studies, which usually come very late, cannot support an activity that requires swift decisions. This approach to evaluation is not specific to the ROP MA, but in general seems characteristic of the institutional culture at the level of Romanian administration.

135. **(DR, KII) Decision-makers should be more proactive in defining their evaluation needs**. Along with the long duration of evaluations (as opposed to the need for rapid information to support decision making), evaluations are also not used because they are not carried out in response to an identified need. Evaluations could potentially be used to improve performance orientation and enhance complementarity among OPs. ROP evaluations analyze existing complementarities and synergies with other interventions, but in practice, this is more of a formal exercise, as evaluators do not always have access to other OPs' databases. As such, databases should be interconnected, and it could be useful to have common evaluation studies (e.g., ROP and POCU) that could even result in comprehensive common databases that can facilitate understanding at the target group/regional level.

136. **(KII) Identifying ways to carry out shorter and more targeted evaluations is key to better using results to support decision making**. It is **important** that such evaluations are designed around needs and delivered on time. Developing the evaluator's capacity or finding ways to ensure that evaluators with relevant and sufficient expertise are selected to carry out evaluations is key for the overall relevance and credibility of results. Staff with expertise in the area being evaluated also need to be more involved.

C. Operational Program Competitiveness (POC)

Program Monitoring System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Description and Program Structures

137. **POC supports investments that meet the needs and challenges of low economic competitiveness, research, development, and innovation (RDI), and information and communication technology (ICT).** Within the POC, three PAs were established: PA 1 aims to strengthen RDI, while PA 2 aims to enhance access to and use and quality of ICT. PA 3 was added in 2020 to support SMEs in the context of the economic crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

138. **The monitoring activity is approached as a mechanism for the systematic collection and analysis of information on activities, indicators, and project results, as well as the communication and use of information obtained about their progress.** By aggregating the information at the MA level, the monitoring activity allows following implementation progress at the PA level.

139. **The POC monitoring function is set up within a multi-level framework, with stakeholders distributed across five levels**: (i) beneficiaries; (ii) IBs; (iii) the MA; (iv) the MC; and (v) the EC. Beneficiaries are mainly responsible for data collection, while within the MA and IBs there are several units involved in data validation, aggregation, or reporting, each with clearly established roles.

140. **The POC MA is responsible for implementing M&E activities in POC, at the program level and for coordinating project-level monitoring**. The General Directorate for European Competitiveness Programs (DGPEC) within the MEFI serves as MA for POC 2014–2020, being responsible for coordinating the overall implementation of the OP. The MA coordinates the activity of the IBs and supports the MEFI for ESIF-level actions. In POC MA, the Directorate for Program Management, Project Appraisal and Contracting (DGPECP) is responsible for ensuring OP monitoring and is comprised of two services: the Service for Program Management (SGP) and the Service for Project Appraisal and Contracting (SECP). Additionally, the Service for Project Supervision (SMP) monitors the fulfilment of indicators for each operation. The SGP covers most of the Directorate's responsibilities in relation to M&E, ensuring the collection, aggregation, and reporting of data with respect to POC progress from IBs and the other Directorates and services in the MA. The SMIS Coordination and IT Directorate, also in the MEFI, is responsible for the development and maintenance of MySMIS, the main IT instrument used in POC. At the MEFI level, the PEO is responsible for conducting the evaluations, according to the POC evaluation plan.

141. **There are two IBs, one established within the Ministry of Education and Research (the IB for research) and a second established as the Authority for the Digitization of Romania within the Ministry of Communications and Information Society (the IB for promoting the information society).** Their responsibilities are defined in relation to the Delegation Agreement with the MA. The IB for Research (IB-R) is responsible for implementing PA 1 while the IB for the promotion of the information society (IB-PIS) is responsible for implementing PA 2. IB roles refer to planning and appraising and selecting projects; verifying purchases (including tenders) and requesting reimbursement and payment claims; conducting technical monitoring of projects (activities, output and results indicators, human resources, calendar etc.); detecting and reporting irregularities/fraud/control; and information and communication related to beneficiaries.

142. **POC MC is a partnership structure, with a strategic decision-making role in the POC implementation process.** There are 31 voting members in the POC MC, representatives of the ministries in charge of relevant public policies (such as, European Funds, Economy and Health), the IBs, National Agency for Environmental Protection, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Romania, as well as other public institutions and NGOs in relevant sectors.

Specific Monitoring Tools

143. **MySMIS is the main IT instrument for monitoring projects in POC**. Data collection starts with the applicant, who introduces the financial data and targets assumed for the indicators in the system. This is done using the module MySMIS2014+, which is the MySMIS client interface. If the project is selected and contracted, these data become reference data and serve as the starting point in project implementation. All elements monitored at the project level need to be validated in the IT system (MySMIS), by the project officer. Only validated data will be considered in the program-monitoring process. Art4MySMIS generates reports into Excel format which are subsequently processed according to the requested reporting forms.

144. **MySMIS cannot yet be used exclusively, and therefore some other IT instruments are used both at the MA and IB level**. Microsoft Access and Excel are also used, especially for data collection and processing. The use of other IT tools for data centralization helps the MA and IBs verify and validate MySMIS data.

Assessment of the monitoring system's institutional and procedural framework

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

145. **The POC MA carries out its M&E activity, aggregating the data it receives from the PA level, through IBs, for PA 1 and PA 2.** In the case of investment grants under PA 3, at the level of POC MA, projects that are monitored are sampled. The Delegation Agreement provides IBs responsibilities only for project-monitoring functions and responsibilities.

146. **Stakeholders' opinion regarding the understanding and definition of M&E activities is rather dual.** While the survey results show there is good understanding of M&E functions, and very good, both at the MA and IB level, the interviewed representatives think M&E activities are rather poorly understood among MA and IB staff.

147. **However, the analyses show that M&E responsibilities, both at the MA and IB level, are better defined at the project level than at the program level.** Interviews confirm that at the level of the responsible structures both within the MA and IB, monitoring is carried out almost exclusively at the project level, so that the monitoring process, among employees, is for the most part associated with project monitoring.

148. **Monitoring activities are perceived differently among beneficiaries.** While on PA 1 the beneficiaries were made aware and eventually realized the importance of monitoring activities at the OP level, through indicators, this was not achieved on PA 2.

149. **POC's institutional set-up influences the way activities are performed**. POC MA and the two IBs are not stand-alone institutions; they are part of two ministries and a public agency, functioning as Directorates. This means that they are coordinated by a State Secretary, need to follow the internal regulations of their respective institution, and depend on other departments such as HR, procurement, and legal. All institutions have limited mandate when it comes to communication, as all need to go through the ministries' channels and be approved accordingly (for example, site updates, press releases, etc.).

150. **At the MA decision level, there seems to be no long-term vision for OP management, and M&E tools are poorly understood and underused in decision making.** It appears that one of the main improvements needed pertains to the centralization of information generated in the M&E process, since there is no dedicated point for aggregating all the information related to M&E and dealing only with M&E aspects at the PA and OP levels. Although, the capacity exists at the institutional level, the distribution of resources seems precarious.

151. **The MC may play a more central role in OP implementation.** Although in accordance with

Regulation no. 1303/2013, the MC may address observations to the MA regarding program implementation and evaluation, it seems that this right is not formally or properly used. Both from the point of view of the MA and OI-PSI representatives, MC should act as a program board and give more support to the work of the MA and IBs, and even lobby politically or economically where appropriate. The unsatisfactory performance of the MC may be linked to the overall poor performance of the OP, which the MC failed to address.

Design of Indicators

152. **POC shows an overall good internal coherence, linking needs to objectives and actions.** It also contains output and results indicators for each Investment Priority (IP). Indicators are correctly identified, their achievement supporting the overall objective of increasing national competitiveness. The logic of intervention was built in collaboration with the EC and with the participation of relevant stakeholders, mainly line ministries and national agencies responsible for implementing public policies relevant to POC (RDI and ICT). The logic of intervention was validated by the ex-ante evaluation, against the criteria in CPR. The results orientation is embedded in the OP through elements required by the EU regulations, namely the set of financial, output, and results indicators with baselines and targets, and the PF, which covers all PAs.

153. **In accordance with Art. 27 of the CPR, POC should contain the following types of indicators:** (i) financial indicators related to allocated expenses; (ii) output indicators related to supported operations; and (iii) results indicators related to the IP. The output indicators are divided into three categories: common indicators (a limited set of indicators is listed in Annex I of EU Regulation no. 1301/2013); program-specific indicators (inserted in the OP in addition to the common indicators) and project-specific indicators (which capture the specificities of the type of funded project, not included in the OP and AIRs). The results indicators are divided into two categories: program-specific indicators (reflecting the situation at sector level) and project-specific indicators (representing the project's contribution to the results indicator specific to the program, not included in the OP and AIRs).

154. **Below are some of the gaps and challenges identified with respect to indicators:**

- The methodology of the indicators was developed at the end of 2016, after about 200 contracts had already been signed.
- Although the indicators are not redundant and generally well explained, in some cases their definitions could have been more developed. Also, the CO24 and CO25 calculation formula is error prone and may generate administrative burden at the beneficiary level (also the case for 3S7).
- To establish the performance indicators, for the section dedicated to research, one of the indicators was "the number of new researchers in supported entities." IB-R calculated this indicator for each person and its value initially was very high. The EC took notice and instructed on the use of a new formula, based on full-time equivalent norms. After several months, the MA, the IB, and beneficiaries reached a common point regarding the revision of the calculation. Approximately 14 new instructions and additional documents were appended to about 140 contracts so the values could be updated (the whole process lasted about a year).[70]
- At the PA 2 level, regarding the Performance Framework indicators, there were some issues that started with the National Digital Agenda Strategy related to the role and responsibilities of institutions in the implementation of the e-Government section. These generated a lack of projects, which resulted in not reaching the Performance Framework indicators related to e-Government.

[70] However, the milestones for the performance indicators were still met.

- OP indicators that projects achieve are in fact indicators of project sustainability, and are very difficult to verify due to the very difficult calculation formula and the availability of data. The necessary data is collected from the beneficiary through sustainability reports and should normally be aggregated by MySMIS.

155. **On a positive note, M&E results on indicators are largely disseminated according to requirements (according to 78 percent of survey respondents).** Also, over 65 percent of respondents believe the program will achieve its goals in full or over 75 percent.

156. **About 70 percent of beneficiaries do not know how the indicators they report at the OP level are aggregated and used.** However, a positive aspect is that the beneficiaries can carry out the activities related to the indicators at the project level in a reasonable period, as they do not consider them to have a heavy administrative burden.

Design of IT systems

157. **MySMIS is the main tool used. Although it facilitates transparency and accountability, the IT system needs structural updates.** Both at the MA and IB level, although most of the data collected are loaded into MySMIS, other IT instruments are still used as parallel tools for data collection and verification (Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Access, and other databases). Project data from MySMIS do not allow for easy processing or interpretation. The survey results confirm that MySMIS functionality is poor, especially for data verification (58 percent of respondents consider that MySMIS has a poor and very poor performance in this regard).

158. **MA/IB employees have mentioned a number of shortcomings to the system.** One problem mentioned refers to the fact that it is not yet sufficiently developed to cover all tasks and activities related to M&E or that the structure of the data, mainly of indicators, is not fully aligned with the OP. Another problem is related to inputting historical data, prior to its implementation. [71]

159. **Many fields are filled in primarily by the beneficiary.** This leads to several problems, since **beneficiaries** often lack the IT knowledge or monitoring skills to enter the necessary data correctly. This problem is compounded by the fact that MySMIS does not have an alert system to report erroneous data. Several other issues were encountered by both the MA/IBs and beneficiaries, regarding the need to keep parallel data and the difficulty of monitoring the projects, since MySMIS only addresses the indicators that are sometimes obtained only at a project's end.

160. **It has been noted that MySMIS is also often criticized by the beneficiaries, who complain about a large amount of data to be collected and entered.** In many cases, beneficiaries do not consider this information to be relevant. However, most beneficiaries consider MySMIS to be very useful for automating data collection and transmission.

161. **The system could be improved by introducing an alert system that works both at the MA/IB and beneficiary level**, which signals when certain specific risks/problems arise within a project and when data is entered incorrectly into the system. MySMIS should also contain tools allowing the user to set their own conditions and extract the data specifically needed.

Strengths and weaknesses in the monitoring system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

162. **Overall, the OP's monitoring function is fully compliant with current legislation, allowing projects to be tracked in detail. However, improvements are needed to increase efficiency.** The need

[71] MySMIS became operational late on the POC and, for example, on PA 1 there were 100 contracts signed before its implementation. Subsequently, all of these projects' data had to be entered manually. Also, MySMIS does not take over the data originally entered from one mode to another, so the same information must be filled in repeatedly.

for an "early warning" mechanism that could prevent and better mitigate any delays or problems in project implementation was unequivocally observed, especially at the level of the MA staff.

163. **All the national regulatory framework was developed and enforced so as to enable the effective implementation of the EU requirements.** This was part of the accreditation process the MA and IBs pass through at the beginning of the programming period. The operational procedures, which are drafted by the MA and applicable to both the MA and the IBs, are perceived as being very useful for the monitoring process, as well as for all the other functions, and are the backbone of all activities performed in the MA and IBs. Some problems were observed in terms of ease of use of procedures, especially for project monitoring.

164. **However, the EC audit conducted in 2019, which focused on the reliability of performance data for 2014–2020, concluded that the management and control systems established at the program level do not work properly**.[72] While the auditors showed that the reliability of the data reported in the 2017 AIR could not be confirmed, the audit report highlighted some key issues regarding the M&E system at that time, mainly related to the process of collecting data for indicators, incorrect measuring or reporting of indicators within AIR, or lack of minimum information to be stored in MySMIS. Therefore, the classification of the audited part of the management and control system was Category 4, "Essentially does not work." While 9 of the 19 recommendations were closed following the answers transmitted by the Romanian part, 10 recommendations remained open at the time of finalizing the audit report and were subsequently addressed.

165. **The POC monitoring procedure is generally considered adequate by MA and IB employees, obtaining very good feedback (between 75 and 100 percent) for all analyzed criteria—clarity, utility, ease of use, and relevance for adequate monitoring.** However, 29 percent of respondents consider the procedure to contain excessive checks on projects.

166. **As beneficiaries' documents are verified by different departments within the IBs/MA, coordination among these is essential for ensuring a smooth and efficient process.** The thorough verification is oriented toward ensuring full compliance and detailed control of the way projects are implemented.[73] This leads to significant workload throughout the monitoring system and, given the high administrative burden on each project, the monitoring officers are often overloaded.

Efficiency of Monitoring Processes

167. **Project-level data are collected and aggregated, lending to the achievement of the PA objectives.**[74] Project information is gathered in several ways: from reports made by beneficiaries, verifications through IT applications, and other open-source monitoring sources or onsite visits. There are two types of reports, quarterly and annual. Both reports are a review of projects, risks, degree of absorption, etc. The reports do not contain any qualitative evidence of the results obtained by the OP, or their effects. There are several ad hoc reports; for example, reports on existing savings at the project level, risks of non-achievement of project indicators, risks of non-implementation of projects within the set deadlines and measures that could be taken, main blockages, etc.

168. **The fact that the AIR might no longer be implemented in the next programming period was considered positive by MA staff, as it is not considered to add value to the OP.** Some POC indicators cannot be reported until the project is completed (due to the nature of the projects/indicators) while

[72] See Guidance for the Commission and Member States on a common methodology for the assessment of management and control systems in the Member States for the 2014–2020 programming period (EGESIF 14-0010-final of 18.12.2014). KR6: A reliable system for collecting, recording and storing data in for monitoring, evaluation, financial management, verification and audit, including links to electronic data interchange systems with beneficiaries.

[73] Operational Procedure for Monitoring POC funded projects—Code: PO.DGPEC.03, Edition: III, Revision 4, Date: 09.09.2020.

[74] If necessary, at the IB level, the collected data are also sent to the department responsible for monitoring the strategy.

for others there are no data at the time the AIR is developed/approved, as these are provided later by the responsible institutions (for example, the National Institute for Statistics).

169. **A potential improvement may be related to the data and indicators collected by beneficiaries at the PA level.** These are transmitted to the MA, which should aggregate them. They reach the MA's project monitoring service and are sent to the DGPEC, which is responsible for drawing up AIR. However, this only happens when AIR needs to be developed. Otherwise, OP information is used only for information related to subcontracting, payments, etc. This means that there is an unjustified effort on the part of the beneficiaries who collect the data for the indicators and report them permanently, as the activities progress.

170. **While the Beneficiaries' Survey shows that they do not identify any major challenges in achieving the program indicators, the progress of the projects being largely in accordance with the initial planning, the AIRs and the analysis of indicators show that there are some problems.** In addition to not reaching the indicators related to IP 2c regarding the Performance Framework, POC management presented a high risk, considering the EC preventive system audit on the reliability of performance indicators that classified this part of the system in Category 4, "Essentially does not work." Thus, there was a risk the EC would suspend payments because of the existence of significant deficiencies in the quality and reliability of the monitoring system or data on common and specific indicators. Achieving the assumed targets and avoiding the risk of decommitment depended inclusively on the pace at which projects were to be implemented. Significant problems in POC management came from the slow pace of drafting project sheets, respective implementation of projects by public beneficiaries, with important financial impact being major projects such as DANUBIUS and ELI.

171. **The processing and interpretation of the data did not depend only on the data collection format but also on the characteristics of the monitored indicators, the training of the monitoring staff on how to perform the verification, and on establishing the methodology used in their interpretation.** These were quite ambiguous at the beginning of the program and were gradually clarified, through a series of meetings between the representatives of POC MA and IB-R.

172. **In general, beneficiaries feel positive about the existing guidelines and procedures, both in terms of clarity and relevance, as well as for their accessibility and validity of information.** Where problems were encountered, a major proportion (93 percent) received telephone guidance from the project officer, as well as written guidance from the IB (76 percent) and MA (49 percent). The vast majority considered these guidelines to be very useful. These findings confirm that there is a solid and open relationship between beneficiaries and IBs, which also emerged from the interviews. However, 71 percent of the beneficiaries think it would be useful to have monitoring and reporting procedures applied uniformly by all MAs.

173. **When there were delays compared to the initial planning in terms of meeting the indicators, the beneficiaries were most often notified by the MA, and the project's implementation period was often extended.** Beneficiaries are generally aware that the collection of indicators is a permanent task, and most (70 percent) perform it as such. However, the MA staff emphasized that not all beneficiaries understand the importance of thoroughly reporting on projects' progress in order to monitor the evolution of the program.

174. **Another positive area to note is that beneficiaries state that they learn about the monitoring and reporting requirements applicable to their projects from several sources,** such as written documentation available online or received from the IB/MA, verbal guidance from the IB/MA, or information sessions held by the IB/MA. All of these sources seem to adequately inform the beneficiaries regarding M&E requirements.

Performance of IT systems

175. **There are currently inconsistencies between the way the MySMIS platform was developed and the fact that the appropriate documents were not adapted in accordance with the changes made.** Thus, it would be necessary to modify the documents used in the relationship with the beneficiaries (such as the framework financing contract, the working procedures with all the forms and annexes) to assure better concordance with MySMIS. For example, Excel reporting templates are still used and requested by the MA directly or through the various working procedures in place. These documents are different from those generated by the existing reporting application within MySMIS. Thus, it would be useful to generate reports directly from MySMIS in an appropriate format, in order to avoid working on two document formats at the same time.

176. **In order to monitor in more detail the program's impact, it would be useful to make the reporting of the IT system more detailed (possibly for well-defined periods of time—years/months).** MySMIS also needs to be better standardized and improved to allow MA and IB employees to easily obtain quarterly reports.

177. **The problems regarding MySMIS seem to be felt by the beneficiaries as well.** In addition to this system, many beneficiaries also use email for data transfer (66 percent) or even CD transfer (38 percent) because MySMIS is perceived as more error-prone than these instruments. Regarding MySMIS, beneficiaries indicated that there are problems on almost all levels: the degree of automation, administrative burden, error rate, etc. The fact that MySMIS loads to a large extent scanned copies of documents made and signed on paper seem to be the main obstacle in reducing the administrative burden. Also, 56 percent of respondents face difficulties in exporting the necessary data for indicators, and 43 percent have trouble selecting the necessary data for indicators. MySMIS is an important resource for data gathering and reporting, but beneficiaries still have to submit both reports in.pdf along with Excel sheets on different financial/technical progress, so the system is not automated enough.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

178. **Both the MA and IBs generally have the necessary administrative capacity to fulfill their M&E responsibilities.** The ones responsible for monitoring projects at the IB and beneficiary level are usually well-trained people who increase the success rate of project implementation, the annulments being caused by economic or scientific decisions and not by an inability to implement interventions. However, improvement is always possible and according to the interviewed persons, it may be achieved, especially through better communication between IBs and the MA and/or beneficiaries, as well as through regular trainings. Less than 50 percent of those responsible for collecting, verifying, or using the data have received training in this field.

179. **Still, the administrative capacity seems to be lower within MA structures, and this has several causes.** Besides the need for internal restructuring and improved distribution of resources, from the discussions with the MA representatives, it seems that the MA staff had limited involvement in the 2014–2020 programming process. Greater involvement would have helped staff both better understand the OP's intervention logic and gain a proper understanding of M&E activities.

180. **At the IB level, there is satisfactory capacity for data collection and monitoring**. But even here, the role of the IB-PIS in monitoring and evaluating the PA is less understood, compared to the previous programming period. Within the operational procedures and in the Delegation Agreement, the IBs only have a role in collecting and providing the data to the MA to develop the quarterly reports and AIRs. However, there are certain people in charge of collecting data and evaluating the PA who transmit information to superiors so they can make information-based decisions in the next stage of programming (i.e., analyze the projection on indicators, if there are risks and what effects there may be). This activity only takes place quarterly, and the IB notifies the MA when certain risks are identified.

At the IB-R level, the main challenge is related to accelerating the digitization of activities, particularly important in the current socio-economic context. The challenge is even more important as the staff involved had to quickly adapt to work simultaneously on two different modules of MySMIS.

181. **Stakeholders think more M&E knowledge is needed both at the MA and IB levels**. Even if the staff within the IBs and MAs are generally well-trained, both best practices in the field and the data collected so far show that they must benefit from constant and adequate training. According to IB-R, the training mechanism that has given the best results so far is both theoretical and practical, developed by MEFI. These took effect so long as it was implemented simultaneously with the staff of the MAs and IBs, and no longer worked since the approach was changed and the only trained staff were MA employees who eventually had to train the IB staff. The need for trainings also emerges from the survey; 89 percent of respondents considered the trainings to be the most important way to improve M&E knowledge, but at the MA and IB level, 78 percent considered that there is also an important need for additional guidelines and instructions.

182. **The main support needed at the IB-R level is to attract technical experts specialized in thematic areas to validate, from a scientific point of view, the results of project implementation.** The existence of technical reports prepared by these experts was a key element to conducting the monitoring activity in good conditions, both by checking the progress reports with the related technical deliverables and **in** the monitoring visits carried out at project locations.

183. **Regarding beneficiaries' administrative capacity, 54 percent did not have to use/hire additional staff, compared to the one initially planned in order to meet the monitoring and reporting requirements.** Thus, the costs of monitoring and reporting activities are often maintained at the level initially provided. However, additional staff was mainly recruited to prepare reports (55 percent) and justify documents (61 percent). Most people on the project team were usually involved in collecting data and preparing supporting documents.

184. **Although the training sessions for beneficiaries were considered useful in helping them meet M&E requirements, too few beneficiaries have actually received training.** Within the survey, 47 percent of mentioned that they received training provided by IBs, 24 percent received training provided by the MA, and 21 percent received training provided by other entities.

Effectiveness of the Monitoring System

185. **The M&E institutional framework is influenced by the overall set-up and functioning of Romania's central administration, mirroring its rules, practices, and overall organizational culture**. Generally, the Romanian administration is still focused on compliance and legality rather than on quality and results. It is affected by high administrative burden, rigid communication channels, and hierarchical structures, as well as low ownership of policies, programs, or their results.[75] These have inherently made their mark on the design of the overall EU funds system and continue to play a significant role, even in POC implementation.

186. **It seems that there is no unified vision for the M&E objectives on the elements to be evaluated, monitored, and reported to the EC**. While MA stakeholders consider that the M&E tools are not well understood or used at the MA decision level, the IB-R states that the monitoring data are used in the decision-making process. along with many other factors (legislative, strategic, procedural, etc.) However, the entire system seems to be less oriented toward the effective results and impact of the implemented projects and more toward compliance. In many cases, only certain parameters are monitored and analyzed, such as financial data or the degree of absorption, omitting the real results behind interventions. Also, the instruments used showed that the top decision-makers are not sufficiently involved in the OP implementation. To increase the interest of MA management in M&E

[75] The structural causes underlying the weak capacity of the Romanian public administration (gov.ro) and also The Strategy for Public Administration Consolidation 2014–2020.

activities, more frequent requests and updates from the ministry level, on reports on the fulfillment of the OP indicators, could be useful. Currently, high-level interest is focused only on the rate of absorption and contracting stage.

187. **The MA and IB employees seem to have limited understanding of the Partnership Agreement**. It seems that they were not involved in M&E activities at the level of the Partnership Agreement, nor did they contribute to the activities carried out by any of the thematic or functional working groups created at its level.

188. **The OP is generally on track with implementation, and has been modified five times**. Some modifications were intended to clarify indicators. The stakeholders claim that the data collected are enough to monitor progress at the program level.

189. **POC contributes to the implementation of several national strategies in various fields such as competitiveness, research, development and innovation, ICT, education, and health.** At the MA level, certain specific data on the OP results are requested for monitoring the National Reform Plan. At the IB-PIS level, the data collected are also sent to the department responsible for monitoring the National Digital Agenda Strategy. Regarding the Performance Framework, a problem was encountered at the level of the above-mentioned strategy, with the e-Government section, that resulted in a lack of projects and failure to reach the related Performance Framework indicators. It seems that there was no responsible person/coordinator from the MEFI to take over these issues.

190. **The data regarding the progress of the PA I are used by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization (MRID) through the specialized directorates in monitoring the National Research Strategy and for drafting the new strategy that will be valid for the new programming period**. The mechanisms used are institutionalized: the specialized directorate within the MRID makes a request to which IB-R responds by providing the requested data within the legal limits of competence.

191. **The MA is required to publish a "citizens' summary" of each AIR, as well as regular (usually monthly) updates on the financial progress of the program and these requirements are met.** There are no other requirements to release data or information from monitoring, but the MA also publishes the minutes and decisions of the MC meetings. Unfortunately, the MC meetings tend to be formal events and its interventions and recommendations are considered too few. The MC should play a more central role and act as a board of the OP but the interest of the institutions represented in the MC is not to make a contribution to the OP, but rather to ensure that the interests of their institutions are represented and considered.

Success factors and good practices in monitoring

Presentation of identified good practices

192. **Both the MA and IBs generally have the necessary administrative capacity to fulfill their M&E responsibilities.** Those responsible for monitoring projects at the IB and beneficiary level are usually skilled professionals who increase a project's success rate. In terms of M&E functions, however, it seems that a more developed administrative capacity may be found at the IB level. Within OI-PSI there is satisfactory capacity for data collection and monitoring, while within IB-R there is an organizational culture based on strict observance of work procedures, and consequently M&E activities were observed.

193. **Another example of good practice is that the OI-PSI is very open with beneficiaries and establishes an informal partnership with them.** The OI-PSI frequently communicates to beneficiaries about effects and risks (financial or otherwise) on the implemented projects. It also tries to limit negative effects. For example, OI-PSI managed to anticipate and avoid certain problems that could have occurred in the implementation of some projects, discussing in advance with the beneficiaries and making them understand that they have engaged in an activity that is too difficult for them to

sustain and implement.

194. **Although MySMIS needs to be improved and cannot yet be used exclusively, it is gratifying that constant efforts are being made** throughout the system to ensure that IT tools for monitoring projects and programs can be used as comprehensively as possible. These efforts shall continue, and in the 2021–2027 period be even more widely used to facilitate M&E activity.

Key success factors for POC monitoring

195. **The POC logic of intervention was built in collaboration with the EC and with the participation of relevant stakeholders and shows a good internal coherence, linking the needs, to objectives and actions**. The indicators are correctly identified, their achievement helping to increase national competitiveness.

196. **Although several problems existed in the past, the OP's monitoring function is compliant with current legislation,** and **the recommendations provided in the 2019 EC audit report are being implemented.** There is a general agreement among stakeholders that the monitoring system is now compliant with all relevant legislation, both in terms of design and in practice. Evidence from the document review, the interviews, and beneficiaries confirm the fact that the POC monitoring system meets at least the minimum requirements of the regulations.

POC Evaluation System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Assessment of the evaluation system's institutional and procedural framework

Evaluation Strategy and Planning Process

197. **The POC evaluation plan was approved by the POC MC in May 2016. There are eight evaluation themes that cover all the SOs within PA 1 and 2.** PA 3 is not included in the evaluation plan. The evaluation plan is not restrictive, so the MA can also carry out ad hoc evaluations as needed during the life cycle of the program.

198. **The POC evaluation plan is developed by MEFI, with inputs from the MA.** The plan is developed at the beginning of programming and implemented by the MEFI PEO, which prepares all the necessary documents for the tendering process, which is managed by the specialized structure in MEFI; the PEO is part of the evaluation process.

199. **Tenders are usually organized by evaluation themes.** The methodology for carrying out the evaluation is established in the evaluation plan and detailed in the tender documentation, for each theme, with respect to:

- evaluation questions
- territorial/sectoral dimensions/target groups
- suggested methodology—both theory-based and counterfactual impact evaluations
- instruments
- type of data needed/expected to be used (context, MySMIS, program or project level)
- key stakeholders
- expertise of the evaluators

200. **Once the winners are established, the evaluation begins and is carried out according to the specifications and the schedule in the ToRs and the technical offer.** POC MA, IB-R, and OI-PSI are part of the ECC, which oversees the evaluation process and provides inputs during meetings with the evaluators.

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

201. **OP evaluation is managed by the MEFI PEO, and there is no such unit at the level of POC MA.** According to the evaluation plan's provisions, this unit is obligated to annually report information to the MC **about** the plan's stage of implementation.

202. **It seems that the MA is not fully involved in all processes of program evaluation.** The Program Monitoring Service representatives that were interviewed emphasized that they were neither consulted nor involved in developing the evaluation plan. The IBs are informed of the existing evaluations in their PA. Recommendations for improving and developing IB activities appear to be a result of system or operation audits carried out by the EC, the AA, or the MA as part of evaluating the delegated function. These periodic evaluations are key to developing the IBs' activity.

203. **The evaluation system is compliant with the regulatory requirement.** The implementation and monitoring of the evaluation recommendations take place as follows:

- PEO sends the MA the evaluation report and a table with recommendations, including a timeline and responsible entities/staff.
- The MA develops and updates an electronic registry of recommendations, coordinates the implementation of recommendations, and informs on the stage of implementation.
- The MC analyzes how recommendations are implemented.

204. **The evaluation network will be used to share best practices with a larger group of entities active in the field, including academic actors.** The MC plays a key role regarding the use of evaluation results. Final evaluation reports are presented to the CCE and MC for analysis. A summary of results carried out for each OP must be sent to the EC by December 31, 2022, as per the provisions of Art. 114 of the CPR. Other dissemination means include:

- Launch and closing conferences for the evaluations (organized for users of evaluation results)
- Web page for evaluation: www.fonduri-structurale.ro (all reports will be published here)
- Executive summaries for the evaluations: will be developed for the public and distributed as part of the information and communication activities organized by the MEFI and by the evaluation network.

Strengths and weaknesses in the evaluation system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

205. **All national regulatory framework was developed and enforced so as to enable effective implementation of EU requirements.** The operational procedure for evaluation ensures the necessary framework, whereas the evaluation plan provides the details for carrying out the evaluation activities. Evidence from the document review and the interviews confirm that the POC evaluation system is compliant with the requirements of the regulations.

Efficiency of Evaluation Processes

206. **One evaluation has thus far been produced for POC, in the RDI field.** A Reimbursable Advisory Services (RAS) agreement on the evaluation of ESIF interventions in ICT was signed with the World Bank and is currently underway (P174331).

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

207. **The POC MA thinks evaluations could be more effective if conducted by the MA itself; this would also encourage more ownership over the evaluation process.** The POC MA acknowledges the PEO's expertise and perceives the evaluation as relevant for improving activities, but would like to have sufficient resources to implement ad hoc evaluation on relevant topics.

208. **Evaluation expertise is higher than in other MAs**. POCU MA staff were involved in the design and implementation of the 2007–2013 Competitiveness Program (which was not used during this programming period) and have acquired significant knowledge in the field.

Effectiveness of the Evaluation System

209. One **evaluation has been produced for POC so far.** It was finalized in January 2021.

D. Human Capital Operational Program (POCU)

Program Monitoring

Program Monitoring System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Description and Program Structures

210. **M&E provisions for POCU are detailed in Art. 19 and in Annex 1 and 2 of the ESF regulation.**[76] They mainly refer to obligations already stated in the CPR, extending those provisions to the interventions implemented through the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), PA 1 of POCU. Most requirements refer to monitoring participants (target groups), which is extensively done through common indicators and requires data collection and processing arrangements that must be in line with the provisions of Directive 95/46/EC on the protection of individuals with regard to processing personal data and on the free sharing of such data.

211. **As per the ESF regulation, POCU monitoring is achieved through output, immediate results, and longer-term results indicators, as well as the Performance Framework.** There are no process indicators in POCU. Impact should be assessed through evaluations, by gathering appropriate indicators, and other data necessary data. The need to rely on other data sources should be anticipated. All data related to participants need to be recorded and digitally stored as individual participant data. Longer-term indicators should be collected six months after people leave the operation. EU regulations and guidelines recommend that the MA should collect these indicators at the IP level, using representative sampling and surveys.

212. **Program monitoring is regarded as a "systemic macro-process."** It aims to reflect the program's progress by systematically and continuously generating quantitative and qualitative data from the implementation, validating and reporting the data, and performing evaluations as set in the OP evaluation plan, as well as presenting them within the POCU MC. Program monitoring covers tracking financial progress (absorption of funds) and physical progress (output and results indicators).[77] Processes are also monitored, such as calls launched and projects submitted, approved, contracted, modified, cancelled, etc.); however, this type of monitoring activity is not explicitly mentioned in the procedure.

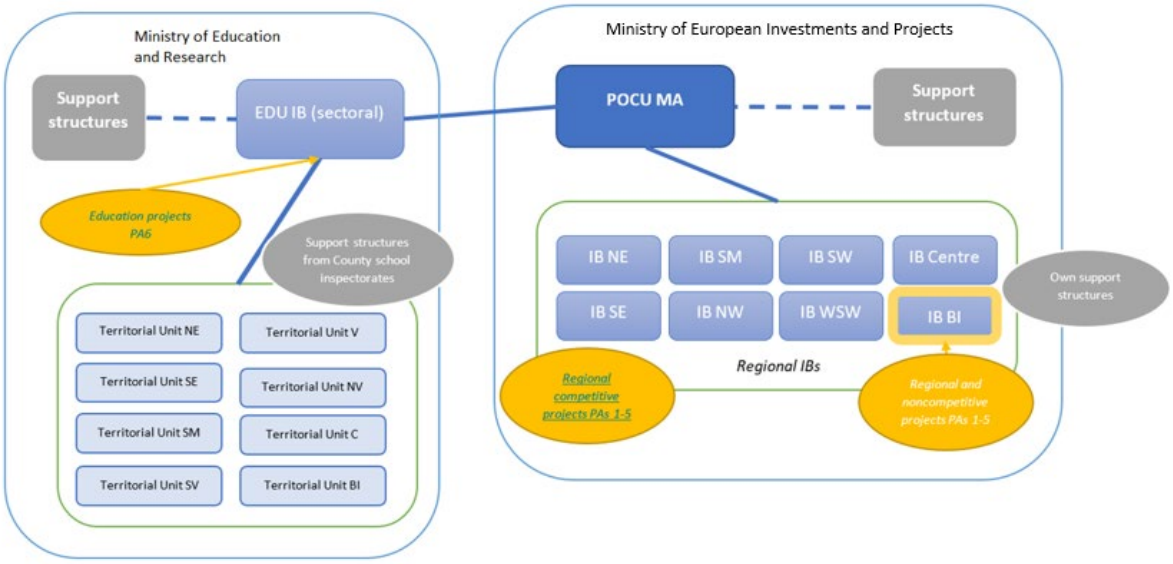
213. **The POCU monitoring function is set up within a multi-level framework, with involved stakeholders distributed across five levels**: (i) beneficiaries; (ii) IBs; (iii) the MA; (iv) the MC; and (v) the EC. Beneficiaries are mainly responsible for data collection, while within each institution there are a number of units involved in data validation, aggregation, or reporting, each with clearly established roles. Additionally, the General Directorate for Programming and System Coordination (DGPCS) at the level of the Ministry of European Investments and Projects (MEIP) is responsible for coordinating the OP's overall implementation as well as the evaluations, according to the POCU evaluation plan. Not least, the SMIS Directorate, also in MEIP, is responsible for the development and maintenance of SMIS, the main IT instrument used in POCU.

214. **The POCU MA and IBs are responsible for implementing the M&E activities (see Figure 1)**. The MA coordinates the activity of the IBs and supports MEIP for ESIF-level actions. The responsibilities of the IBs are defined in relation to the Delegation Agreement with the MA. There are eight Regional IBs (RIBs) and one sector IB (for Education). The RIBs are responsible for the implementation of PAs 1–5, while the Ministry of Education (ME), which is the Education IB, is responsible for implementing PA 6 of POCU. The Bucharest-Ilfov RIB was assigned the monitoring of national-level, non-competitive projects. The Education IB has eight territorial structures, functioning in County School Inspectorates.

[76] 1304/2013.
[77] Based on POCU Monitoring and reporting procedure PO.DGPECU.07, rev 3 (2019), Section 2.5.2, p. 12.

IB roles refer to planning and performing project appraisal and selection; verifying purchases (including tenders) and requests for reimbursement and payment claims; conducting technical monitoring of projects (activities, output and results indicators, human resources, calendar, etc.); detecting and reporting irregularities/fraud/control; and information and communication related to beneficiaries.

Figure 1. POCU organizational structure



215. **The POCU MC is a partnership structure, with a strategic decision-making role in the POCU implementation process.** There are 30 members in the POCU MC, who include representatives of the ministries in charge of relevant public policies (such as Labor, Health, Education, Regional Development, Agriculture), the IBs and the EC (consultative role), the National Agency for Roma, social partners, as well as other private entities and NGOs in relevant sectors. MEIP is not a member of the MC, but representatives (such as the PEO) are invited to the meetings.

216. **Procedures are used for monitoring activities at the program and project level, for the MA and for IBs.** They specify in detail the roles and responsibilities, activities, information flows, and deadlines/durations for certain activities, and can be considered an equivalent to the plan. There are procedures in place for program and project monitoring, drafting the AIR, MC functioning, modifying the program, etc. Procedures have annexes and templates, which are included in the POCU Beneficiary Manual.

217. **Project-level monitoring entails observing progress with respect to achieving objectives and results, attaining indicators' targets, and undertaking financial monitoring.** Monitoring also observes project management and the execution of activities according to the established calendar, as well as qualitative aspects on how activities are executed, specific aspects related to a project's human resources, and respect for equal opportunity and non-discrimination, state aid, and sustainable development principles and regulations. During the three-year sustainability period, monitoring ensures that projects maintain results (and indicators) and respect the principles of equal opportunity and non-discrimination.

218. **Project monitors use document analysis and verification (primarily), special (ad hoc) onsite visits, regular onsite visits, cross visits, ex post monitoring, and verification of data uploaded into MySMIS/MySMIS2014+.** Some monitoring activities receive the input of financial verification officers. Each activity is carefully documented in writing. Apart from the documents focused on verification, project officers need to prepare other types of documents, such as lists/samples of participants, and they take pictures during onsite visits.

219. **Monitoring data is aggregated, synthesized, interpreted in reports, and presented to the MA management, POCU MC,[78] the MEIP, and the DGPCS, EC, and other stakeholders**. Data is used to evaluate the financial progress of the ESF operation, the operational capacity of the overall POCU management and control system, and progress in achieving the established objectives.[79] Based on these assessments, the need to correct or redesign interventions is determined, if significant differences are observed compared to the initial programming. An annual progress review meeting is organized at the OP level, to analyze the overall OP progress, as well as identify main challenges and areas for improvement.

Specific Monitoring Tools

220. **SMIS is the main IT instrument used for monitoring projects in POCU**. Data collection starts at the level of the applicant (even before project selection), who introduces the financial data and the targets assumed for the indicators. This is done using the MySMIS2014+ module, which is the SMIS client interface. All elements monitored at the project level need to be validated in the IT system (SMIS), by the project officer. Only validated data will be taken into account in the program monitoring process.

221. **POCUForm is another IT instrument for monitoring indicators and target groups.** It was developed as a temporary solution in 2018, until the SMIS monitoring modules became operational. Since the latter was delayed for almost two years, POCUForm has been used instead. POCUForm covers the following stages of data collection and reporting, at the beneficiary and MA/RIB level:

- recording participant data in POCU operations (through the individual registration form)
- automatic centralization of data on the project's target group (target group record)
- automatic extraction of data on common and program-specific indicators, based on recorded data; data are centralized for each project (in the indicator record) and transmitted to the IBs in a format that allows centralization at the desired level and size
- centralization of data on common and program-specific indicators at the IB/MA level to facilitate semi-annual/annual reporting to the EC

222. **POCUForm draws data for individuals and automatically calculates all common indicators referring to persons.** Beneficiaries manually input values for the remaining indicators and send the monitoring officer a single file with the indicators. This is done upon each request for payment. All project files in an officer's portfolio can be automatically aggregated into a single file and the officer can send it to the coordinator in the IB. The aggregation takes place upward through the MA level. Reports from POCUForm can provide disaggregated information at the project/IP/IB/PA level, by gender (for indicators referring to persons), category of region (for national projects, a pro-rata is applied), and reporting period (semester/year).

Assessment of the monitoring system's institutional and procedural framework

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

223. **Generally, responsibilities are clearly defined, at the program and project level**. However, responses to the Institutional Survey (IS) show that the level of understanding differs: at the OP level, 100 percent of MA respondents consider responsibilities to be clear, compared to 50–60 percent in the RIBs and only 25–33 percent in the Education IB. At the project level, only 33 percent in the MA consider responsibilities to be clearly defined, compared to 100 percent in the Education IB. Some gaps were identified in relation to the financial corrections, a procedure that has only recently been

[78] The list of the organizations that have representatives in the POCU MC can be found at: http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/files/programe/CU/POCU-2014/CM_POCU/Dec._DG_CPU_CMPOCU_131.pdf
[79] POCU monitoring and reporting procedure, Section 2.5.1, p. 11.

developed.

224. **Procedures are regarded as useful, easy to use, clear, and relevant by the majority of respondents, but challenges remain**. Main problems related to project monitoring involve short deadlines (especially in the case of the Education IB), complicated and insufficiently standardized forms, unclear instructions to beneficiaries, and excessive verifications (mostly for the RIBs).

225. **Apart from tracking projects' progress (financial and physical), POCU monitoring also covers progress in relation to launching calls and their outcomes**. The MA management is continuously informed about the calls under preparation/launched/closed, as well as projects submitted/appraised/rejected (including at what stage) and contracted. The MC is also regularly informed about these aspects, as it is about the absorption and the potential decommitment risks. By contrast, progress on indicators is only occasionally presented and only on specific topics (for example, if a target needs to be changed, the situation pertaining to that indicator is presented). A more detailed overview of progress was presented when the Performance Framework was discussed (in 2019).[80]

226. **POCU's institutional set-up influences the way activities are performed**. POCU MA and the Education IB are not stand-alone institutions; they are part of ministries, functioning as general directorates. This means that they are coordinated by a State Secretary, need to follow the internal regulations of their respective ministry, and depend on other departments, such as HR, procurement, and legal. The RIBs are constituted as legal bodies subordinate to MEIP, but have their own horizontal functions, including communication. In practice, they are a lot more flexible and decisions are taken faster than in the case of the MA or the Education IB; for example, when hiring new staff, obtaining legal support, or undergoing tender procedures. All institutions have limited mandate when it comes to communication, as all need to go through the ministries' channels and be approved accordingly (for example, site updates, press releases etc.).

The MC could be more involved in supporting implementation. The minutes of MC meetings show multiple occasions where MC members ask how they can better contribute to supporting implementation. Also, they appear willing to engage in technical working groups, to provide solutions for improving implementation. Two such working groups were created—one for those who are neither in education, employment, or training (NEETs), and one for digital skills call design. The EC has also called for leveraging the expertise of the social partners and NGOs in designing calls.

Design of Indicators

227. **Generally, the POCU indicators system is well-designed and able to produce the necessary data to inform on progress of the OP.** Three types of indicators are used (in addition to financial indicators): output, immediate results, and longer-term results indicators. Most indicators refer to those receiving support from the program, and are collected when they enter the operation (for output indicators), exit the operation (immediate result), and usually six months after the end of support (longer-term results indicators). Exceptions to this schedule may apply, depending on the operation. The common European Social Fund (ESF) indicators are compulsory to all projects.

228. **Challenges remain with respect to overlaps between common and specific indicators and occasional lack of clarity.** Some IPs have a rather large number of specific indicators (education/social protection/labor market institutions), which in several cases, duplicate information already collected through the common indicators. For example, indicators such as "pupils/students gaining a qualification at the end of support" are very similar to the common indicator "persons gaining a qualification at the end of support." In the case of specific indicators, certain terms are not sufficiently clear, such as "validated," "functional," or "implemented." However, improvements were made in

[80] Documented by the minutes of the MC meetings 2017–2019.

many cases, either by providing details in the indicator fiches, or by changing the indicators (and modifying the OP). Further details on the indicators are available in Annex 1.

229. **The timing for collection is a specific challenge for some indicators.** Some indicators are classified as immediate results indicators and collected at the end of the operation, but should be in fact longer-term indicators, as the defined collection period is too short to reflect the change at the level of target group/intervention supported. Such indicators are mostly applicable to non-competitive projects under the implementation of central public institutions and refer, for example, to adopted procedures or beneficiary satisfaction, functional services, or implemented instruments. As decided by the MA, data collection by representative sampling in the case of longer-term results indicators is only used for 3 out of 10 indicators, while for the rest, beneficiaries are responsible for collecting and reporting the corresponding data in a comprehensive manner, for all participants. This is done through POCUForm.

Collection of indicators regarding participants

Details on each participant are collected on three occasions: upon entering the operation (project), upon leaving the operation, and six months after they leave the operation. This is done by the beneficiary, through Sections A, B, and C of POCUForm.

Not all beneficiaries enter and exit the operation at the same time. Some participate in different activities, others give up, etc. This means that beneficiaries constantly need to follow up on participants. Details on this are provided in the Indicators Guidelines and in the individual fiches.

Design of IT systems

230. **POCU does not use the SMIS monitoring module to track projects' progress**. This is the newest module in SMIS and should cover all aspects related to project monitoring, including participants. However, it is not yet implemented in POCU, given the fact that historical data needs to be introduced and this would entail a great effort, actually "blocking the OP for a few months" (as per the interview with POCU MA management).

231. **POCUForm has significantly reduced the administrative burden for the IBs and the MA, but not for beneficiaries**. POCUForm allows for automatic aggregation of data from projects, to the IB and MA level (or from projects to the IP/PA/OP level). However, beneficiaries must still input the data manually into the system. This is done either directly on a computer, and then the filled-in consent form is printed and signed by the participant, or done on paper and transferred into POCUForm (when there are too many participants whose information needs to be in a short period of time).

232. **Multiple recordings of data on indicators increase the risk for error**. Indicators are recorded in POCUForm—in the Indicators Registry file, the technical reports, and in SMIS. In theory, these three should have the same values, for the same period. However, during the technical reports validation process, changes might be operated in the technical reports and SMIS, but not in POCUForm. Or, data in POCUForm might not always be thoroughly checked by the officers. When the AIR is drawn up, aggregated data from POCUForm is checked against that in SMIS and discrepancies are sometimes found. These are then solved by extensive checks of all projects, until the initial errors are found.

Strengths and weaknesses in the monitoring system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

233. **The national regulatory framework was developed and enforced so as to enable the effective implementation of EU requirements.** This was part of the accreditation process the MA and IBs undergo at the beginning of the programming period. The operational procedures, which are drafted by the MA and applicable to both the MA and the IBs, are perceived as being very useful for the monitoring process, as well as for all the other functions, and are the backbone of all activities

performed in the MA and IBs.

234. **POCU MA has undertaken all the necessary measures to ensure compliance with the legislative requirements.** All the EC provisions meant to ensure results orientation were observed during the preparation of the program or immediately after, with the support of MEIP. There is general agreement among stakeholders that the monitoring system is compliant with the relevant legislation, both in terms of design and in practice. Evidence from the document review, the interviews, and beneficiaries confirm that the POCU monitoring system meets the minimum requirements of the regulations.

235. **The monitoring function remains focused on compliance and legality, leading to a high administrative burden.** EU monitoring requirements are topped by cumbersome procedures for beneficiaries and staff alike—an example is the very detailed monitoring of the experts employed in projects, which entails the verification of work contracts, personal responsibilities (*fisa de post*), application forms (for activities and sub-activities), project progress reports, personal activity reports, and timesheets. The process is often "artificial" and requires a lot of paperwork. While some verifications may be dropped, others could be performed by using national registries (e.g., REVISAL for labor contracts).

Efficiency of Monitoring Processes

236. **Overall, the monitoring system is performing well, allowing projects to be tracked in detail.** Bottlenecks are mainly identified via project progress reports, submitted every three months or more often, together with close collaboration with beneficiaries (by phone and/or email and also in meetings). While there are no "early warning" mechanisms, current practices allow for a thorough understanding of program challenges. Problems are reported by project monitors to superiors and then to the MA structures and MA management, but this is usually done in an ad hoc, informal manner, during regular meetings held for this purpose.

237. **The POCU monitoring procedure is generally adequate, but in particular cases it is not clear enough; for example, regarding how exactly communication with beneficiaries should take place, how often, how it should be documented, and so on.** In other cases, the procedure is regarded as too strict (in terms of allocated time) for the monitoring officers to respect in practice (for example, when performing visits or responding to notifications). Also, different monitoring activities (such as visits) are not always performed as required per procedure, given the lack of time. The monitoring of internal processes and compliance with procedures (especially deadlines) is performed informally, as no IT-supported process is in place.

238. **As beneficiary documents are verified by different departments within the IBs/MA, coordination among these is essential to ensure a smooth and efficient process.** However, duplications and associated difficulties could be identified, with a series of documents (e.g., on human resources) being verified by both financial and monitoring departments. The thorough verification is oriented toward ensuring full compliance and detailed control over the way projects are implemented. Administrative actions include extensive verifications of CVs, timesheets, and activity reports for tens of persons in a single project.

239. **POCU MA thinks that both IBs and beneficiaries have enough tools and information to carry out their activities**. The Beneficiary Manual, Indicators Guide and Fiches, short videos, and POCUForm Manual are the main sources of information available to beneficiaries, together with direct guidance from monitoring officers. For the latter, the procedures and various checklists, as well as the POCU and ESF guides, provide the necessary information, as well as guidance from the MA. The RIBs appear to rely a lot more on the MEIP and MA guides, compared to the Education IB (approximately 80–90 percent, compared to 50 percent in the case of the Education IB).

240. **However, the information sources are not fully used.** All beneficiaries use the Beneficiary

Manual **to** find the monitoring and reporting requirements that apply to their project (Q35). Other documents include: Applicant's Guide, Specific Provisions and the Financing Contract (90 percent), the Applicant's Guide, General Provisions and Procedures (81 percent each) and instructions (72 percent). Information transmitted directly by project officers is used, but to a lesser extent (27 percent). The guiding documents provided by the EC with respect to monitoring and evaluation go little beyond the Program Monitoring Unit in the MA. Those interviewed agreed that training should be provided as early as possible, so that everybody thoroughly understands the new monitoring framework. Challenges remain in relation to understanding indicators, as almost half of respondents are only aware of the indicators specifically mentioned in the Applicant's Guide and do not recognize common indicators (Q19).

241. **In most cases, beneficiaries are able to comply with the monitoring requirements**. If there are reporting issues, monitoring officers are usually able to offer support by phone or email. If necessary, meetings are organized—meetings with the IB general directors are not uncommon. Sometimes, the MA may also provide support, if beneficiaries or the IB request it. Misalignments have been highlighted in relation to the fact that reporting is performed separately for project monitoring (activities performed) and procurement procedures. These lead to overlaps in the documents submitted and checked—once as part of the progress report (monitoring) and once for procurement.

242. **Beneficiaries are generally aware that the collection of indicators is an ongoing task (Q22) and most (70 percent) perform it as such.** Awareness depends very much on the relationship created between the MA/IBs and the beneficiaries, but overall, there is a good level of awareness, especially in the case of beneficiaries from the public administration. RIBs have a strong relationship with the beneficiaries and perceive them as being aware of their duties.

243. **Beneficiaries have received both guidelines and trainings, as well as specific support for different issues, mostly from the RIBs and the MA**. Generally, they are considered moderately useful by the beneficiaries (Q48) but very helpful by the IBs and the MA. Among the topics beneficiaries consider useful for future training are "the use of specific applications," "monitoring and implementation of indicators," "reporting and interpreting the indicators, dysfunctions in the verification and approval of additional documents to the financing contracts, aspects regarding the improvement of the reporting method and verification of expenses incurred"(Q49).

244. **All stakeholders agree that the format of the data is not easy to process.** Most of the information is still in.pdf, and data quality assurance and aggregation incur a high level of administrative burden. Better data collection instruments would significantly reduce the administrative burden for beneficiaries and IBs, and ensure better data quality. The MA and IBs also think the quality and format of the information put into SMIS and POCUForm depends on the level of "interest and mutual respect" (of beneficiaries toward monitoring officers).

Performance of IT systems

245. **The IT system does not function well enough to work as an early warning system or to highlight more specific aspects about the program's progress.** General feedback from the MA, IBs, and beneficiaries is that SMIS is not tailored enough for POCU and does not necessarily help identify specific needs. Experience differs, however, in relation to R4SMIS: some stakeholders in the MA and IBs use it extensively and consider it satisfactory, while others have limited use for it and opt for custom-made Excel files. It is likely that the reporting module is not user-friendly and requires more advanced digital skills. Also, the extraction of certain information can only be done by the SMIS unit in MEIP, upon request, which further deters some stakeholders from using it.

246. **For the IBs and the MA, the introduction of POCUForm has significantly simplified data aggregation on participants and indicators.** Several data validation keys were introduced to ensure

data quality. However, challenges remain, as (i) data from POCUForm is not connected to the information in SMIS; and (ii) if errors are identified at the OP level (for example, elderly participants registered in early education projects), all projects under the respective IP must be checked, since it is impossible to track the error otherwise. Note, however, that POCUForm was meant to be a temporary instrument (3–6 months) until the SMIS monitoring module was functional. While this module is currently functional, it is not clear whether all POCU needs are covered, and the OP is still not using it.

247. **Both SMIS and POCUForm are perceived as being prone to errors, with POCUForm being the most error-prone (Q27).** Beneficiaries also perceive POCUForm as generating administrative burden.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

248. **In response to the high administrative burden, both the MA and IBs have extended their staff by hiring outside the assigned number of positions for the institution.**[81] Capacity issues are particularly present in the Education IB. As highlighted in the verification of delegation functions,[82] ad hoc visits are not always performed according to schedule or as frequently as they are supposed to be. Monitoring officers face several challenges in this respect, ranging from lack of time (due to workload) to lack of resources (Education IB, as their resources for the task need to be approved by the Ministry of Education, not by the POCU MA).

249. **Beneficiaries also acknowledge the rather high administrative burden of monitoring**. This is particularly related to data collection and providing the necessary justification documents. Beneficiaries reported that costs associated with monitoring activities range from 35 to 100 lei/hour (Q53), while the average time dedicated to the task usually ranges between 40–80 hours per person, per month (Q52).

250. **The variety of specific cases in projects and the insufficiently coordinated instructions/guidelines lead to different practices with respect to dealing with justification documents, performing onsite visits, sampling the target groups for verification purposes, and so on.** Over time, different interpretations of the same provisions could be observed at project officer level in the same IB, among IBs, and between IBs and MA. This made the process less effective overall, placing an additional burden on both beneficiaries and project officers who need to respond to requests for information. Moreover, different approaches to the same topics impact the way indicators are reported. The MA was expected to assume a clear leading role, and in the last two years, regular meetings for a "unitary approach" were held by the MA and IBs to discuss and agree on different topics. While there is still need to further improve the adoption of a unitary approach, both the MA and IBs perceive the situation as better than in the past.

251. **Meetings between the MA and IBs are used to discuss and promote common approaches to problems or actions across IBs.** While they have often been highlighted as a good practice, there is still room for improvement, as beneficiaries report different approaches by different IBs to the same issues.

252. **At the MA level, the staff involved in monitoring activities think there has been significant improvement in the organizational culture (compared to the previous programming period), making it more supportive and data-oriented**. The inclusion of performance targets for all staff, linked to the OP performance (contracted amounts, mainly, only financial indicators) is perceived as a means to increase ownership over the implementation of the OP, in the opinion of those interviewed. The Education IB is less content with the overall organizational culture, compared to the other IBs and the

[81] Using a mechanism called "hiring outside the organizational chart," which allows public institutions to hire short-term contractual staff. The legislation was passed only a couple of years ago and it greatly improved the situation of the MA and IBs, in some cases almost doubling their size.
[82] Information gathered in POCU RAS.

MA.

253. **On the beneficiaries' side, the perception is still rather negative**. About 30 percent of beneficiaries have suggested improvements with respect to monitoring, mostly related to simplification of reporting or problems related to the use of instruments, such as POCUForm. Some of the beneficiaries who did not submit suggestions have strong opinions about the futility of the process: "We did not even dare open the subject, it was clear they would not accept suggestions" (POCU beneficiary, survey response for Q59). In practice, suggestions are analyzed, some are taken into consideration, and some are solved as soon as possible (this is the case of POCUForm).

254. **POCU MA and IBs participated in training on M&E.** The training sessions were organized with the support of the WB in 2018, for the MA and IB staff in the field of monitoring, on project monitoring and on data/indicators collection, reporting and validation, including the use of POCUForm.

Training delivered by the World Bank

The goal of the training was to increase the capacity of POCU staff in performing monitoring-related tasks and support beneficiaries. Two training modules were delivered over three days and around 100 persons participated, from the MA and IBs.

- Module 1: Project monitoring, M&E, general monitoring requirements at the project level, administrative verifications, onsite visits, ex post project monitoring, other monitoring tasks
- Module 2: General requirements for monitoring ESF indicators; POCU system of indicators; types of indicators (description and main features); data quality and data validation; indicators collection and reporting; financial corrections; POCUForm (practical exercise)

Effectiveness of the Monitoring System

255. **POCU shows an overall good internal coherence, linking needs to objectives and actions. It also contains output and results indicators for each IP.** The logic of intervention is not explicitly displayed, but it can be observed in the various sections. The logic of intervention was built in collaboration with the EC and with the participation of relevant stakeholders, mainly line ministries and national agencies responsible for implementing public policies relevant to POCU (employment, social protection, health, education). The logic of intervention was validated by the ex-ante evaluation, against the criteria in the CPR.

256. **The program was modified seven times during its implementation**. Some modifications were intended to clarify indicators; for example, indicators referring to persons or communities "at risk of poverty and social exclusion" were modified to "at risk of poverty or social exclusion," to allow for proper data collection. Other modifications entailed reallocating resources between PAs and/or IPs. All modifications were substantiated by data and analyses.[83] These analyses included progress review by IP—assessment of the calls for proposals, financial, indicators—as well as of the underlying factors for success/failure, review of the implementation context (update on the labor market context, for example).

257. **POCU contributes to the implementation of several national policies and strategies in the field of employment, social protection, health, and education.** They are listed in the OP. The strategies themselves contain references to EU funds and POCU, but the monitoring system does not explicitly support data collection for monitoring its contribution to the strategic objectives (ex. Roma Strategy, Strategy for Disabled Persons).

258. **In theory, the system is built to allow for participation and engagement of all relevant**

[83] Many of which were developed with the support of the World Bank from 2018–2020.

stakeholders, but this seldom happens in practice. There is little or no accountability with respect to program results beyond the POCU MA and IBs. This is problematic, for two reasons:

- In some cases, the implementation of operations depends largely on ministries or agencies (IP 8vii, for example); if they have limited capacity or motivation to implement the projects, there is little the MA can do, except for reallocating funds.
- In most cases, the implementation of POCU operations supports national strategies, but the data from implementation is not used to monitor those strategies; there is often a disconnect between programs funded through the national budget and EU funds, which, under the excuse of "avoiding double funding and complementarity" are not correlated.

259. **There is limited evidence of an institutionalized/formalized means of ensuring active involvement of the ministries and agencies[84] in POCU implementation.** However, these institutions are members of the MC and, as such, can play an active role in observing the progress of POCU, issuing recommendations and proposing actions. In practice, the information participants receive during MC meetings is transmitted to their institutions through the meeting minutes and the materials distributed, and there is no evidence regarding how these materials are used.

260. **Ministries, agencies, and other stakeholders (including the public) may request data and information from POCU MA, on the progress and results of the OP.** There is no evidence that ministries or agencies request it, even in cases they should—this is, for example, the case of the Agency for Roma Inclusion, which could have requested data on the Roma ethnics participating in POCU projects and on POCU interventions targeting Roma communities or other relevant topics, in order to observe the progress of the Strategy for Roma Inclusion during 2015–2020 and to prepare the next strategy, for 2021–2027. The press is usually interested in the financial progress, namely the absorption of EU funds. The Minister of EU Investments and Projects also requests information related mostly to the financial progress and to the roll-out of calls.

261. **Most stakeholders think the results are sufficient to ensure the proper monitoring of the OP, but there are different views about the data generated.** Most of the stakeholders claim the data is used to manage and update the program, but the Education IB does not consider the data included in the monitoring system as enough for decision making. Other stakeholders consider the data is not necessarily sufficient to allow the results orientation or to capture the quality of results achieved, although it has improved over the previous programming period. More relevant sectoral-oriented indicators can be used, but with a strong interoperability of the systems, because SMIS is no longer connected with data from other national platforms, such as INS-Tempo (National Statistics Office), SIIIR (Education data), or REVISAL (employee data); the MA and IBs also lack access to these platforms.

262. **While the monitoring system allows for comprehensive progress tracking, there are separate functions/tools observing financial and physical progress and it is often difficult to get a clear picture**. An integrated dashboard that captures financial, output, and results indicators would be a useful tool, both at the project and OP level.

263. **Responsibilities related to communicating monitoring data are not perceived in the same manner across POCU**. While most respondents in POCU MA (66 percent) see communication as part of their responsibilities, only 31 percent of the RIBs acknowledge it. None of the respondents in the Education IB mentioned dissemination as part of their M&E responsibilities, even though they have the same delegated functions as the RIBs. Thirty percent of respondents in the MC acknowledged their role in disseminating M&E results. (Q4)

264. **Only minimum requirements are usually met with respect to communicating monitoring**

[84] Ministry of Labor, National Agency for Employment, National Agency for Disabilities, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, National Agency for Roma, National Council for Fight Against Discrimination, Ministry of Economy, etc.

data. This is done by the following channels: (i) during MC meetings; (ii) ad hoc, upon request from stakeholders; and (iii) via regular updates on contracts signed and absorption, published online (as per regulations). Out of the three, only the first contains additional details or analyses, beyond raw data/statistics.

Strengths	Weaknesses
• TA used for administrative capacity, including development of data collection instruments • MC willing to get involved in supporting implementation, members with good knowledge of the sectors, beneficiaries and implementation challenges • Good organizational culture, supportive of knowledge sharing	• MA not involved in the programming • High administrative burden for beneficiaries—POCUForm has significantly reduced the work for MA and IBs, but not for beneficiaries. • SMIS not user-friendly and not adapted to POCU needs • Multiple institutions involved in the monitoring, leading to management challenges • MC not used enough to support implementation

Success factors and good practices in monitoring

265. **The main good practice identified in POCU monitoring is the comprehensive approach with respect to support provided for collecting indicators.** This is based on:

- providing a detailed Indicators Guide and individual fiches for indicators
- developing an indicators collection tool (POCUForm)
- providing training to MA and IBs on indicators and on POCUForm
- providing information to beneficiaries about indicators (through short videos)
- integrating the methodology for corrections (in case targets are not met) into POCUForm and enabling the automatic calculation of corrections

266. **Another good practice refers to the meetings for a unitary approach held between the MA and IBs**. These are regarded as a way to improve organizational culture and ensure knowledge sharing between the IBs and the MA. However, they are limited at the management level, and the MA is currently considering options to extend them to operational staff, as well.

Program Evaluation System: Strengths and Weaknesses

267. **The POCU evaluation function is performed by the MEIP PEO, and there is no Evaluation Unit at the level of the MA.** The description of the evaluation system and the procedure is provided in the text of the main report.

Assessment of the evaluation system's institutional and procedural framework

Evaluation Strategy and Planning Process

268. **The evaluation plan was developed in line with the OP for developing the PA and OP's evaluation plans (at the MEIP level, by the PEO), in line with the CPR provisions**. The POCU evaluation plan includes the evaluation strategy and objectives, as well as budgetary assumptions, recommendations for carrying out the procurement procedures, timeline, governance, and methodology. There are 21 evaluation themes (including those for POSDRU 2007–2013), one meta-evaluation, and ad hoc evaluations. These add up to €6.29 million allocated for the entire plan.

269. **The POCU evaluation plan was developed by MEIP, with inputs from the POCU MA, and is implemented by the MEIP PEO.** The evaluation plan was developed at the beginning of programming (2015) and revised in 2017, and is implemented by the MEIP PEO, which prepares all the necessary documents for the tendering process to take place. While the tender procedure is managed by the

specialized structure in MEIP, the PEO is part of the evaluation process. Tenders are usually organized by evaluation themes (for example, "Employment," "Social Inclusion," "Education"), and contracts for each theme include both the ex post evaluation of the Human Resources Development OP 2007-2013 (POSDRU) and the evaluation for POCU. Once the winners are established, the evaluation begins and is carried out according to the specifications and the schedule in the ToRs and the technical offer.

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

270. **POCU MA is involved during the evaluations and can play an active role in how activities are performed.** POCU MA is part of the ECC, which oversees the evaluation process, provides inputs during the meetings with the evaluators, and plays a key role in the approval of evaluation reports. Usually, there are two meetings of the ECC—one for inception and one for analyzing and approving the report—but there might be more, depending on the evaluation theme and the needs. The ECC is provided with the evaluation report in advance. It has the final say in approving the report—for example, the impact evaluation for Education was first rejected by the ECC for not having fully applied the evaluation methodology.

271. **After the evaluation is complete, the PEO in MEIP formally presents the results to the MA and MC**. The PEO in MEIP sends the MA the evaluation report and a table with the recommendations, including a timeline and the responsible entities/staff. The MA develops and updates an electronic registry of recommendations, coordinates the implementation of recommendations, and informs on the stage of implementation. Final evaluation reports are presented to the MC for analysis. However, limited time is allotted to presenting evaluation findings, and these are usually secondary on the agenda. The MC analyzes the way the recommendations are implemented.

272. **The results of the evaluations are then disseminated publicly**. Dissemination means include conferences organized for the users of the results, a dedicated web page (evaluare-structurale.ro), as well as other information and communication activities organized by the MEIP and those organized by the Evaluation network.

Strengths and weaknesses in the evaluation system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

273. **The entire national regulatory framework was developed and executed to enable the effective implementation of EU requirements.** The operational procedure for evaluation ensures the necessary framework, whereas the evaluation plan provides the details for carrying out the evaluation activities. Evidence from the document review and the interviews confirm that POCU evaluation system is compliant with regulations.

Efficiency of Evaluation Processes

274. **Four evaluations have been completed so far[85] as part of the POCU evaluation plan**. Two **evaluations** regard NEETs interventions, one in 2015 for the 2007–2014 period and one for PA 1 of POCU (in 2019), one with respect to Employment and one on Education (retrospective impact evaluations for POSDRU). The evaluations regarding NEETs interventions, including YEI, were ad hoc, whereas the others cover evaluation themes from the POCU evaluation plan. Two more evaluations are underway, for Social Inclusion and Technical Assistance.

275. **Evaluations are meant to provide POCU management with robust conclusions and, where appropriate, recommendations, in connection with**:

[85] Microsoft Word—Raport evaluare NEETs 04.07.2016 (fonduri-ue.ro), Nota-anuala-privind-evaluarea-POCU-2014–2020.pdf (ccicj.ro)—the note was presented in POCU MC meeting.

- The progress attained in the areas, sectors, and target groups covered by POCU/POSDRU and the extent to which the observed progress is attributed to the program.
- Unintended effects, positive or negative, observable in the short, medium, or long term.
- Spillover and durability effects.
- Mechanisms that facilitated/prevented the effects and their key contextual characteristics.
- If and to what extent things could have been done better, as well as recommendations for the future.
- Good practices and positive examples regarding interventions to promote social innovation and secondary themes (for example, supporting the transition to low carbon, the efficient economy of resources, social innovation, improving the accessibility, use and quality of technologies information and communications, non-discrimination)

276. **Both impact evaluation reports (Employment and Education) highlight limitations with respect to data availability, particularly for the former OP (2007-2013)**. In the case of the Education sector, significant constraints were encountered on availability, accessibility, and data quality. This required adapting the methodology for data collection and analysis, identifying new sources, and adding data quality checks, and the interpretation of the findings has been adapted to the methodological limitations. The constraints are placed at the education system level and cover the whole sector, or at the level of the program, targeting the recorded data and available through the monitoring system, or at the level of projects, including the availability and ability of funding beneficiaries and final beneficiaries to provide the data needed for the evaluation. The constraints related to data are also encountered for the employment sector.

Peer review of evaluations

The two impact evaluations (Employment and Education) for POSDRU 2007–2013 were peer reviewed, including the tender documents. This was done at the request of the MEIP PEO, with the support of the EC helpdesk service supporting DG REGIO and DG EMPL. The main findings of this peer review are the following:

- The quality of the tender documents is high. However, the specifications could provide evaluators with room for innovation.
- The evaluation is particularly complex, covering too many topics. Peer reviewers recommend division into separate, smaller contracts, prioritizing the topics to be assessed and/or reducing the number of the evaluation questions.
- Evaluation reports are too voluminous, exceeding the capacity to absorb information. Peer reviewers recommended to reduce them to approx. 150 pages.
- The evaluation recommendations were considered strategic, future-oriented and are highly appreciated by the peer reviewers.
- The quality of the evaluation reports was also assessed. Some improvements were recommended with respect to applying the evaluation methodology (selection error, statistical significance, treatment samples).
- The peer reviewers also highlighted data availability issues as a major constraint that needs to be addressed in the medium and long term.

277. **Another contract[86] was signed by the MEIP PEO, supporting capacity development in the field of evaluation.** This also included activities relevant for POCU such as the first completeness and accuracy testing exercise of administrative data sets necessary for evaluations. The test results were disseminated to the MA to correct errors, and were presented in workshops. The contract was also used to support an internal evaluation, by the MEIP PEO, of the Youth Jobs Initiative (mentioned

[86] ERNST&YOUNG SRL, QURES Quality Research and Support SRL and Institutul Național de Cercetare Științifică în Domeniul Muncii și Protecției Sociale (INCSMP), GREENSOFT (subcontractor).

previously), and for the internal evaluation of the governance of the ITI mechanism in the Danube Delta.

278. **Assistance was also provided on how to access advisory services to establish the evaluation system and the post-2020 system of indicators.** The scientific committees related to the POCU themes were mobilized and scientific reports were drawn up on the quality of the evaluation or evaluation reports for ongoing evaluations for POCU Employment. These reports were supposed to help increase the scientific rigor of the evaluation exercises.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

279. **POCU MA was involved in the capacity-building activities conducted by the MEIP PEO.** A training plan has been developed by the MEIP PEO with the TA contract (see above) to increase the evaluation skills of the members of the PEOs, the Evaluation Steering Committees, and the Working Group for Performance Evaluation (at the level of the Partnership Agreement). Several training sessions took place, including theory of change, evaluability, evaluation quality control, and indicators for monitoring and evaluation. A total of 86 participants were registered for these training sessions, of which 17 were members of the Evaluation Units, 34 were members of the Evaluation Steering Committees (POCU MA is a member of the evaluation coordination committee set-up for POCU) and 35 were members of the Performance Assessment Working Group (POCU MA is also a member in this working group).

280. **POCU MA would like to have a separate department in the MA that can help with ad hoc evaluation when needed**. POCU MA acknowledges the expertise of the PEO and perceives the evaluation as relevant for improving their activity, but would like to have enough resources in order to implement ad hoc evaluation on relevant topics.

Effectiveness of the Evaluation System

281. **The perceived usefulness of the evaluation results seems strongly linked to ownership over the process.** The MA is involved in the design and the implementation of the evaluations and generally considers that the evaluation activities are useful and were used in decision making. The Education IB, on the other hand, perceives the evaluation process as separate from the IB and considers the POSDRU evaluation as "useless," since it was delivered too late to inform the new program and that the evaluations for the current period are not relevant enough for their needs. RIBs are generally not involved in the evaluation process and have little awareness of the completed or ongoing evaluations. Also, IBs are generally unaware that ad hoc evaluations could be requested.

282. **The results of the evaluations were presented in the MC meetings.** The main lessons learned of the ex post impact evaluations for the POSDRU Employment and Education were presented by the MEIP PEO during the MC meeting. According to the meeting minutes, the evaluations were supposed to inform decisions related to changing the logic of intervention, the institutional framework, budgetary allocations, and/or procedures. No recommendations were made and no follow-up was decided by the MC with respect to the ex post evaluations.

283. **The results of the YEI 2014–2020 evaluation were also presented in the MC meeting and were used to support decision making**. Evaluation findings were presented, but no recommendations were recorded in the MC meeting minutes, even though the evaluation report states them clearly. However, the findings were discussed in the MC and, as a result, a Technical Working Group was initiated, to accelerate the implementation of PA 1 and PA 2 of POCU. This working group was comprised of MC members, on a voluntary basis, and produced recommendations for future calls for proposals for NEETs interventions and also for reducing the targets for the indicators. The evaluation findings were used to substantiate modifications to the OP, for designing calls for projects or for updating the Indicators Guide.

284. **Additional analyses were developed and provided to POCU MA by the World Bank, as part of the POCU RAS.** They confirmed the findings of the NEETs evaluation in the case of PA 1 and provided additional details with respect to the implementation of the other POCU PAs. These analyses were also used to support the modification of the OP, including reallocations and changes in the indicators targets.

Strengths	Weaknesses
• TA used for capacity building • High level of expertise in the Evaluation Unit	• Limited ownership of evaluation process and results • Delays in producing results, because of lengthy tendering process • Limited uptake of recommendations

Success factors and good practices in evaluation

285. **The Scientific Committee (SC) is a support structure, providing advice to the EEC regarding quality of the evaluations**. The SC is comprised of experts in the fields covered by the evaluation and plays a key role in designing the ToRs, accepting the methodology proposed by the evaluator, and checking the quality of the evaluation reports.

E. Operational Program Administrative Capacity (OPAC)

Program Monitoring System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Description and Program Structures

286. **(DR) A structure within MDPWA, the Directorate-General for European Programs in Administrative Capacity (DGPECA), has as its general objective the management and control of the Operational Program Administrative Capacity 2014–2020 (OPAC), financed from ESF.** The organizational structures with M&E functions at the program level within the OPAC MA are the:

- Compartment for management, evaluation, and program monitoring
- Program evaluation office
- MC

287. **(DR) The OPAC MC is a national partnership structure, without legal personality, with a strategic decision-making role in the program implementation process.** There are 52 members in the MC, making it the largest MC, to ensure OPAC visibility and benefit from a large pool of expert opinion. The president of the MC (who has voting rights) is the general director of the MA for OPAC. The members who enjoy voting rights are representatives of MAs of other OPs, MEIP, line ministries, agencies, and authorities relevant to the fields of anti-corruption, ethics and integrity, equal opportunity and non-discrimination, the General Secretariat of the Government, unions, associations and other NGOs, Danube Delta ITI, Local Action Groups, universities and research institutions (46 members). The EC is participant in an advisory capacity and there are four other representatives of different central public institutions nominated as non-voting observers, such as the AA and the National Institute for Statistics. The MC meets at least twice a year.

288. **(DR) The OPAC MC has a dedicated internal procedure—OP on supporting the activity of the MC (PO.DGPECA.05/SCM).** The scope of the procedure is to establish a unitary framework at the MA level for the organization and functioning of the technical secretariat of the OPAC MC, as well as the organization and development of activities to support MC members to improve their capacity to exercise their roles within the MC. The procedure also sets the flow of information between the MA and the MC.

289. **(KII, DR) The majority of MC members are also OPAC beneficiaries, so they are familiar with the role of M&E and are clear on their mandate in this regard.** In accordance with the internal procedure for the MC, members can periodically benefit from training programs. Every year, the MA distributes a questionnaire on the training needs of the MC members. Consequently, a training plan for the MC members is drafted. In 2019, the members of the MC benefited from M&E training—on legislation, M&E, indicators. In particular, they received information on M&E from the perspective of AIRs, given their obligations to understand and approve these reports. The participants proved very interested in the monitoring of indicators parts of the training, and the general feedback was good.

Specific Monitoring Tools

290. **(KII) MIEP coordinates the M&E system, the reporting, and the IT system (SMIS).** However, the Coordination Committee for the Partnership Agreement did not meet regularly, the only working group that functioned to a certain degree was the M&E group. However, the M&E mandate of MDPWA is not clear, OPAC MA reports directly to MIEP, but there is no constant reporting to MDPWA, so their interest in M&E is not consistent nor clear to OPAC MA staff.

291. **(DR) The main monitoring tool for the MA consists of program indicators.** They reflect financial data, outputs and results. Data on common indicators (Annex I of the ESF regulation), specific program indicators, as well as data on financial execution are transmitted to the EC via the SFC 2014 electronic system, as part of the AIRs. The AIR contains information on common and program-specific

indicators, financial data, as well as issues affecting the performance of the program. Starting with the report submitted in 2017, the AIR also includes information on the milestones and targets set in the Performance Framework.

292. **(DR, KII) The AIR is drafted by the Compartment for Program Management and Evaluation, based on data collected from various sources.** The main data comes from the OPAC STORAGE IT system, where all relevant MA structures include data. Also, the AIR makes use of data collected from external sources (e.g., institutions responsible for implementing ex ante conditionalities, the Superior Council of Magistracy and the Ministry of Justice, MC members, etc.), as well as information gathered during the evaluation stage of the program.

293. **(DR) Three general or thematic ex ante conditionalities are applicable to OPAC, which were either not fulfilled or partially fulfilled by the time the program was approved.** The general ex ante conditionalities are G4 "Existence of measures for the effective application of Union law in the field of public procurement with respect to ESI funds" and G7 "Existence of a statistical database necessary to carry out evaluations of the effectiveness and impact of the programs; Existence of a system of results indicators necessary for the selection of actions that contribute most to the achievement of the desired results, progress monitoring in obtaining the results and carrying out the impact assessment." The OPAC applicable thematic ex ante conditionality is T.11.1 "Existence of a strategy to strengthen the administrative efficiency of the Member State, including the public administration." The Ministry of European Funds periodically reports to the EC on the progress made by Romania in achieving the ex-ante conditionalities applicable to all operational programs, as mentioned in the PA. For reporting, the OPAC MA works closely with the MDPWA, the National Agency of Civil Servants, the General Secretariat of the Government, the Ministry of Justice and the Superior Council of Magistracy. According to the latest Partnership Agreement monitoring reports, all OPAC related ex ante conditionalities have been fulfilled.

294. **(DR) The Strategy for Strengthening the Public Administration (SCAP) 2014–2020 is closely related to the implementation of OPAC.** OPAC mainly supports measures stemming from the SCAP and the Strategy for Better Regulation. Only in some specific domains, such as the judiciary or anti-corruption, are other strategies directing the support offered by OPAC (i.e., the Strategy for the Development of the Judiciary 2014–2020 and the National Anticorruption Strategy 2015–2020). There is a strong correlation between OPAC-funded projects and measures included in SCAP, and every MC hosts a presentation of the status of SCAP implementation.

295. **(DR, KII) The coordination mechanism between OPAC and SCAP is very important**. In order to ensure the coherence of the interventions supported by OPAC regarding the financing of the reform measures included in SCAP and to be able to identify difficulties with their implementation and possible solutions, a collaboration mechanism operates between CNCISCAP (SCAP Coordination Council) to the OPAC MA every six months regarding the stage of implementation of the measures included in the SCAP and which are the object of OPAC funding, and the OPAC MA provides semi-annually CNCISCAP information on the stage of implementation of the projects supporting the SCAP measures.

Assessment of the monitoring system's institutional and procedural framework

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

296. **(KII) Generally, responsibilities are clearly defined, at the program and project level.** The mandates are clearly understood by the MA staff and by beneficiaries. However, there are concerns among the MA staff that the mandates of the MDPWA in terms of program monitoring are not clear, and that there are overlaps with the mandate and responsibilities of MEFI.

297. **(KII) Types of reports produced by The OPAC MA publishes several types of reports, including**: financial reports, annual reports, monthly and weekly reports submitted to MEFI, specific

reports according to Art. 112 of the CPR, and AIRs. In addition, there are approx. two reunions/months with EC, for which reports are prepared, but not in a standard format, as well as reports for the meetings of MC (twice per year). For all additional reports, SMIS staff makes the necessary changes allowing OPAC MA to generate the required reports.

298. **(BS) Beneficiaries have multiple sources of information and guidance in terms of monitoring and reporting requirements.** The majority of beneficiaries use the Beneficiary Manual to find the monitoring and reporting requirements applicable to their project—73.47 percent of respondents (Q35). Other documents include: Financing Contract (71.43 percent), Applicant's Guide Specific Provisions (57.14 percent), Instructions (53.06 percent) and Applicant's Guide General Provision (40.82 percent).

Design of Indicators

299. **(DR) The system of indicators used to monitor and report on the progress in the implementation of OPAC includes:**

- Common ESF indicators, set in Annex I of the ESF regulation, which are not mentioned in the program, but which are used in monitoring and reporting on the progress in the implementation of OPAC (with the exception of the technical assistance PA), by virtue of Art. 5 of the ESF regulation.
- Specific program indicators.
- Additional indicators on the progress in the implementation of the program, established on the basis of the 2007–2013 experience on reporting (e.g., indicators requested by the MEF—General Department for Programming).

300. **(DR) OPAC includes a total of 82 specific program indicators, out of which 43 are output indicators and 37 are results indicators.** The program Performance Framework includes four output indicators and two financial indicators, referring to the total value of eligible expenditures that have been registered into the accounting system of the Certification and Payments Authority (CPA) and that have been certified by it. In general, program specific indicators include entities directly supported by program-funded operations (central public authorities and institutions, local public authorities and institutions, NGOs), as well as participants to the training activities carried out under the funded operations. Similar to the common program indicators, specific indicators are of two kinds—output and result (immediate or longer-term). The 43 output indicators target training participants (9), central and local public authorities (15), the judiciary (10), and other issues—methods, tools, procedures developed by central public authorities to support local development; surveys on the perception of citizens and public administration staff, as well as public awareness campaigns on corruption; analyses, studies, evaluations, strategic and methodological documents developed; information and communication events organized by OPAC for beneficiaries and/or potential beneficiaries, studies carried out to determine the degree of satisfaction of the beneficiaries and the degree of awareness of the potential beneficiaries. The 37 results indicators target training participants (7), central and local public authorities and institutions, NGOs and social partners (12), the judiciary (12), interventions funded under the TA axis (PA 4), as well as the number of systematized normative acts and the quality of public procurement awarding documentation.

301. **(DR) OPAC has some specific elements that interfere with the common indicators regarding participants.** The public administration and judiciary personnel is trained to better perform their tasks or to mature their knowledge on various methods, instruments, procedures developed through the financed operations, not to improve their status on the labour market or to enter an education program. Training is not an end in itself to operations financed under public administration objectives, but accompanies reform measures/instruments/mechanisms developed through the financed operations. In addition, staff participating in training activities are already employed, therefore cannot

be included in the inactive/unemployed category. Therefore, a significant number of common output indicators (7) and common results indicators (6) have to be reported with zero values in the AIR.

302. **(DR) The specificity of OPAC also affects the program output indicators that refer to public authorities and institutions.** These institutions may be, depending on the scope of the project, either funding beneficiaries or authorities/institutions mentioned in the financing request or identified during the project implementation and involved in the project activities. Given that an authority/institution can receive funding or support through multiple projects, it needs to be counted only once for the program specific indicators, irrespective of the number of projects it has been part of. Therefore, the program monitoring officers have to analyze each project individually and make an internal assessment of the targets of program specific indicators. These indicators have to be collected manually.

303. **(KII) ESF common indicators are not very relevant for the OP.** There are challenges that derive from the obligation to report common program indicators regarding participants (men/women), or the number of supported institutions, which are not considered extremely relevant for OPAC interventions.

304. **(BS) The number of indicators that are monitored and reported by beneficiaries is rather low.** According to the survey, 62.75 percent of respondents declared that they report less than five indicators, while 31.37 declared that they reported between 5 and 10 indicators in 2019 (Q19).

305. **(BS) The reported indicators and the monitoring reports are considered useful for the internal process of monitoring the progress of the project.** According to the survey, the majority of beneficiaries who responded (65.31 percent) considered that the reported indicators accurately reflected the progress of the project and were helpful in improving the implementation performance (Q33). In a similar manner, 80 percent of respondents declared that the monitoring reports have been very useful for following the progress of the implementation (Q34). However, beneficiaries seem to be unaware about the use of the reported data by the MA. 57.45 percent of the beneficiaries who responded to the survey noted that they do not know how the indicators are aggregated and turned to account at the level of the program (Q44).

Design of IT systems

306. **(DR) The data submitted by beneficiaries is introduced into an internal IT system/joint management file (OPACSTORAGE) by the authorization officer.** The program monitoring officers can analyze the degree of achievements of targets for the program monitoring indicators, with the occasion of drafting the AIR and with the occasion of presenting the implementation status to the members of the MC. The program monitoring officers process the quantitative data and analyze the indicators values for each operation, drafting reports on the current implementation status, as well as forecasts on reaching the OPAC targets, based on the target values within the contracted projects.

307. **(KII) The SMIS is built to meet all OPs' needs, so it is difficult to generate reports that meet all OPAC needs.** The MA is using data collected outside the SMIS system, in order to report to MEFI or DG EMPL. After much work, OPAC is now using the Implementation module in SMIS, which allows recording indicators on participants, in the absence of a POCUForm similar instrument. Data entry is done by validation officers, in SMIS Minimal, not by beneficiaries (beneficiaries work with the Implementation module of SMIS), who also correct any errors. Some errors are later corrected when program monitoring is performed.

308. **(KII) In general, beneficiaries now report indicators more correctly and submit reports more consistently.** Beneficiaries also report indicators at the ad hoc request of the MA, depending on the situation (intermediary monitoring). However, reporting is sometimes superficial and leads to errors in indicators, especially if the focus is on reimbursement requests, and not on progress reports. Therefore, training is also needed for beneficiaries regarding the information that needs to be filled in

the technical reports, also considering that the MySMIS training was highly appreciated by beneficiaries.

309. **(KII) A particular OPAC IT system, called SIPOCA, was created at the beginning of the programming period, when MySMIS was not yet fully operational.** Therefore, all OPAC projects have their own SIPOCA code, as an identification tool. SIOPAC runs in parallel and contains data on project sheets corresponding to non-competitive calls (not included in MySMIS); OPAC had 9 non-competitive calls launched with offline submission (printed financing requests), which are not entirely uploaded to SMIS.

Strengths and weaknesses in the monitoring system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

310. **(KII) The previous programming period resulted in some indicators having a very high success rate (approximately 2,000 percent for participant training days), while others lagged behind.** As a consequence, the current period does not focus on training activities and discourages beneficiaries who only wish to perform trainings.

311. **(BS) In general, beneficiaries respect their monitoring obligations and submit their reports and data in a timely manner.** According to the survey (Q38), the respondents declared respecting deadlines for preparing supporting documents (87.5 percent), preparing financial reports (82.98 percent), drafting technical reports (75 percent), reporting indicators (61.22 percent), reporting the target group (60.87 percent), and meeting the indicators' required level of quality (59.18 percent).

Efficiency of Monitoring Processes

312. **(KII, BS) The majority of financed projects are still under implementation**. This mostly due to delays in implementing the calls calendar (generated by other external factors), meeting external requirements that allowed for granting new projects, and so on; 60.76 percent of survey respondents have projects in the implementation stage (Q8). Regarding the size of the projects (Q10), the majority of respondents (36.71 percent) declared implementing small projects, with budgets of less than 1 million lei.

313. **(KII) Approximately 75 percent of indicators need processing.** Out of a total of 80 indicators, 60 need revisions and processing, and it is time-consuming to generate monitoring reports. Reports cannot be drafted and presented in a very operative manner ("reports cannot be submitted from one day to the next").

314. **(BS) Beneficiaries need constant guidance from the MA, and usually refer to the project monitoring officer for answers and direction.** According to the survey (Q50), when needed, 95.92 percent of beneficiaries asked the MA for clarification regarding monitoring and reporting requirements; 93.75 percent received answers in a timely manner and 97.78 percent considered the answers as useful. In terms of preferred communication (Q45), guidance via telephone from the project monitoring officer was considered the most useful (97.83 percent of the respondents), followed by the guidance provided by the MA during different organized meetings (considered to be very useful by 67.74 percent), and by written correspondence (66.67 percent).

315. **(BS, KII) Beneficiaries have received both guidelines and trainings from OPAC MA, as well as specific support for different issues**. According to the survey, 28.89 percent of beneficiaries (Q48) declared having participated in trainings organized by the MA, which 68.75 percent considered to be very useful. Among the topics that beneficiaries consider useful for future training (Q49) are: SMIS, indicators, data collection, reporting, supporting documents for expenditures, and public procurement.

316. **(BS, KII) Reporting is considered to be among the most burdensome activities in project implementation, consuming resources that should be spent on project results and implementation.** Even if 89.58 percent of respondents to the BS declare not having to employ any additional staff to meet the monitoring and reporting requirements (Q54), reporting is perceived as burdensome. On a scale of 1 (the lowest) to 5 (the highest) regarding the administrative burden, beneficiaries gave an average mark of 3.27 to preparing reports, 3.19 to data collection, and 3.13 to uploading information in SMIS.

Performance of IT systems

317. **(KII) For all reports and program indicators, the MA mainly uses internally collected data (Excel-based), together with SMIS-generated data.** Thus, it has to invest a lot of time in double-checking, filtering, removing errors. For common indicators, some data are not introduced into the Implementation Module or the communication module; they must be correlated for each report.

318. **(KII) When drafting monitoring reports, multiple data sources have to be consulted.** The program monitoring team, especially when drafting the AIR, must combine the two SMIS reports—SMIS Minimal and the Implementation Module, plus reports in the Communication module, irregularities, payments etc. Art4SMIS poses two problems: the types of reports that can be generated do not correspond to the MIEP's reporting needs (weekly and monthly reporting to MIEP features Excel-based internal data) and the doubling of indicators—indicators from progress reports and reimbursement requests are double-counted.

319. **(KII, BS) The SMIS tool, after being perceived as very difficult and burdensome by beneficiaries, slowly became more useful in terms of collecting and transmitting data to the MA.** On a scale from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest), beneficiaries graded SMIS with an average of 8.93 for utility, 7.24 for degree of automatization, 7.17 for user-friendliness, 6.25 for administrative burden, and 5.19 for error risk (Q27).

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

320. **(KII) The MA experienced an intense and rapid restructuring process in the summer of 2020.** The overall experience led personnel to believe that the decision-making process is deeply driven by politics, based on unclear criteria, and not necessarily connected to the program's general performance. As a result of the restructuring process, the staff was reduced from 83 to 66 persons, and 80 percent of the staff were involved in the evaluation process regarding keeping their positions. The process led to internal tensions, affected the working environment, and negatively impacted staff motivation.

321. **(KII) The OPCA is the only OP that will not have a corresponding OP in the 2021–2027 programming period.** The uncertainties regarding the program's evolution or how its main program objectives will be pursued in the next programming period also affect the MA staffs' enthusiasm to use or even consider how to implement the M&E report recommendations regarding the next period. Not knowing what the institutional arrangements will be, recommendations that focus on the future of administrative capacity development for Romania lack a clear target.

322. **(DR, KII) Training sessions for beneficiaries have been organized by the MA, beginning in October 2020.** The trainings covered financial management, project implementation, and MySMIS. However, future training is needed for beneficiaries, especially on how to collect and report indicators and how to work with MySMIS.

Effectiveness of the Monitoring System

323. **(KII) OPAC has no early warning system, with SMIS not being designed as a BSC system.** However, the information from each report is used to make decisions, in terms of launching new calls,

processing payment requests, etc. Around 70–80 percent of reports could support decision making, except for those that rely on outdated data. The monitoring reports are not seen as having an impact on OP modifications. The AIRs contain a section with problems and recommendations, but they result from project monitoring, not program monitoring. Similarly, the weekly reports show the absorption level and generate project-level interventions, not program corrections.

324. **(KII) The AIR is not meant to be a decision-making report, but rather an information tool or for tracking the Performance Framework.** The format is considered to be satisfactory; limiting the number of characters was also well perceived. The general public could benefit from a more synthetic, graphic report, drafted more frequently.

Success factors and good practices in monitoring

Presentation of identified good practices

325. **(DR, KII) The OPAC MC could constitute a model of good practice due to its large number of members,** the diversity of stakeholders represented, the procedural details covering its activity, the diversity of subjects covered during the sessions (with significant emphasis on presenting best practice projects), and the quality of the resulting documents (minutes, recommendations). In addition, the MC members seem to share a high level of knowledge and interest in program monitoring.

326. **(DR, KII) The strong link between OPAC and CNCISCAP in terms of program monitoring also proved to be a good practice.** The collaboration mechanism between CNCISCAP and OPAC MA ensures the coherence of the interventions supported by OPAC regarding the financing of the reform measures included in the SCAP strategy. OPAC is the main source of financing for SCAP measures, and many of the OPAC results rely on good implementation of the strategy.

Key success factors for ESIF monitoring

327. **(KII) Referring to the next programming period, monitoring administrative capacity interventions could benefit from a series of changes**. Special ESF modules in SMIS—separate from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and CF—should be created, given their very different profiles. In addition, all interested institutions (such as MEFI) should be able to extract the necessary monitoring data, without having to require weekly and monthly reports from the MA, which creates more administrative burden.

Program Evaluation System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Assessment of the evaluation system's institutional and procedural framework

Evaluation Strategy and Planning Process

328. **(DR) For activities contributing to the evaluation of OPAC, an ECC is set up at the MA level, by internal decision of the General Director (GD).** The coordination of the quality of evaluation reports will be carried out through ECC, usually composed of the GD of OPAC MA (chairing the committee), the heads of the Project Evaluation and Contracting Compartment, Project Authorization, Payments and Accountancy Compartment, Management, Evaluation and Program Monitoring Compartment, and the Technical Assistance Office. Members' main responsibilities are to provide comments/feedback, approve the evaluation reports, analyze the recommendations, and monitor their respective implementation.

329. **(DR) Based on the evaluation plan and the existing reporting at program level (monitoring/progress reports, other analyses, studies, etc.), the ECC members may decide to initiate an evaluation exercise.** The proposal to initiate an evaluation may also come from the Management, Evaluation and Program Monitoring Compartment, as well as from any member of the ECC or the MC. If the program monitoring officer finds that the results differ significantly from the objectives initially

set, they may also request an ad hoc evaluation. The OPAC evaluation projects will be financed from PA 3, OPAC technical assistance, their contracting will be carried out based on the "Technical assistance of the program" procedure (PO.DGPECA.11/ATP).

330. **(DR) The evaluation plan (EP) for 2014–2020 is a management tool for monitoring and implementing the program.** The EP's role is to plan the evaluation activities for 2014–2020, focusing on the effects of OPAC implementation from the perspective of the specific objectives. The OPAC evaluation plan includes a chapter with the proposed evaluation themes, including the proposed budgets and timetable. Annex 1 of that document details the planned evaluation studies: thematic, evaluation questions, territorial/sectorial/target group dimension, proposed evaluation methods and instruments, data sources, and stakeholders. The latest version of the evaluation plan (September 2018) comprises 11 evaluation topics, built around the SOs of the program.

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

331. **(KII) The program evaluation team does not use SMIS.** For evaluation purposes, they rely on internally **collected** data (the IT system is a multitude of Excel files, OPAC STORAGE) to analyze common indicators. Program indicators are the responsibility of the program monitoring team, and are ultimately checked by the validation officers and not by project officers; since 2017, monitoring and evaluations teams work separately.

332. **(KII) The OPAC MC did not formulate any recommendations with regard to M&E.** The MC meeting planned for December 7, 2020, offered the opportunity to present the 2019 evaluation reports. However, MC members usually formulate recommendations on selection criteria, the quality of project evaluation, etc.

Strengths and weaknesses in the evaluation system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

333. **(KII) The recent practice showed that the ECC (within OPAC MA) is functioning as a consensus institution.** In general, as a consequence of the perceived decrease in the EC's efforts to push for thorough evaluation studies in OPAC, the MA's interest in the topic followed a similar pattern. Hence, the ECC is now perceived as having a formal role in accepting evaluation studies. It does not show a particular interest in debating the evaluation studies or any issues, conclusions, or recommendations stemming from them.

334. **(KII) The only OPAC evaluation reports covering all OP axes (except the TA axis, PA 4) were drafted in 2019 and published in 2020.** Evaluation reports have been drafted regarding SO 1.1 and 1.2 (Lot 1), SO 1.4, 2.1, and 2.2 (Lot 2), and SO 1.3 and 2.3 (Lot 3). The relative late timing is due to the evolution of the program (the delay being due to the institutional instability, with OPAC MA being part of MEFI, for a period in which a central Evaluation Unit dealt with planning program evaluation).

Efficiency of Evaluation Processes

335. **(DR) Analyzing the general approach to evaluation in the 2014–2020 programming period, the evaluation strategy for OPAC will be to measure the following for each SO:**

- effects of the interventions
- efficiency of the interventions, taking into account the relationship between resources used and changes generated (positive or negative)
- the degree to which all proposed results are achieved (measuring results achievement)
- the program's contribution/net impact, any unintended and spillover effects, or sustainability and other factors or mechanisms that influence impacts

336. **(DR) Therefore, several evaluation themes are built around the program's SOs, such as:**

a) carrying out an evaluation focused on the entire judicial system, able to cover both SO 1.3 and SO 2.3, as these represent areas of intervention with specific needs and are included in the OP's overall structure; also, this field significantly contributes to the National Sectoral Strategy.
b) considering the size of SO 1.1 and the fact that it addresses some of the OP's main deficiencies, the following thematic evaluations are taken into account:
    i. An evaluation of the measures taken for the unitary approach of the strategic planning and budgeting on programs (evaluation of the procedures and mechanisms implemented in this respect).
    ii. An evaluation of the quality and performance management systems (evaluation of the implementation of these mechanisms for analyzing their impact).
    iii. An evaluation of the measures taken to improve the legislative framework, representing all the tools and mechanisms used in this regard: consultation processes, regulations, public policies, institutional procedures, reduction of bureaucracy and administrative burden for citizens and the business environment.
    iv. An evaluation of the support provided for the support of NGOs and social partners (evaluation of mechanisms, tools and actions aimed at improving the monitoring and subsequent evaluation of public policies, as well as reform initiatives, training sessions to develop the capacities of these institutions, networking etc.).
c) The other specific objectives can be evaluated individually.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

337. **(KII) Drafting the action plan for implementing the evaluation recommendations proved to be difficult**. Given the limited applicability of the recommendations within the evaluation studies and their lack of depth, the focus on beneficiaries and not on the program, the recommendations are difficult to translate into concrete actions.

338. **(KII) Therefore, the evaluation reports have limited use in the decision-making process.** The project officers use the evaluation studies to improve relations with the beneficiaries, but in general, there is a rather limited interest within the MA for the evaluation studies, as not many have read the studies thoroughly.

339. **(KII) Additional evaluation themes are considered by the MA evaluation staff.** There is a common interest in contracting an analysis on the impact of the reform measures supported by OPAC projects, as well as the impact of the program (based on real impact, not on indicators or on beneficiaries' opinions).

Effectiveness of the Evaluation System

340. **(KII) In general, the evaluation reports are perceived as being too general and either medium or low quality.** The conclusions do not tackle or analyze the main problems in-depth, and the recommendations are perceived as very general and thus not applicable. Moreover, the evaluators are not considered the most appropriate for the task, the most knowledgeable, or as being very involved, and the MA has limited control over them. Because of the late timing and the general and systemic character of the recommendations, they cannot be applied. Their lack of specificity and novelty prevents their implementation—they mostly refer to improving communication with beneficiaries, improving complementarity with other OPs, improving the strategic vision, etc. The recommendations are not perceived as helpful, as some have already been implemented as a natural step in program implementation (e.g., the recommendation to launch new calls). The limited quality of the evaluations is also due in part to the services offered by evaluators, as well as to the quality of the ToRs and evaluation questions.

341. **(KII) The last programming period was very intense in terms of evaluation interest, mainly generated by the EC (RO Geodesk), which systematically requested independent evaluations for any program change.** For the current period, and particularly after 2018 (when the decision was made that OPAC will no longer be continued in the future programming period), MA stakeholders perceived that interest in evaluations has diminished, and that decision making is no longer supported by evaluation results, as in the past.

342. **(KII) At the same time, MA staff have pointed out that evaluation plans need to be more realistic.** They must include clearly defined steps, and deadlines must be respected to prevent recommendations from being unable to drive any effects or program-related decisions.

Success factors and good practices in program evaluation

343. **(KII) In terms of evaluation studies, based on previous experience, the MA has had several successes:**

- it provides valuable feedback to evaluators in a constant effort to improve the quality of evaluation reports;
- it has staff knowledgeable about M&E, who are officially appointed to implement these tasks; and
- it provides transparency and access to all data for evaluators.

344. **(KII) The OPAC MA evaluation activity will improve if the following issues are addressed:**

- stronger coordination and collaboration from MEFI
- improved IT system
- stronger evaluation culture
- more ad hoc evaluation studies instead of large evaluation studies, covering entire SOs
- simplifications that allow program staff to focus on results, rather than on implementation details
- training for beneficiaries working with MySMIS
- empowering the head of the Evaluation Committee

345. **(DR) Administrative capacity will not benefit from a dedicated OP in the next programming period**. However, similar instruments will be used (e.g., Reform Delivery Tool, Technical Support Instrument). It is currently unclear how administrative capacity will be reflected in the future designed OPs and, thus, how the OPAC experience will be integrated. The latest publicly available version of the Partnership Agreement (2021–2027) indicates that administrative capacity will be integrated into all OPs, and in the future POAT. A roadmap on increasing administrative capacity was also developed, which includes a scoreboard with measures and actions to strengthen administrative capacity, accompanied by action plans in areas that address specific issues.

F. Operational Program Technical Assistance (OPTA)

Program Monitoring System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Description and Program Structures

346. **OPTA is funded through the ERDF**. Art. 125(2) (d) and (e) of CPR requires the MA to establish a system to record and store data in computerized form on each operation necessary for monitoring, evaluation, and including data on individual participants in operations. The data must be recorded and stored in a way that allows the MA to perform M&E tasks in compliance with requirements set out in Art. 56 of the CPR and Arts. 5 and 19 and Annex I of ERDF Regulation no. 1301/2013.

347. **Program monitoring is performed according to internal procedures, in line with EU regulations.** According to the OPTA Operational Procedure Program Monitoring and Reporting (PO.DGAPTE.30), the MA is responsible for the management OP, including the rigorous monitoring of the operational program with respect to achieving its objectives, in terms of the financial data and indicators, including milestones.

348. **The main stakeholders involved in monitoring OPTA-funded projects are distributed across four levels: (i) beneficiaries (ii) the MA; (iii) the MC; and (iv) the EC.** OPTA does not have IBs. Beneficiaries are mainly responsible for data collection, while the MA departments have various responsibilities with respect to data validation, aggregation, or reporting.

349. **OPTA beneficiaries are stakeholders involved in the management and implementation of ESIF.** They are mainly responsible for data collection, while within each institution there are a number of units involved in data validation, aggregation, or reporting, each with clearly established roles. This results in a complex network with various stakeholders.

350. **The OPTA MA is responsible for coordinating the M&E activities in OPTA, based on a monitoring plan, annexed to the OP Monitoring Procedure.** The MEIP ROF describes the institutional set-up, roles, and functions of the OPTA MA departments. In OPTA MA, the Directorate for Program Management, Project Appraisal and Monitoring (DGPEMP) is responsible for ensuring that OP monitoring is comprised of two services: Service for Program Management, Appraisal and Contracting and the Service for Project Monitoring. At the MEIP level, the PEO is responsible for coordinating the overall implementation of the OP as well as for conducting the evaluations, according to the OPTA evaluation plan. Not least, the SMIS Directorate, also in MEIP, is responsible for the development and maintenance of SMIS, the main IT instrument used in OPTA.

351. **The responsibilities of the directorate in relation to M&E are mostly covered by the two services from DGPEMP.** These are the Service for Program Management, Project Appraisal and Contracting (SGPECP) and the Service for Project Monitoring (SMP), which ensures the collection of data with respect to OPTA progress from the other directorates and services in the MA; it also ensures the aggregation and reporting of data and information to the management, other MEIP departments and the EC, as per OPTA regulations or upon request.

- SGPEPC is responsible for OP-level monitoring. It establishes what information is required for reports, the types of reports, and the timing of data collection (including the annual monitoring plan), thus coordinating the entire monitoring and reporting process.
- SMP coordinates project-level monitoring. Its responsibilities cover project implementation, from the signing of the financing contract to the end of the sustainability period (3 years for infrastructure elements that are not intended for accessing the SMIS system, and 5 years after the completion of the project if they are intended for accessing SMIS).

352. **The OPTA MC is a partnership structure, with a (theoretical) strategic decision-making role in the OPTA implementation process.** As established by the regulations, the OPTA MC is responsible

for examining a number of topics related to the OP's implementation, including progress on achieving objectives, indicators and overall performance, problems affecting implementation, and so on. At the same time, it is supposed to address observations to the MA regarding these aspects and to monitor the MA's actions following observations received. The MC has 25 full members, 9 observatories, and 2 consultative members (the EC and the European Investment Bank). Almost all ministries have representatives in the MC, together with various national agencies and bodies (such as the National Institute for Statistics) and other stakeholders from the private/associative sector.

Specific Monitoring Tools

353. **There are procedures available for carrying out monitoring activities at the program and project level, as well as a template for the monitoring plan**. These procedures specify the roles and responsibilities, activities, information flows, and deadlines/durations for certain activities. There are procedures in place for program and project monitoring, developing the AIR, MC functioning, modifications of the program, etc.

354. **Monitoring is initiated at the project level once the project is approved and contracted, and lasts 3–5 years after the project's completion**. The data that beneficiaries put into the application (objectives, results, targets, and financial values) become the baseline and reference point for project implementation and monitoring. Beneficiaries are responsible for observing, documenting, and reporting on the project's progress. During the sustainability period, beneficiaries are responsible for submitting sustainability reports.

355. **Each project is assigned two monitoring officers, a primary and a secondary one.** Monitoring officers represent the interface between the MA and the beneficiary. An officer may be assigned several projects. They are responsible for ensuring the four eyes principle and are in charge of carrying out all monitoring activities—verifying technical progress reports, conducting onsite verification visits, etc.

356. **Project-level monitoring entails observing progress with respect to achieving objectives and results, attaining indicator targets, and undertaking financial monitoring.** Officers use document analysis and verification from MySMIS2014+, implementation monitoring visits, ex post visits.

357. **Data is aggregated at the MA level, with monitoring linked primarily to the reporting function.** Monitoring data is aggregated, synthesized, interpreted in reports, and presented to MA management, OPTA MC, the Minister of European Investments and Projects, the DGPCS, EC, and other stakeholders.

358. **The MA transmits data from OPTA implementation via the SFC** and through the implementation reports (especially AIRs). The EC also has a representative in the MC.

359. **Annually, a progress review meeting is organized at OP level to analyze overall OP progress as well as main challenges and areas for improvement**. Performance framework issues and specific difficulties regarding institutional set-up or project implementation are also analyzed, based on work prepared by the MA. Recommendations are issued for improvement and an action plan is established, with clear tasks, responsibilities, and timeline.

360. **SMIS is the main IT instrument used for monitoring projects in OPTA**. Data collection starts at the applicant level (even before project selection), as the applicant introduces the financial data and targets assumed for the indicators. This is done using MySMIS2014+, which is the SMIS client interface. All elements monitored at project level need to be validated in the IT system (SMIS), by the project officer. Only validated data will be considered in program monitoring.

Assessment of the monitoring system's institutional and procedural framework

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

361. **The system is adequate and complies with regulations. There are no overlaps, as the monitoring system is designed to avoid this, reflecting lessons learned from the previous programming period.** Financial reporting is easy to do, but when it comes to monitoring and aggregation issues, as in the case of AIRs, strong collaboration is needed between those responsible. From statements made by the OPTA MA, this seems to be happening.

362. **While there are no "early warning" mechanisms, current practices allow for a thorough understanding of program challenges.** Problems are reported by project monitors to superiors and then to MA structures and MA management, but this is usually done in an ad hoc, informal manner.

363. **The first impact evaluation of OPTA 2014–2020[87] states that the involvement of public institutions in debates** is perceived as better in the OPTA MC than in the POIM and POC MC, but the participation of the social partners is less intense compared to other MCs.

Design of Indicators

364. **The ex ante evaluation reflects positively on the indicators, and OPTA MA mentions it has no problems in reporting them**. They capture the effects of all types of interventions. The OP includes the following type of indicators, specific to OPTA:

- 19 output indicators, out of which:
    - 3 are horizontal (6S7: Participant training days—beneficiaries (no.), 6S19: Training days—management structures/other structures (no.) (which is mentioned as additional indicators) and 6S20: Number of staff involved in the management and implementation of ESIF, whose salaries are co-financed by the OPTA—full-time equivalent (no.))
    - 16 are specific, but one is mentioned as an additional indicator: 6S14: Evaluations and studies developed (no.)
- 6 specific results indicators (e.g., 6S1—projects with an absorption rate of more than 70 percent of the total number of projects supported by the OPTA)

365. **Guidance on specific indicator collection is also included in the Specific Guidelines for Applicants and the OPTA Indicators Guide.[88]** Most stakeholders think the results are sufficient for proper monitoring, although they would prefer a more coherent system that can show correlations between financial and results indicators.

366. **Data is not necessarily sufficient to allow the results orientation or to capture the quality of results achieved,** although it is a significant improvement over the previous programming period. For example, for each SO, there is one, at maximum two corresponding results indicators and between 1 and 11 output indicators, without a clear correspondence between output and result.

367. **OPTA only has specific output and outcome indicators**. The indicators selected in the sample analyzed also include an additional indicator and a horizontal one. The indicators are sufficient for the purposes of the PA, even though intermediary results and assumptions are not clearly identified. There are no redundant indicators and the indicators can be quite easily interpreted.

368. **The output indicators in this set are measured mostly using data from registration forms, while outcome indicators require data collected at the institutional level regarding human resources**

[87] Section Rezultate implementare—Evaluare: https://mfe.gov.ro/programe/autoritati-de-management/am-OPTA/
[88] Microsoft Word—Ghid indicatori OPTA 2014–2020 (august 2016).docx (fonduri-ue.ro)

involved in FESI coordination, management, and control. To crosscheck the measurement, additional methods or sources of information need to be identified. The indicators do not include disaggregated data, mostly because the target group does not include vulnerable groups. It would be recommended to include gender disaggregation.

369. **Based on the available information, the quantitative analysis shows that the indicators are adequate, specific, and relevant, with an average score of 8.4 out of the 9 criteria.** It is important that all outcome indicators include a baseline to support the monitoring process. A specific case is indicator 6S5, "Average score obtained after evaluating the staff employed in the FESI system higher than (no.)." Although the indicator is adequate and can be monitored quite easily through existing procedures, the fact that the staff performance evaluation procedure has changed and was approved in 2015 makes it difficult to see the evolution of the indicator without a baseline. Furthermore, an internal staff performance evaluation procedure can be vulnerable to positivity bias (e.g., the target is 3.50 while in 2018, it was 4.56).

370. **Most indicators are clear, sufficient, and well-chosen, and reflect the impact of interventions on the human resources that manage FESI.** For the future programming period, however, several ideas can be considered:

- the staff evaluation methodology must allow comparability and be approved and applied before the beginning of the programming period in order to ensure a baseline before the period's start;
- the possibility of disaggregation at least by gender dimension must be considered;
- the additional indicator regarding studies and evaluations can be adjusted or even split so that it can more concretely reflect the dimension of human resources (for example, specifying if it includes studies of organizational culture, etc.).

371. **Indicators are monitored with each progress report,** but the correlation between the financial and physical indicators is only analyzed at the end of the implementation. Beneficiaries usually do not know how the indicators are aggregated and used at the PO level.

Design of IT systems

372. **The OPTA evaluation revealed different opinions regarding the use of the MySMIS2014+ IT system, showing that project managers and beneficiaries have different perspectives regarding its influence on effective implementation of interventions.** Specifically, MySMIS2014+ as a monitoring tool is perceived as positive, contributing to the harmonization of procedures between beneficiaries and authorities. However, it is considered difficult to use, as it is not organized according to the specific needs of the OP and still needs simplifications and adaptation. The evaluation states that the hardware infrastructure is adequate for the system's current needs, and the software infrastructure is under development. Users' perception is that many improvements have been made to the system (e.g., the platform has become more stable, the number of errors is declining), but they still feel there is a need to improve the menu customization possibilities (e.g., more detailed predefined reports) and in terms of compatibility with all applications in the Microsoft Office suite.

373. **From SMIS they can extract most of the necessary data for processing, including for the financial data entered in SFC.** However, the computer system needs to be fully developed from the beginning of the programming period. It should also be able to detect problems and provide early warnings. The IT system does not help in this case.

Strengths and weaknesses in the monitoring system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

374. **Based on the provisions in ROF, OPTA system set-up and responsibilities are compliant with EU requirements.** This is confirmed by EC accreditation of OPTA MA, AA reports, etc. Evidence from the document review, the interviews, and beneficiaries confirm that the OPTA monitoring system meets at least the minimum requirements of the regulations.

375. **The decision-making process is influenced by monitoring both at the project and program level, as follows:**

- At the project level, the technical reports contain information on progress (indicators achieved versus target indicators) and problems found in implementation. Based on these sections, action is taken on those projects. If there is a difference of more than 10 percent (+/-) in the value of the indicators compared to the application form, an addendum to the contract will be signed.
- At the program level, monitoring data is mainly used to design calls for projects.

376. **The reports are used by the MA to track progress and results.** For example, bimonthly reports (according to the procedures) and weekly reports (outside the procedures) are submitted on technical and financial progress. Thus, the MA frequently provides information on indicators, payments, reimbursements, etc. Reports also include information about projects under evaluation and contracting. The information is taken from SMIS, but also from other documents compiled by each manager, because they have their own Excel sheets with specific data. OPTA MA also has someone responsible for centralizing information received from colleagues (it is not clear if this is part of procedure, but the job description lists these responsibilities). In addition, an AIR is useful for providing an overview of the results. However, there is no need for very frequent (weekly) reports.

Efficiency of Monitoring Processes

377. **OPTA MA uses the information from the project and program level reports, as well as from the IT system, for decision making.** The problem is that the reporting is complex and incomplete. The information is disseminated at MA level and published according to the procedures on the MEFI website (although there is no evidence on how it reaches other stakeholders interested in them).

378. **Most OPTA beneficiaries consider the indicators to be sufficient and accurate for assessing the progress of their project**. They usually collect data for indicators on an ongoing basis or once per month from project activities, institutional databases, or target group registries.

379. **Monitoring reports are generally accurate.** Monitoring and reporting requirements are most frequently found in the Beneficiary Manual and financing contract, but also in other guides for applicants, and their difficulty is assessed as being medium to easy. The existing guidelines are positively assessed by the beneficiaries, especially in terms of usefulness and accessibility, but also for their validity, clarity, and coverage. Beneficiaries in general do not have trouble with the monitoring process, except for the large amount of data to process. Furthermore, they receive valuable information from the MA to understand their reporting duties (training and tailored support). The COVID-19 crisis did not have a significant influence on the monitoring activity, but rather a small negative influence. The monitoring activity was adapted by using exclusively online tools.

Performance of IT systems

380. **While the monitoring system allows for comprehensive progress tracking, there are separate functions/tools for observing financial and physical progress, and it is often difficult to get a clear picture.** An integrated dashboard, capturing financial, output, and results indicators would be a useful tool, both at project and OP level.

381. **Although the monitoring system is adequate and facilitates transparency and accountability, the IT system does not function well enough to work as an early warning system or to highlight more specific aspects about the program's progress.** The general feedback of the MA is that SMIS is not tailored enough for OPTA and does not necessarily help identify specific needs. It is likely that the reporting module is not user-friendly and requires more advanced technology skills. Also, certain information can only be extracted by the SMIS unit in MEFI, upon request, which further deters some stakeholders from using it.

382. **Beneficiaries view SMIS as quite useful (average of 8.47 out of 10) and easy to use (7.64 out of 10),** but some also regard email as useful (8.40 out of 10) for data gathering and transmission, and much easier to use (9.40 out of 10). SMIS has a good level of automation (7.85 out of 10) and an average level of administrative poverty (5.07 out of 10), as well as a risk of errors (5 out of 10).

383. **Most of the difficulties with SMIS relate to connecting to the system, exporting data for the indicators, and structuring the necessary data in the module.** Unfortunately, the system does not show the progress of each activity and indicator at project level, and does not help assess progress. If progress is below expectations, the MA notifies the beneficiary. Most of the beneficiaries had to modify the target value of the indicators, some of them by even 50 percent.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

384. **The organizational culture is perceived by the MA as supportive, the tasks performed successfully, even if they require additional effort.** There is an adequate level of human resources and skills, but OPTA MA mentions the need to supplement the number of employees to ensure an optimal workload.

385. **Generally, there is medium administrative burden stemming from M&E activities**. Beneficiaries recommend better tracking of project progress in SMIS and allowing all MA employees to access the data they submit into the platform, for a more efficient data verification process. On average, two members of the team are involved in monitoring and reporting activities, allocating approx. 40–80h per month, most of these spent preparing justifying documents.

386. **At the MA level, there is a strong need to provide training on how to use SMIS.** In the previous programming period, SMIS was used for financial issues, but on the implementation side the MA only started using it last year and is not completely familiar with the validation component. OPTA MA mentioned that they started using the Implementation Module, they had problems because some functions were not well developed. However, most challenges were solved with the support of the SMIS unit, which implemented the necessary changes and also provided training for the MA and for the beneficiaries.

Effectiveness of the Monitoring System

387. **The logic of intervention was validated by the ex ante evaluation, against the criteria in CPR.** The evaluation mentions that OPTA shows an overall good internal coherence, linking needs to objectives and actions. It also contains output and results indicators for each IP. The logic of intervention is presented in the various sections of the OP, but also in Annex II in a more synthetic manner.

388. **The logic of intervention was built in collaboration with the EC and with the participation of relevant stakeholders, mainly line ministries and national agencies responsible for implementing public policies relevant to OPTA (transport, competitiveness, beneficiaries of EU funds).** The program is demand-driven, "involving an effort to anticipate the technical assistance needs of eligible beneficiaries, as well as to analyze and quantify the support needs of the FESI coordination, management, and control system."

389. **OPTA 2014–2020 is designed to remain open and responsive to meet newly defined needs at the beneficiary level and the coordination, management, and control of FESI.** Given its nature, the OPTA will have a horizontal influence on all ESIF-funded OPs and will also provide assistance to beneficiaries of all the OPs, alongside the specific contribution of the POIM, the POC, and even the OPTA.

390. **OPTA contributes to the implementation of the Public Administration Building Strategy for 2014–2020 and the National Reform Program, as well as the Digital Agenda for 2020.** It is not a clear, direct contribution to the indicators of these strategies, but a more indirect contribution.

391. **There is limited evidence that there is an institutionalized/formalized way to ensure the active involvement of other stakeholders in the implementation of OPTA.** However, the program has rather horizontal activities, without significantly influencing national policies. The press is usually interested in the financial progress, namely the absorption of EU funds. The Minister of European Investments and Projects also requests information related mostly to the financial progress and to the roll-out of calls.

392. **The MA is obliged to publish a "citizens' summary" of each AIR, as well as regular (usually monthly) updates on the program's financial progress.** There are no other requirements to release data or information from monitoring, but the MA publishes the minutes and decisions of the MC meetings, as well as materials presented during the meetings.

393. **MA employees perceive the administrative burden created by data verification as being medium to high, mostly because data is not adequately correlated from different sources.** The monitoring department has approximately 75–100 percent of their positions filled, with an adequate level of competencies, except data analysis, for which there are not enough human resources. On the other hand, the most important challenges related to M&E are insufficient personnel to cover all the relevant skills, vulnerabilities of the instruments for monitoring, as well as a young M&E culture, insufficiently developed to encourage all stakeholders to be actively involved in the process.

394. **For the MC, the most relevant data are those related to program progress.** They consider MEFI employees to be more competent in understanding and using M&E data than employees of other ministries or agencies.

Success factors and good practices in monitoring

Presentation of identified good practices

395. **One good practice adopted by OPTA is to publish all documents presented during the MC meetings.** These are available at Autoritatea de Management pentru Programul Operațional Asistență Tehnică (gov.ro), in the program monitoring section.

Key success factors for ESIF monitoring

396. **The monitoring system is compliant with all relevant regulations, and works properly.** As important success factors, we can consider:

- Constant support via phone or email provided to beneficiaries by the MA
- most of the beneficiaries are public institutions, which makes it easier to have widespread understanding of M&E procedures
- Indicators Guide and individual fiches for indicators
- Training available for the MA on indicators and SMIS

Program Evaluation System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Assessment of the evaluation system's institutional and procedural framework

Evaluation Strategy and Planning Process

397. **The evaluations are conducted by independent contractors.** The evaluation plan includes three evaluations: the ex post impact evaluation of OPTA 2007–2013, the interim impact evaluation of OPTA 2014–2020, and the final impact evaluation of OPTA 2014–2020.

398. **The first evaluation report, corresponding to 2018, was finalized in 2020** (the first version was submitted in February and the final version was approved in September). The version published online[89] is of good quality and covers most of the evaluation topics, depending on the availability of data. The OPTA evaluation plan includes:

- background for drafting the plan
- evaluation strategy
- governance of the evaluation plan
- methodology for evaluation

399. **(DR) The first impact evaluation of OPTA 2014–2020 concluded that the program made an** important contribution to the following activities: strengthening the capacity of beneficiaries to prepare and implement projects; ensuring the transparency and credibility of ESIF; improving the regulatory, strategic, and procedural framework for the coordination and implementation of ESIF; developing and maintaining a functional and efficient system for the ESIF and developing an improved human resources management policy for the institutions involved in implementing ESIF. On the other hand, improvements are needed in some areas, such as capacity of the beneficiaries, transparency, and credibility of human resources management.

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

400. **The Evaluation Unit within MIEP (PEO, Programs Evaluation Office) has a double mission:**

- To ensure a coordinated national evaluation system and to develop the capacity to evaluate operational programs; and
- To plan and manage the evaluations of the Partnership Agreement, and of the programs for which MEFI acts as MA (Competitiveness, Human Capital, Large Infrastructure, Technical Assistance, and Helping the Disadvantaged), as laid out in the 2014–2020 evaluation plans. Consequently, it fulfills the following tasks:
    - Drafts the ToRs of the evaluation
    - Participates in the selection of external evaluators
    - Monitors evaluation activities
    - Controls/ensures the quality of evaluation reports
    - Coordinates and disseminates evaluation results

Strengths and weaknesses in the evaluation system's performance

[89] Section Rezultate implementare—Evaluare: https://mfe.gov.ro/programe/autoritati-de-management/am-OPTA/.

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

401. **The system is adequate, and the PEO has involved OPTA MA in preparing documentation to procure evaluation services.** Furthermore, there is also an ECC that approves the evaluation reports, which helps the process of creating relevant evaluations.

402. **The implementation evaluation recommendations involve both the MA and the MC:**

- The Evaluation Unit sends the MA the evaluation report and a table with recommendations, including timeline and responsible entities/staff
- The MA develops and updates an electronic registry of recommendations, coordinates the implementation of recommendations, and informs on the stage of implementation
- The MC analyzes the way recommendations are implemented

403. **Within the quarterly meetings of the Functional Working Group for Evaluation and Performance (quarterly meetings),** members will present evaluation plans, main problems and solutions, as well as best practices in terms of evaluation method, organization of evaluations, and how results are used.

404. **The evaluation network will be used to share best evaluation practices with a larger group of entities active in the evaluation field, including academic actors.** The MC plays a key role regarding the use of evaluation results. Final evaluation reports are presented to the ECC and MC for analysis. A summary of evaluation results carried out for each OP will be sent to the EC by December 31, 2022, as per Art. 114 of the CPR. Other dissemination means include:

- Launch and closing conferences for the evaluations (organized for users of evaluation results)
- Web page for evaluation: www.evaluare-structurale.ro (all reports will be published here)
- Executive summaries for the evaluations: will be developed for the public and distributed as part of the information and communication activities organized by the MIEP and by the evaluation network.

Efficiency of Evaluation Processes

405. **(DR) The first impact evaluation of OPTA 2014–2020 highlights the fact that for some of the projects, the monitoring system can be more complex and include additional indicators that highlight the impact of some of the intended results.** For example, some projects do not include quantitative results indicators, only expected results, which makes it extremely difficult to analyze the impact of the intervention.[90] Another example mentioned in the evaluation pertains to the development of the partnership culture, for which the program does not have a definite results indicator, even though it aims to improve it.

406. **(DR) As mentioned in the first impact evaluation of OPTA 2014–2020, the methods proposed for the counterfactual analysis are based on data series throughout the program at the employee level regarding position, performance, and income.** The availability and completeness of the data was limited. Institutional changes (such as the transfer of the Ministry of European Funds to the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration and then return as a stand-alone ministry, or the transfer of IBs from one ministry to another) have affected the availability and consistency of staff data. Due to the long time period (2014–2020), data were stored across different databases, and are difficult to aggregate due to differences in record formats. Cleaning and aggregating data has been time-consuming and demanding in terms of human resources. The

[90] For example: section 8.4.5.3 Case study 3: Sprijin privind dezvoltarea/optimizarea unor module specifice sistemului informatic integrat SMIS 2014+/MySMIS 2014—Cod SMIS 126444.

evaluation team mobilized the resources to process and aggregate the databases and align them with the format and structure needed for statistical analysis.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

407. **The evaluation reports are disseminated through the ECC and the Coordination Committee at the level of the Partnership Agreement (CCMAP), and OPTA MA mentions they are used for policy making.** The reports are rather detailed and complex; thus, an even shorter summary can be disseminated among the stakeholders**.** The reports are made public, although the website dedicated to evaluation reports no longer works properly.

408. **The PEO oversees the evaluation process and has sufficient resources, although OPTA MA would like to be more involved, using its own human resources.** There are no complaints about the quality of the reports, thus it is likely that the evaluators who were contracted have enough resources to comply with the requirements.

409. **The organizational culture is adequate to support evaluation.** There are sufficient skills and resources and the level of the PEO, although OPTA MA would like to have its own resources.

410. **Most MA employees are benefiting from training on the logic of intervention.** Unfortunately, most of the respondents from MA lack details about the evaluation plan and overall process; MC OPTA is more aware of the evaluations conducted, but cannot assess their quality or usefulness. They presume that the most important factors influencing the quality of the evaluations are related to data availability and quality. Most of the MA employees do not know how the reports are disseminated to the public, only which stakeholders will receive each report.

Effectiveness of the Evaluation System

411. **Relevant recommendations were made through the evaluation reports**. However, once an evaluation project is contracted, the involvement of OPTA MA in the process is significantly reduced. According to them, it would be useful to have dedicated staff in the MA to conduct evaluations that are more relevant for them, but also to make them available whenever needed, not only depending on the evaluation plan. OPTA MA may request ad hoc evaluations, but it takes a long time to contract them.

Success factors and good practices in program evaluation

412. **Overall, the system ensures that evaluations are fully compliant with EU regulations.** The evaluations are of good quality and produce useful recommendations not only at the program level, but also at the general level of FESI implementation, although they should be more concise. However, the system is vulnerable to changes in the structure of ministries and the deficient process of data aggregation. Another aspect that requires attention is the difficulty of contracting ad hoc evaluations. In the future aggregation period, greater flexibility can be considered in involving the MA in the evaluation process, as well as in establishing the topics included in the evaluations, including by introducing ad hoc evaluations in contracts.

G. Operational Program Aid for Disadvantaged Persons (OPDP)

Program Monitoring System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Description and Program Structures

413. The **General Directorate for European Human Capital Program (DGPECU) is in charge of both POCU and OPDP. This means that a number of POCU MA employees have responsibilities related to OPDP as well, to varying degrees, from 5 percent to 80 percent. In Romania, OPDP is a type I OP, including both food and basic material.**

414. **The main stakeholders involved in monitoring OPDP-funded projects are: (i) beneficiaries; (ii) the MA; (iii) the EC; and (iv) partner organizations.** The two beneficiaries in OPDP are the MEFI and the Ministry of Education (ME), which are responsible for implementing operations and for data collection. For the food distribution component, the structure tasked with implementing operations is the OPDP Implementation Service (SIOPDP) within the MIEP, and for the basic material assistance component (school supplies) it is the ME.

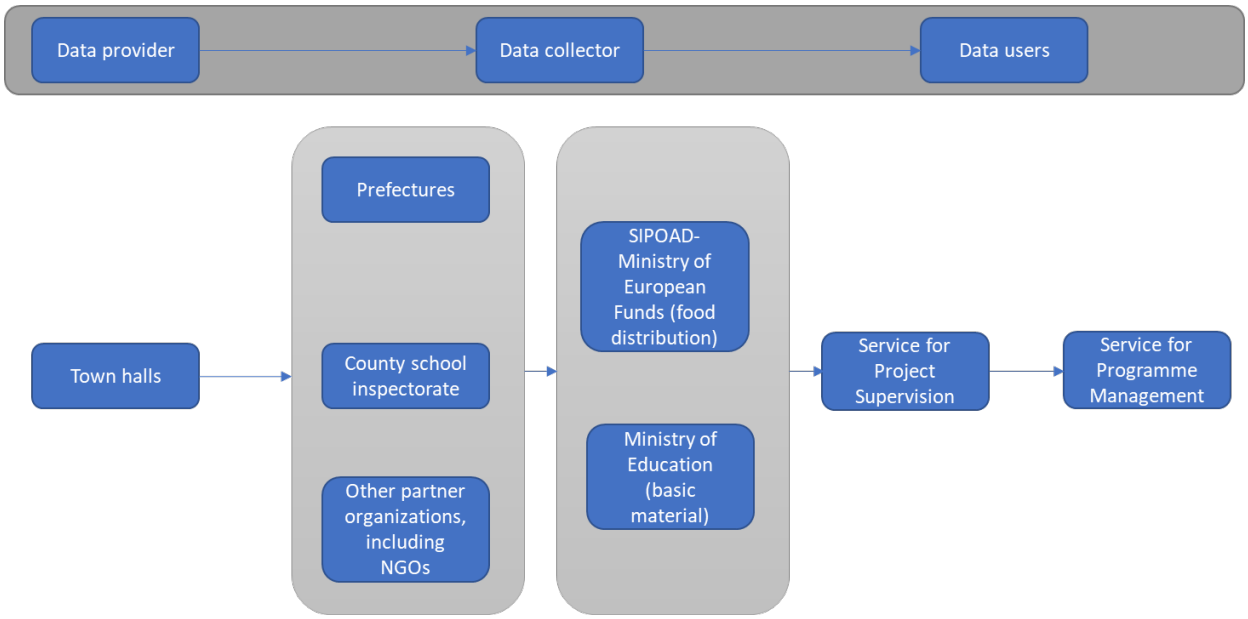
415. **The MA is responsible for data validation, aggregation, and reporting.** There are no IBs and no MC in the case of OPDP. However, there are partner organizations, public bodies, and/or nonprofit organizations that distribute food and/or basic material assistance and also provide ancillary measures, directly or through other partner organizations. They also supply data for monitoring, to the MIEP and ME (as beneficiaries). The main partner organizations are the County School Inspectorates (under the subordination of ME) and the County Prefectures (under the subordination of MAI),[91] but also NGOs (such as the Red Cross) and religious institutions can be selected and involved.[92]

416. **At the county level, prefectures are responsible for establishing working groups for the implementation of OPDP.** Prefectures send beneficiaries an annual report regarding the implementation of OPDP at county level, centralizing the information and synthesizing data received from the administrative-territorial units, as well as other data and information about OPDP implementation at county level (Figure 2). The annual report includes a short presentation of the development of OPDP at county level, ongoing problems, proposals for improving the program's future development, synthesis of data received from administrative-territorial units, and synthesis of accompanying measures carried out in the county. These working groups include the county offices of the National Authority for Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety (ANSVSA), which represents the local authorities that distribute the goods (municipalities and communes), as well as other relevant organizations.

[91] HG.pdf (gov.ro)

[92] According to the OP—Section 3.3: Selecting partner organizations.

Figure 2. OPDP data collection



Source: Based on OPDP Operational Procedure for Program Monitoring and Reporting (PO.DGPECU.33) and Operational Procedure of Projects Technical Monitoring (PO.DGPECU.35)

417. **The MIEP ROF describes the institutional set-up, roles, and functions of the POCU MA and OPDP Implementation Service.** In POCU MA, the Directorate for Program Management, Project Appraisal and Contracting (DPMPAC) is responsible for ensuring OP monitoring is comprised of the following services: Service for Program Management the Service for Project Appraisal and Contracting, and the Service for Project Supervision. Based on the provisions in ROF, OPDP system set-up and responsibilities are compliant with the EU requirements in the CPR and Fund-specific Regulation no. 223/2014.

418. **The directorate's responsibilities in relation to M&E are mostly covered by the Service for Program Management,** which ensures the collection of data with respect to POCU and OPDP progress from the other directorates and services in the MA or other authorities; it also ensures the aggregation and reporting of data and information to the management, other MIEP departments, and the EC, as per regulations (CPR and FEAD-specific) or upon request.

419. **The Project Supervision Service (SSP) ensures project-level monitoring**. The collection of data and information is based on the summaries developed by the municipalities and the information received from the structures designated with the implementation of operations, structures responsible for registration, updating, centralization, storage in electronic format.

420. **The Program Monitoring Service (SMP) is responsible for monitoring progress at the OP level, and for drafting the AIR.** OPDP reporting officers within the SMP receive information from the SSP, after their verification, as well as from the Service for Projects Appraisal and Contracting. Technical and financial monitoring of the OPDP projects 2014–2020 (PO.DGPECU.29) is done on the basis of the summaries developed by the town halls, the technical reports, the onsite visits and the data introduced in SMIS by SIOPDP and ME.

Specific Monitoring Tools

421. **No monitoring plan is available; only procedures for monitoring activities, at program and project level.** They specify in detail the roles and responsibilities, the activities, information flows, and deadlines/durations for certain activities. There are procedures in place for program and project monitoring, drafting the AIR, modifying the program, etc. Procedures have annexes and templates.

422. **Monitoring is initiated once the project is approved and contracted**. Then, the data found in the application (objectives, results, targets, and financial values) become the baseline and reference point for project implementation and monitoring. Beneficiaries are responsible for observing, documenting, and reporting on the project's progress, based on the information received from the partner organizations. The monitoring process starts from the moment of signing the financing contract and ends three years after project completion.

423. **Each project is assigned a monitoring officer who represents "the interface" between the MA and the beneficiary.** For verification purposes, using the four eyes principle, upon checking the technical reports submitted by the beneficiary, another project officer is appointed (the two officers are called Officer 1 and Officer 2) and the results of their verification are validated or reconciled by the SSP manager.

424. **Project-level monitoring entails observing progress with respect to achieving objectives and results, attaining indicator targets, and undertaking financial monitoring.** Technical reports submitted by the beneficiaries include, for each county:

- Report on the development of OPDP—synthesis of OPDP implementation at the level of each partner county, prepared by the institution of the county prefect
- Centralized tables regarding the delivery of food and/or basic materials at the level of each county
- Synthesis regarding the implementation of accompanying measures
- Information and publicity measures carried out within the project
- Centralization of results indicators, prepared by the beneficiary, which will contain the detailed situation of the indicators collected from municipalities/inspectorates, centralized at the level of school prefectures/inspectorates and cumulated by lot, if the purchase was made on lots, or cumulated at the level of the institutions included in the technical report and the request for reimbursement.

425. **Project monitors use document analysis and verification, onsite visits to beneficiaries and partner organizations (sample-based), and data uploaded into MySMIS/MySMIS2014+.** Each activity is carefully documented in writing, as per the monitoring procedures. Beneficiaries centralize the data/information until April 1 of each year. The information on the technical indicators is transmitted to the SSP through a centralizer. After verifying them in relation to the information validated in the Technical Reports, SSP transmits to the persons responsible for developing the AIR within SMP the data/information until April 12 of each year.

426. **The AIR is drafted by the OPDP reporting officers within the SMP within the DGPECU, who receive the information from the SSP.** The categories of data/information to be collected, centralized, and reported are established according to the list of common indicators of the OP and must include:

- Overview of implementation: Information on program implementation in relation to the common indicators for partially or fully completed operations. The information also includes the problems encountered in implementation, as well as measures taken or to be taken. The information received is centralized and is entered in the AIR format provided by the EC through the SFC 2014 computer system.
- Information and an assessment regarding the actions that take into account the horizontal principles set out in Regulation no. 223/2014.
- Data on resource indicators (financial indicators) through the reports and data entered in SMIS.
- Data on performance indicators, outcome and results indicators.
- List of the most relevant categories of goods distributed to children.

427. **The Commission Implementing Regulation no. 594/2016 established a model for the structured study on the final recipients** of the operational programs of food assistance and/or basic material assistance within the European Aid Fund for the most disadvantaged persons under EU Regulation no. 223/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

428. **Monitoring data is aggregated, synthesized, interpreted in reports, and presented to the MA management, the Minister of European Investments and Projects, and the DGPCS, EC, and other stakeholders**. At the OP level, monitoring is focused on obtaining and delivering quantifiable, accurate, and reliable information with respect to the use of financial resources and the fulfillment of physical indicators. Data is used to evaluate the financial progress, the operational capacity of the overall OPDP management and control system, and progress toward achieving the established objectives. Based on these assessments, the need for corrective measures or to redesign interventions is determined, if significant differences are observed compared to the initial programming.

429. **SMIS is the main IT instrument used for monitoring projects in OPDP**. Data collection starts at the **level** of the applicant (even before project selection), who introduces the financial data and the targets assumed for the indicators. This is done using the module MySMIS2014+, which is the SMIS client interface. If, following the evaluation process, the project has been selected and contracted, they become reference data and the starting point in project implementation. All elements monitored at project level need to be validated in the IT system (SMIS), by the project officer. Only validated data will be taken into account in the program monitoring process. The Procedure for Technical Monitoring of the Projects (PO.DGPECU.35) also mentions "centralizers" for monitoring technical indicators, which can be found in the Excel Form: F-PO.DGPECU.35.22—Centralization of results indicators. Thus, a mix of MySMIS2014+ and Excel are used for monitoring.

Assessment of the monitoring system's institutional and procedural framework

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

430. **Apart from tracking projects' progress (financial and physical), OPDP monitoring also covers progress in relation to launching calls and the outcomes of these**. The MA management is consistently informed about the calls under preparation/launched/closed and the projects submitted/appraised/rejected (including at what stage) and contracted.

431. **Although OPDP lacks an MC, an annual meeting is held to observe progress of the OP**, with the participation of the institutions involved in implementing the OP, along with the Ministry of Finance (as Certification Authority) and the Ministry of Labor.

Design of Indicators

432. **All the indicators used in OPDP are common, as per EU regulations,[93] and there is no Performance Framework (none is required).** The indicators are not explicitly mentioned in the program, but they are stated in the Applicant's Guide. Progress can be observed in the AIRs. The following categories of indicators are used:

- Common input indicators, relating to amount of eligible public expenditure
- Output indicators on food support distributed and on the basic material assistance distributed
- Results indicators on the food support and basic material assistance distributed

433. **FEAD indicators do not cover the compulsory accompanying measures**. Accompanying measures are an innovative element of FEAD in comparison with previous programs, in line with the objective of addressing social exclusion. They aim to support the social integration of end recipients.

[93] Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 1255/2014 of 17 July 2014 supplementing Regulation (EU) No 223/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived by laying down the content of the annual and final implementation reports, including the list of (europa.eu).

They are provided in addition to the distribution of food and/or basic material assistance, with the aim of alleviating social exclusion and/or tackling social emergencies; for example, education measures encouraging school attendance, guidance on ensuring personal hygiene, guidance on personal finances, etc.

434. **The program and its logic of intervention are straightforward and the indicators are enough to adequately monitor the program.** Only common indicators are used. The quantitative analysis, supports the idea that the indicators are well designed, with an average score of 8.89 out of 9 criteria. However, it would be recommended to have cross tables that show how vulnerable groups intersect: for example, how many Roma women with disabilities are supported. In conclusion, the existing indicators are sufficient and very specific, allowing for efficient monitoring of the program. It is recommended to keep this approach.

435. **A guideline of OPDP indicators was developed as part of the OP ex ante evaluation.** However, it is not available online and is not annexed to the Applicant's Guide or the monitoring procedures.

Design of IT systems

436. **OPDP is implemented through the SMIS Implementation Module.** The module is new and allows for all monitoring data to be input directly into SMIS, without the need for other IT systems. However, it seems that SMIS is not adapted to OPDP.

Strengths and weaknesses in the monitoring system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

437. **OPDP MA has undertaken all the necessary measures to ensure compliance with the legislative requirements for both POCU and OPDP.** All the EC provisions meant to ensure results orientation were observed during the preparation of the program or immediately after, with the support of MEFI.

438. **The national regulatory framework was developed and enforced to enable the effective implementation of EU requirements.** This was part of the accreditation process the MA undergoes at the beginning of the programming period. The operational procedures are perceived as being very useful for the monitoring process, as well as for all the other functions, and are the backbone of all activities performed in the MA.

439. **There is a general agreement among stakeholders that the monitoring system is compliant with the relevant legislation, both in terms of design and in practice**. Evidence from the document review, the interviews, and beneficiaries confirm the fact that OPDP monitoring system meets at least the minimum requirements of the regulations.

440. **Compliance is also checked regularly by the AA and the EC.** The AA may issue **recommendations** for improving the institutional set-up, process, and procedures, if the case may be. The majority of recommendations are implemented as issued. If significant deficiencies are identified in the program's management and control system, disbursements from the EC may be blocked until the situation is corrected.

Efficiency of Monitoring Processes

441. **Overall, the monitoring function of the OP is fully compliant with the legislation and is performing well, allowing projects to be tracked in detail.** While there are no "early warning" mechanisms instituted, current practices allow for a thorough understanding of program challenges. Problems are reported to beneficiaries by partner organizations, prefectures, and school inspectorates, and further to the project monitors in the MA.

442. **On the other hand, the mid-term evaluation of FEAD conducted by the EC[94] reports high monitoring costs related to the paper trail** (e.g., lengthy documents with evidence on end recipients); that there are too many forms to fill in and too many database updates to make, which leads to increased costs. The evaluation report highlights the fact that the identification of end recipients in operational programs is based mainly on income criteria, and in countries like Romania, when these criteria are used, income is checked through statements that end recipients must supply to relevant authorities or upload to national or local databases (including databases on recipients of social benefits or minimum guarantee income), as well as through a more global assessment of one's situation carried out by social workers or local authorities to identify end recipients.

443. **Generally, the monitoring process of OPDP is regarded as significantly less cumbersome than POCU.** Monitoring and reporting procedures are adequate, and the reporting responsibilities were fulfilled on time**.** OPDP beneficiaries must report few indicators (about five), and consider that these indicators are sufficient for showing the progress of the implementation, but otherwise do not show any impact. Main sources of data are target group registries and project activities. Email is the main system for data transfer, apart from SMIS, and is perceived as a very useful and easy tool for this purpose**.** Monitoring procedures and the Beneficiary Guide are useful for better understanding monitoring and reporting responsibilities. Beneficiaries have received support from MEFI, written or via phone, which was useful for understanding their responsibilities, even though they have not received training.

444. **The MA perceives the OPDP M&E procedures as relevant and compliant, but some of the monitoring forms are rather complicated to use.** There is no clear consensus regarding the capacity to collect and analyze data. As a solution, training, additional guidelines, and more realistic deadlines should be taken into consideration. MA considers that data collected is generally complete and reliable, but there are mixed views regarding the quality of the verification process.

Performance of IT systems

445. **SMIS is considered easy to use and good for submitting data, but not good enough to aggregate, review, and validate it.** It would be useful to work on the interconnection between different databases (for example FOREXEBUG—Ministry of Finance or SIIIR (The Integrated Information System of Education in Romania)—Ministry of Education, as well as the databases at local level) and avoid unnecessary administrative burden on beneficiaries and the MA. The MA considers that the management is quite open to learn more about the program's progress and to use M&E to improve the OP's performance.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

446. **At the insistence of the EC, the MA assigned about 2–3 persons in each department, separating OPDP responsibilities from POCU.** Over time, this differentiation has been put into practice to ensure the necessary resources for OPDP and avoid situations where POCU-related tasks took over the entire staff.

447. **Only one beneficiary mentioned the amount of resources involved in monitoring and reporting:** one person with less than 40 hours per month, with an average cost of 100 lei—approximately €20. In their project, they had to temporarily hire an external consultant for preparing documents.

448. **Projects financed from OPDP technical assistance carried out by other structures within the MEF include:**

- support for MIEP to manage and implement OPDP by providing logistics;

[94] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1089&newsId=9331&furtherNews=yes

- support for MIEP to carry out OPDP 2018–2021 tenders—auxiliary services; and
- continuous training of MIEP staff involved in coordinating, managing, and implementing OPDP.

Effectiveness of the Monitoring System

449. **Overall, the program is consistent with the Europe 2020 strategy and other relevant strategies or programs at the national level.** It presents a coherent intervention logic, starting from clearly identified needs to program targets, funded operations, and targeted indicators. The development of the OP benefited from several relevant factors, such as ministries or NGOs working in a field relevant to the OP. The reporting actions and evaluations highlighted for the OPDP are consistent with EU regulations, while there is room for improvement and clarification on data collection procedures, to avoid creating administrative burden.

450. **The OP has been modified three times.** Commission staff working document: Mid-Term Evaluation of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (SWD 2019, 149 final) mentions Romania as one of the countries with the most frequently reported adaptation related to fine-tuning/revising the targeting of end recipients, including adjusting the composition of food packages and improvements in the implementation process, which covers procurement and delivery methods, determining who is responsible for what, allocating tasks among stakeholders.

451. **Data is sufficient for monitoring, but the format is not easy to process.** Most of the information is still in PDF, and generates a high level of administrative burden for data quality assurance and aggregation. There is no clear evidence if the data is used in policymaking, but MA mentions they are using data for program management.

452. **According to the 2018 AIR,[95] at the beginning of 2018, as a result of the audit carried out in Romania by EC services,** OPDP MA received a warning letter reporting that deficiencies were identified in the operation of the OP's management and control system, including the quality of the monitoring activities and monitoring data, such as:

- management checks have not been fully effective and/or are not applied consistently;
- on-the-spot checks on the delivery of products have been carried out inconsistently, not always in accordance with procedures and/or without adequate monitoring of deficiencies or problems reported;
- the quality controls of foodstuffs delivered to ensure compliance with the technical specifications need to be improved;
- the absence of checks on the quality and reliability of the data reported in the AIR;
- delays completing all other functionalities in the MySMIS2014+ computer system; and
- low administrative capacity of the OPDP MA—insufficient staff.

453. **As a result, the MA undertook the following corrective measures:** employing additional staff, adding more types of aid and beneficiaries, creating collaboration protocols, and improving the data reporting system.

Success factors and good practices in monitoring

454. **Two important factors are helping the successful implementation of OPDP:**

- extensive use of SMIS; and

[95] https://www.fonduri-ue.ro/images/files/programe/OPDP/2020/09.10.2020/Raport_anual_de_implementare_2014RO05FMOP001_2018_0_ro.pdf

- the fact that implementation is mainly done through public institutions, which facilitates communication.

Program Evaluation System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Assessment of the evaluation system's institutional and procedural framework

Evaluation Strategy and Planning Process

455. **As per regulation, OPDP is not required to have an evaluation plan.** Ex ante, interim, and ex post evaluations are mentioned in the FEAD regulation:

- For the ex ante evaluation, a list of elements to be evaluated is provided, which has been integrated in the requirements for the ex ante evaluation of the OPDP.
- Interim evaluations by Member States are optional and the MA will conduct a structured study on final recipients in 2017 and 2022. The OP is in line with these requirements.
- The ex post evaluation will be carried out by the EC with the assistance of external experts.

456. **In accordance with Regulation no. 223/2014, the MA has commissioned a study to assess the satisfaction of the OPDP end users for 2014–2016.** In this regard, in 2017 the public procurement procedure was launched to carry out a sociological survey of those responsible for the OPDP within partner organizations and all final beneficiaries of this program. The study was conducted between January and February 2018, and its main conclusions were included in the 2017 AIR. The overall conclusion is that most final beneficiaries of OPDP for the 2014–2016 period are satisfied with the assistance provided, but their material situation requires forms of intervention and support provided more frequently, as well as the provision of other products/services, apart from food packages. The findings of the study were also used to substantiate the modification of the OP operated in 2020.

H. Interreg V-A (CBC): Romania-Hungary and Romania-Bulgaria programs

Program Monitoring System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Description and Program Structures

457. **(DR) Cross-border cooperation (CBC) programs are implemented with shared management.** Member States (MS) propose the CBC, which then are approved by the EC in each programming period. Each CBC has a designated MA, a Certifying Authority, and an AA. The MA and the AA must be located in the same MS.

458. **(DR) The General Directorate for European Territorial Cooperation Programs (GDETCP) within MDPWA has the following relevant structures for the monitoring activity:**

- MA services for RO-HU and RO-BG
- The Electronic Monitoring System (eMS) Office ensures the proper functioning of the eMS system used by the ETC programs financed by the ERDF
- The Project Monitoring Service (Unit) uses internal procedures to monitor projects regarding the achievement of project results and indicators.

459. **(DR) RO-HU MA and RO-BG MA are the organizational structures within the MDPWA that ensure the management of the EU's non-reimbursable financial assistance from ERDF,** as well as co-financing from the state budget related to partner beneficiaries. They are responsible for implementing the M&E activities at program level and for coordinating project-level monitoring.

460. **(DR) The MC is set up in line with EU Regulation no. 1303/2013 and is comprised of representatives of the MA, national authorities (NAs), and institutional representatives.** The MC supervises the implementation of the CBC and selects projects to be financed. Its overall task is to ensure the quality and effectiveness of program implementation assisted by the Joint Secretariat (JS). The MC shall meet at least once a year and review program implementation and progress made toward achieving its objectives.

- For RO-HU the MC has 25 voting members, 12 organizations on the Romanian side, public authorities, and 2 RDAs, and 12 Hungarian organizations, one of which is an NGO.
- For RO-BG the MC includes 42 voting members, from the national, regional, and local public administration, NGOs, civil society, and the academic environment.

461. **(DR) The JS is an organizational structure established to assist the MA and MC in exercising their functions.** It contributes to the program's daily implementation, as well as to assist the MA in its coordination and implementation activities. Further on, it supports the work of the other program's management bodies, fulfilling program-implementation related tasks. The JSs are distinct structures within regional offices for CBC in Oradea (RO-HU) and Calarasi (RO-BG). The delegation agreements for RO-HU and RO-BG clearly set out JS responsibilities for monitoring projects. These are verified through field missions where the MA's representatives evaluate the delegated tasks at the JS level.

Specific Monitoring Tools

462. **(KII) The eMS is used for RO-BG and RO-HU program monitoring and is adapted to the specifics of the ETC programs; it complies with all applicable regulations**. The system was developed by Interact Vienna and made available to the RO-HU and RO-BG cooperation programs. It represents a major improvement in the monitoring process compared to the last programming period, given that it is currently used for all steps related to program management and used by all management structures (MA, national authorities, Secretariats, AA), and by beneficiaries at all stages, from project submission to completion.

463. **(DR) Data is aggregated at the JS/MA level, with monitoring linked primarily to the reporting function.** The following reports are available according to existing procedures:

Reports drafted by MA

- Financial reports, according to Art. 112 of EU Regulation no. 1303/2013, (submitted on January 31, July 31, and October 31)
- Reports for the MC, according to the provisions of Art. 125 (1) (a) of EU Regulation no. 1303/2013 on the necessary data on the evolution of the program in terms of achievement of objectives, financial data, and data on indicators and milestones
- AIRs/FIRs in accordance with Art. 50 of Regulation no. 1303/2013
- Ad hoc reports for the purpose of evaluation, audits, payment claims, accounts, annual summaries

Reports drafted by the JS

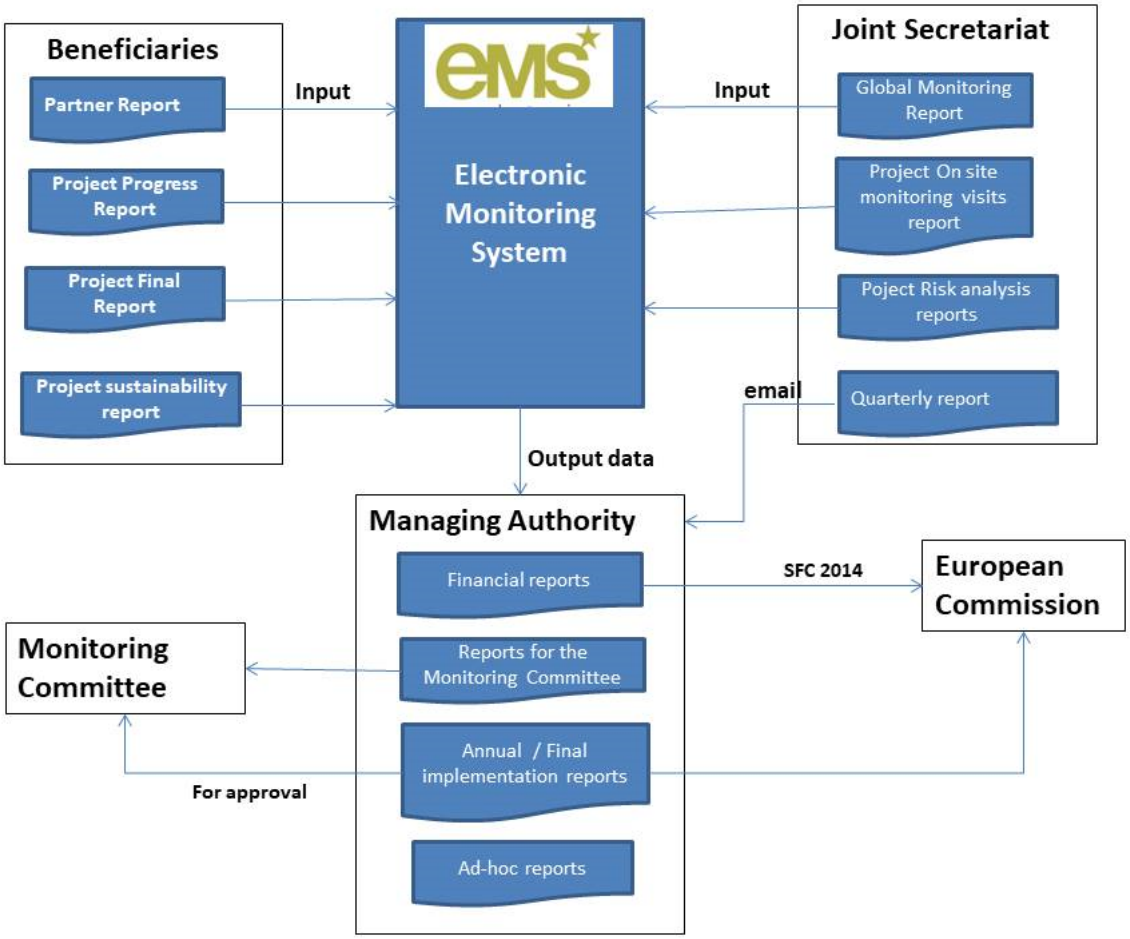
- Quarterly report of the JS for each PA
- Global monitoring report at program level related to the evolution of the implementation
- Onsite monitoring visits report, conducted by JS and/or the project monitoring unit (Service)/MA
- Risk analysis

Reports drafted by the beneficiary

- Partner report
- Beneficiary project progress report
- Final project report
- Project sustainability report submitted by the beneficiary to JS during the post-implementation period

464. **Data collection is mainly done from project reports, which represent the main source of** measuring the indicators at program level (Figure 3 below).

Figure 3. Monitoring process at the CBC level



Assessment of the monitoring system's institutional and procedural framework

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

465. **(DR) There is no monitoring plan in place for RO-HU and RO-BG programs, but there are monitoring procedures.** There are operational procedures regarding program and project monitoring at MA level, shared by both RO-HU and RO-BG programs. At the JS level, there are different project monitoring procedures for each program. The procedures specify the roles and responsibilities, activities, deadlines for reporting, and activities. Also, the eMS system has operational procedures in place for drafting the AIR and supporting the MC. (KII) The working procedures that apply to different structures regulate their distinct tasks and responsibilities, all the way through to compartment level. The procedures include deadlines, responsible persons, and references for each operation. Work systems are annually audited to evaluate their efficiency.

466. **(DR) Project monitoring focuses on the expected activities, results and outputs, respectively,** on beneficiaries' achievement of target indicators and objectives. After signing the Financing Agreement for each project, the Executive Director and Head of JS appoint the project monitors.

Design of Indicators

467. **(DR) Program output indicators have been developed to express and measure project outputs.** All output indicators are collected at project level and aggregated at program level. According to operational procedures, the system of indicators consists of:

- a set of indicators that are defined for the PAs and will support the M&E of program activities; this set includes results and output indicators. There are no process indicators set, only the output and results indicators.
- the second set of indicators that is established at the level of each selected project.

468. **The authorities responsible for monitoring these two sets of indicators are the MC, the MA, and the JS:**

- MC is periodically informed about the stage of fulfilling the program indicators;
- MA monitors the indicators of the program with the help of the progress reports related to each project and the eMS; and
- JS monitors the project indicators using progress reports for each project, through onsite monitoring visits and the eMS.

469. **(DR) The evaluation of RO-HU's implementation report[96] found limitations regarding achievement of the results indicator targets and their measurement:**

- The results indicators defined—effects outside the area of influence of the interventions funded by the program.
- The type of results indicators corresponding to effects of the interventions cannot be aggregated.

470. **As a result, for RO-HU, the methodology for the results indicators was updated in the 2020 program document** for a more accurate determination and calculation of the results targets set for some IPs.

471. **(IA) Following the analysis of a sample of indicators for the RO-BG programs, it appears that the analyzed indicators are well-established and relevant, covering the objectives envisaged in the logic of intervention, and able to show progress.** No redundancy or overlapping has been identified, the number of indicators being the least possible to facilitate adequate monitoring. All indicators lacked sufficient publicly available data, which is especially needed for outcome indicators that do not have normative interpretation. The main recommendation arising from this initial analysis is to better develop the indicator section within the Applicant's Guide so as to better explain indicator definitions, the data collection mechanism, the formulas calculated for their aggregation at program level, and the importance of beneficiaries in correctly reporting and monitoring the indicators. This information should also be publicly available and centralized for all types of indicators.

Design of IT systems

472. **(KII) eMS is designed to work flexibly, with different interface configurations that can be accessed at different stages depending on the specifics of each program.** For each CBC there is an online system to which beneficiaries can connect, as well as an eMS section on the CBC website. User manuals for the system for RO-HU and RO-BG are posted on their website. The workflow can be tracked on time, from the moment the beneficiary sends the project to the moment of certifying the expenditure. eMS is interconnected with keep.eu at the European level. Keep.eu imports from eMS the data on the beneficiary, financing, results, project and program data.[97]

473. **(KII) The eMS is managed by a special structure within the MA, known as BEMS (eMS Bureau), which ensures the electronic program management system functions properly**. At project

[96] Final Evaluation Report (2020), Services for evaluating the implementation of The Interreg V-A Romania—Hungary Program, August 2020 (document provided by the MA).

[97] Keep.eu is a free, comprehensive and searchable database built by Interact Vienna with the support of the EC and CBC programs. The database covers the 2000–2006, 2007–2013, and 2014–2020 periods.

level, JS is responsible for providing training to beneficiaries and monitoring the collection of up-to-date information related to project implementation.

Strengths and weaknesses in the monitoring system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

474. **(KII) RO-HU and RO-BG programs are in full compliance with the national and EU legal framework.** Also, every operational procedure contains a section with references to European and Romanian legislation being implemented. MA and JS staff activities are clear and the coordination of the JS monitoring procedure with that of the MA has been ensured in order to avoid duplication.

475. **(KII) The current monitoring procedure was used and tested in the previous programming period.** It underwent several improvement iterations in line with the corresponding challenges and implementation requirements, and in close coordination and active consultation with other similar programs in Europe.

476. **(DR) Monitoring of the CBC is initiated at the project level and starts at the partner level,** where each project beneficiary, including the Lead Beneficiary (LB), needs to fill in the partner report in the eMS system regarding the stage of implementation of activities and expenditures, and with relevant supporting documents. Based on data from the partner report, outputs and validated costs are summarized and aggregated in the project progress report prepared by the LB and submitted to the JS in the eMS system. When the project progress report is finalized, the LB prints, signs, and uploads it in the "Attachment" section of the project progress report in the eMS.

477. **(DR) The financial reports to be submitted to the EC by the MA include the number of operations selected for financing and financial data on the total eligible expenditures.** The financial statements which are submitted on January 31st include the financial data broken down by each category of intervention under the program.

478. **(DR) The AIR contains key information on the implementation of the program and its priorities by referring to:**

- financial data
- common indicators, program-specific indicators, quantified target values, changes of results indicators
- stage objectives defined by the Performance Framework (starting with the AIR.

479. **The FIR includes information and evaluations on progress toward program objectives and** contribution to the EU's strategy for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth, in addition to the information and evaluation mentioned above and specific characteristics of the AIR.

Efficiency of Monitoring Processes

480. **Given the efficient use of the eMS system and the updated procedural framework,** there are no significant issues regarding the monitoring process at the RO-HU and RO-BG levels.

481. **(KII) At the beneficiary level for RO-HU MA, in some cases, forms of reduced institutional capacity were noted**. Regarding report verification by MA staff/regional structures, there were cases when clarifications/completions from beneficiaries were requested, in the process of verifying reports. To improve the reporting process for the beneficiaries, the following actions were taken:

- a user manual was developed regarding how to complete reports in the eMS
- trainings sessions with beneficiaries were carried out, for each project call
- webinars were held in which IT staff showed beneficiaries how to file eMS reports

- training sessions were organized about common implementation mistakes and on report preparation

482. **(KII) At the beneficiary level, some inefficiencies have been reported because of a language barrier (poor knowledge of English).** The official language of the programs (English) was what mainly challenged beneficiaries as they prepared reports, with different levels of proficiency between project partners, thus making the process of collecting information very difficult.

483. **(BS) Regarding administrative burden, 24 percent of beneficiaries found the preparation of reports to have a medium burden**. Data collection and calculation of indicators were found to be medium burdensome (18 percent from the total number of answers). A small number of beneficiaries from RO-HU and RO-BG (24 percent) find it useful for the monitoring and reporting forms to be the same for all programs. No additional resources were needed by 36 percent of the beneficiaries to meet the monitoring and reporting requirements. Also, one quarter (24 percent) consider that the COVID-19 crisis has somewhat blocked the monitoring and reporting process.

484. **(BS) Overall, beneficiaries find monitoring and reporting requirements to be manageable.** The difficulty of meeting the requirements was considered average by 71.43 percent of the respondents, with only about a third considering it difficult or very difficult. Only 37.5 percent of the beneficiaries from RO-HU and RO-BG never reported the same information in two different reports, the lowest of all the OPs analyzed. One problem identified for RO-HU was that first level controllers do not use a unitary system for requirements, with each controller having its own interpretation.

485. **(BS) However, some unclear requirements and delays in activities were reported by the beneficiaries**. Regarding difficulties in meeting a project's M&E requirements, 42 percent considered it to be because of unclear requirements. At the same time, half of the beneficiaries (50 percent) met the monitoring and reporting requirements for the project on time, with the other half delaying a part of these activities.

Performance of IT systems

486. **(KII) For RO-HU MA and RO-BG MA, the data collection, validation, and aggregation processes are conducted through the eMS system**. In this IT system one can also find financial statements, statistical reports, etc., the results obtained because of the data aggregation that took place through eMS. The eMS can generate reports in Excel and PDF with relevant information, aggregated financial statements at project or program level, as well as tables and annexes in the formats required by EU regulations.

487. **(DR) Although the eMS is the main information system, email is still used by the MA to request data reconciliation from JS.** (BS) Also, 12 percent of beneficiaries used email instead of eMS to transfer indicator data.

488. **(KII) For the next programming period, the eMS should have the functionality to generate early warnings**. In the current configuration, if no reports are sent by the beneficiary, the system does not warn the MA/project officer. Instead, notifications are received only to signal that beneficiaries sent their reports, and when they are validated.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

489. **(KII) Actors are directly involved in understanding M&E and know how to properly undertake their duties.** Also, the MAs and JSs have previous experience with non-reimbursable European funding, including PHARE pre-accession funds that were implemented according to the same organizational formula. However, in practice, there are situations in which the limits of the attributions of the MA and JS staff tend to overlap in the monitoring process, especially regarding what concerns the permanent support that both structures provide to the beneficiaries.

490. **(KII) Regarding project monitoring, the activity is carried out by a team of 15 people at the level of the Project Monitoring Service.** Employees benefit from training provided by the EU. Meanwhile, they supply a series of trainings to beneficiaries, which were transferred online during the COVID-19 crisis. In the previous period the trainings were organized in the territory, but this can no longer be done, especially in neighboring states.

491. **(KII) Regarding training activities, RO-HU JS considers that prior to the existence of a mechanism to coordinate trainings, there should be harmonized working procedures for all POs, because there are different ways of working in different European-funded programs.** Apart from the legal norms, there are program norms that differ from case to case. A beneficiary that applies to three programs with three different sets of rules does not understand, in one instance, why the rules are different, and in another instance, ends up mixing up the different rules. Steps are being made to standardize procedures, considering that the laws and European regulations are common for all programs.

492. **(KII) At the level of RO-HU MA, challenges in fulfilling M&E responsibilities were related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed restrictions, halted project implementation, and radically shifted authorities' priorities.** At the level of RO-BG MA, the main challenges were regarding data collection, specifically, whether beneficiaries had entered correct, complete, and timely data, so that program structures can process the data without requesting clarifications.

493. **(KII) At the RO-HU JS level, data collection is one of the tasks assigned to those who work in project and program monitoring.** Data collection is done through interviews and onsite visits. A good source of data are the reports that monitor project progress. In the case of accounting documents, to justify expenses, there is the first-level control staff who record data in the eMS, and that data can be used.

494. **(KII) Program performance is not correlated with the clauses in staff working contracts**. Considering the fact that MA staff consists of civil servants, the annual evaluation complies with the provisions of the Administrative Code and is generally related to compliance and timeliness of tasks. Moreover, at the level of RO-HU and RO-BG technical assistance PA, there are no indicators established.

Effectiveness of the Monitoring System

495. **(DR) AIR/FIR and a summary for citizens are made available to the public, according to EU regulation**. The JS drafts a summary for citizens regarding the content of the AIR/FIR. After the MA receives a favorable opinion for the report from the EC, reports are made available to the public, together with the summary published on the program website, in compliance with the procedure for publishing information.

496. **(DR) The target groups addressed through the communication activities of RO-HU and RO-BG are the program applicants and beneficiaries**, and the monitoring indicator for the communication activity is "the number of information and promotion events of the program (the output indicator related to the TA PA)."

Success factors and good practices in monitoring

Presentation of identified good practices

497. **(KII) At RO-BG and RO-HU program level, sufficient data is currently being collected to allow the M&E system to play a key role in decision making.** The entire data collection process takes place through electronic monitoring systems.

Key success factors for ESIF monitoring

498. **(KII) The eMS is used in all stages of program implementation by program structures and beneficiaries.** Also, staff involved in M&E have extensive experience with non-reimbursable European funding, including PHARE pre-accession funds. Program structures implemented measures to combat the effects of COVID-19 pandemic, including staff working from home, using electronic signature tools, or providing online trainings for beneficiaries.

Program Evaluation System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Assessment of the evaluation system's institutional and procedural framework

Evaluation Strategy and Planning Process

499. **(DR) The ESIF evaluation system has one evaluation plan at the Partnership Agreement level and an evaluation plan for each ESIF co-financed program**. While the evaluation plan for the PA includes topics related to macro level effects and horizontal cross-cutting issues, the plans for each program focus on program-related issues and on projects' contribution to the program's specific objectives.

500. **(DR) The evaluation plans were developed in the 2014–2020 period for the CBC programs funded by the ERDF RO-BG and RO-HU**. The plan aims to evaluate program implementation by gathering data concerning the program's progress in achieving its objectives, as well as financial data and information relating to indicators and milestones, and reporting to the MC and the EC. The plan was drafted by the MA and the ETC Evaluation Unit and approved by the MC.

501. **(DR) The evaluation plans, approved by the MC, provide for three evaluation exercises:**

- Evaluation of the communication strategy: to support potential project beneficiaries.
- Implementation evaluation: to determine the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the program, assess the need to fine-tune and make recommendations to design the future program; and assess the program's physical and financial progress and the lessons learned.
- Impact evaluation (toward the end of the implementation period): how funds contributed toward achieving the specific objective of each programs' IPs.

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

502. **(DR) The GDETCP within MDPWA has the following relevant structures for evaluation activities (Figure 4 below):**

- MA services for RO-HU and RO-BG
- The Evaluation Unit coordinates the evaluation activities of the ERDF cooperation programs managed within the directorate. Main functions include:
    - drafting the evaluation plan, based on needs identified by the MA
    - drafting the ToRs, for contracting evaluation to external evaluators
    - managing procurements and contracts for evaluation activities

503. **(DR) The PEO within MEFI plays a coordinating role regarding** evaluations carried out for programs within the Romanian Partnership Agreement. The CEU is a member of the Evaluation Steering Committee.

504. **(DR) The MC analyzes and approves the evaluation plan, as well as any subsequent** modifications to it. The MC examines and approves the MA's response to the recommendations

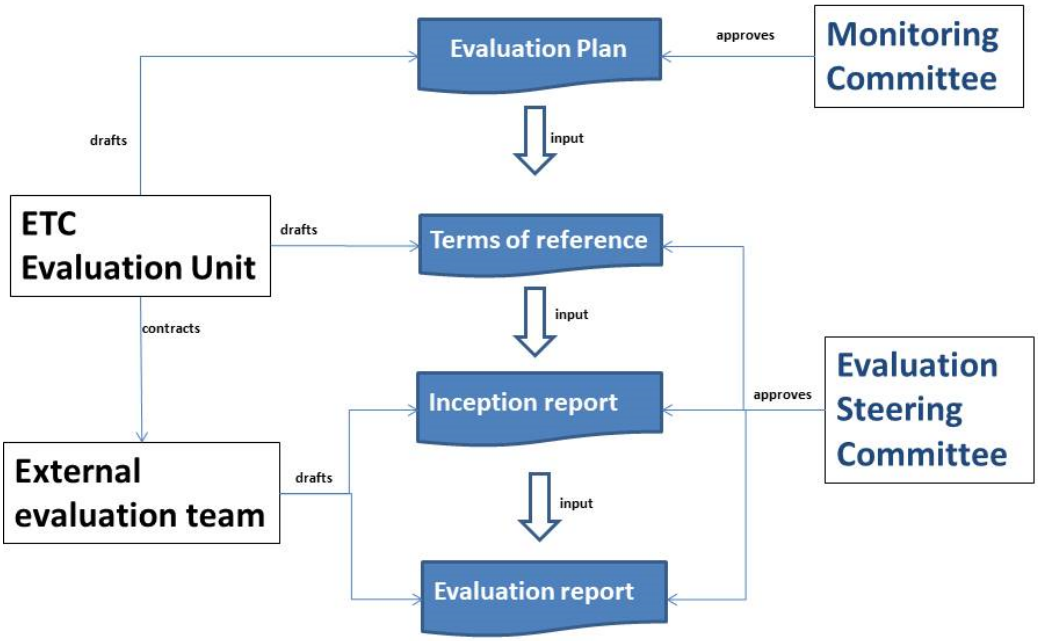
received from the evaluators and it can make comments to the MA regarding the evaluation of the program and monitor the actions taken as a result of its observations.

505. **(DR) The Evaluation Steering Committee (ESC) is set up at the level of each program and** oversees implementation of the plan and the corresponding evaluations. The ESC meets for each evaluation exercise. The core membership of the ESC remains the same for the duration of its existence, and includes: head of the MA, a NA representative, ETC Evaluation Unit staff, a representative of the EC, and a representative of the PEO from MEFI**.**

The Steering Committee's main functions include approving the following:

- ToRs for each evaluation exercise of the program (including the evaluation criteria)
- Inception Report, including methodology for conducting the internal evaluation, as well as a timetable for activities
- draft evaluation report
- final evaluation report

Figure 4. Program evaluation system



506. **(DR) All evaluations are examined by the MC and sent to the EC, according to Art. 56 of the CPR.** (KII) With regards to internal evaluations, both the limited staff and the multinational nature of the programs make a CBC program very difficult to evaluate with internal resources.

Strengths and weaknesses in the evaluation system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

507. **(DR) The aim of the OP for evaluating RO-HU and RO-BG is to provide guidelines for the MA on the steps for program evaluation, as well as a transparent framework for this process.** As a general rule, evaluations under the RO-HU and RO-BG programs will be carried out by external experts, on request, in accordance with the eligible costs of the program. The evaluation procedure includes provisions to ensure the functional independence of evaluators from the authorities responsible for program implementation, as requested by CPR Art. 54(3). Evaluation plans respect the requirements of the guidance document on evaluation plans issued by the EC regarding the delivery of an Inception Report in advance of the evaluation exercise.

Efficiency of Evaluation Processes

508. **(DR) Regarding the implementation of the evaluation plans for RO-HU and RO-BG, two evaluation exercises have been completed for each program**; one regarding the communication strategy and one for implementation.

509. **(KII) At the time of planning, the expected evolution of the programs was taken into account to establish the evaluations and their timeline**, so that the evaluation is not carried out too late, and changes can be made in case non-functional /inefficient / ineffective issues are found. However, there have been delays in implementing evaluation plans due to the prolonged preparation process and conduct of public procurement. For example:

- For the RO-BG evaluation, the procurement procedure was selected by the National Agency for Public Procurement for preliminary control, which significantly extended the launch period and delayed contracting.

- For RO-HU, the process of editing the specifications and revising evaluation reports was quite lengthy, so as to include the opinions of all involved actors.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

510. **(DR) The evaluation function for Interreg programs is ensured by the Evaluation Unit that is functionally independent from MA.** The Evaluation Unit within the MDPWA has two full-time expert staff (civil servants) who carry out other horizontal tasks as well, having an overview of the programming and implementation of Interreg programs in Romania. The evaluation plans are drawn up by the MAs and the ETC Evaluation Unit, to preserve the neutrality of approach as well as to observe the technical aspects of program evaluation. The Evaluation Unit established provided the technical support and knowledge and has the main input when drafting the evaluation plan.

511. **(DR) According to the evaluation plan, the representatives of the MA, NA, JS, Info Points, and the ETC Evaluation Unit attend training seminars** on program evaluation topics. Such training activities may refer to:

- planning and managing evaluations, making quality control of evaluation reports; and
- qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods and methods for impact assessment. The budget for these activities is ensured under the technical assistance budget.

Effectiveness of the Evaluation System

512. **(DR) The outcomes from the evaluation reports related to Interreg programs are used during the programming period.** For example, in the 2020 implementation evaluation of RO-HU it was recommended to change the program indicators and the Performance Framework, which was implemented in the fourth version of the program document approved by the MC.

Success factors and good practices in program evaluation

513. **(KII) The evaluation plans for RO-HU and RO-BG are planned in full compliance with the M&E guidelines published by the EU Commission**. The evaluation plans are also subject to the approval of the MC, to ensure consultation with key actors. The evaluation plans not only allow flexibility, but for RO-HU it was necessary to modify the program's action plan so it could better meet needs.

I. Interreg-IPA CBC Romania—Serbia Program (RORS)

Program Monitoring System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Description and Program Structures

514. **(LR) Performance orientation is a key priority for the EC during the 2014–2020 period.** The legislative package for the Cohesion Policy in the 2014–2020 programming period contains several provisions intended to increase focus on performance.

515. **(LR) According to procedures, RORS program monitoring is the managerial tool aimed at systematic analysis of risks related to implementation at the program level,** and allows appropriate plans to be drafted so as to limit their possible consequences.[98] As such, the monitoring function is set up within a multilevel framework, involving multiple stakeholders and a variety of mechanisms.

516. **(LR) As with all ETC programs and according to European and national rules, the main stakeholders involved in monitoring RORS-funded projects are established in both Romania and Serbia.** In Romania, the MDPWA acts as the MA for the program.

517. **(LR) The program responsibilities are established at five levels**: (i) beneficiaries; (ii) JS in Romania and Antenna office in Serbia; (iii) the MA in MDPWA and its correlative national authority in Serbia; (iv) the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC); and (v) the EC. Beneficiaries are mainly responsible for data collection, while within each institution (JS, MA, JMC) there are multiple units involved in data validation, aggregation, or reporting, each with clearly established roles.

518. **(LR) The RORS MA, together with specific structures in the GDETCP, is responsible for implementing the program's M&E activities**. The GDETCP is responsible for ensuring the program M&E functions are comprised of three main relevant structures: (i) The MA Directorate for ETC programs; (ii) the Project Monitoring Service, which coordinates project monitoring at national and regional levels for all programs; and (iii) expenditure statements and the eMS Office. Within the MA Directorate for ETC programs are two other relevant substructures: (i) the MA Service (Unit) for Romania-Serbia, which coordinates program-level monitoring, programming, and project appraisal and evaluation; and (ii) the Program Evaluation Unit for Territorial Cooperation Programs, which coordinates evaluations at the level of ETC programs, including the Romania-Serbia program.

519. **(LR) The responsibilities of the JS are established in the Framework Agreement (Delegation Agreement) signed with the MDPWA acting as MA.** There is only one JS in Timisoara and one antenna office in Serbia.

520. **(LR) The JMC is a partnership structure, without legal personality, with a decision-making role in the program life cycle.** The composition of the JMC is established in the program according to the principles of partnership and representation. There are 43 members (out of which 34 are voting members) in the JMC, with 17 representatives with voting rights from each country. Almost all county councils relevant for the eligible area are represented, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Transport (major stakeholders in both Romania and Serbia).

Specific Monitoring Tools

521. **(LR) Project monitoring is primarily based on document analysis and verification, risk analysis, special (ad hoc) onsite visits, regular onsite visits, ex post monitoring, and verification of data uploaded into eMS**. Some monitoring activities are pursued following the input of financial verification supervisors. Each activity is carefully documented in the following types of reports: beneficiaries' quarterly progress reports, beneficiaries' final report, beneficiaries' yearly sustainability

[98] Based on RORS Monitoring procedure, Section 1.1., p. 11.

reports (conducted yearly along the sustainability period), onsite visit reports, annual environmental impact reports (if applicable), quarterly JS monitoring reports, global (monthly) JS monitoring reports, risk analysis for each project (updated regularly according to the procedure) and checklists for verifying technical reports submitted by beneficiaries, etc. Apart from the documents focused on verification, each person responsible for the project needs to prepare other types of documents, such as lists/samples of participants.

522. **(LR) As observed following the desk review, the monitoring process is streamlined.** (KII) The MA project monitoring procedure was revised in 2019 and is based on extensive risk analysis and correlative mitigation plans that are continually updated and approved by the MA. This appears to be a good practice, as it informs decision-making processes, analyzing all scenarios and allowing the rapid uptake of solutions to specific problems. Due to the risk analysis, the system is performing better, and the necessary decisions are taken in a timely manner to avoid bottlenecks and support performance.

523. **(KII) The** entire **data collection process takes place through the eMS, with no parallel records.** It is expected that in the future programming period, both the electronic system and the indicators will be improved based on the experience of the current period, so that data collection, aggregation, and reporting at Interreg programs will be more effective and focused on the beneficiaries' experience.

524. **(LR) Beneficiaries' data is aggregated by the eMS at the JS/MA level, with program monitoring linked primarily to the reporting function.** According to existing procedures,[99] there are five types of program monitoring reports to be developed: (i) financial reports, as per Art. 112 of the CPR; (ii) internal financial reports; (iii) AIRs/FIRs; (iv) reports to the MC, as per Art. 125 (1) of the CPR; and (v) ad hoc reports.

525. **(LR) The EC aggregates the monitoring data and observes implementation across all programs, at the level of the CBC**. The MA transmits data from program implementation via the SFC and through the implementation reports (especially AIRs). EC also has a representative in the MC.

526. **(KII) Data is also transmitted to the EC via the eMS system that is connected to the https://keep.eu/ /EU data portal/system**. Therefore, information on beneficiaries and progress on indicators is automatically updated regularly on the EC website.

Assessment of the monitoring system's institutional and procedural framework

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

527. **(LR) The program's institutional ecosystem is well designed to meet regulations and reflects Romania's legislative and institutional culture.** It is the result of more than 15 years' experience in managing CBC funds in Romania. Also, institutions that are members of the JMC play an active role in observing the program's progress, issuing recommendations, and proposing actions. However, JMC meetings appear to be formal events, as a large number of members (43) does not allow for active discussions. Moreover, there is little transparency regarding discussions within the JMC meetings, as the meeting minutes are not publicly available (compared with other OPs, such as POCU).

528. **(LR) The procedural framework for carrying out monitoring activities at the program and project level for the GD, MA, and JS is quite comprehensive and in full compliance with EU regulations, with clearly established and delimited roles, according to those who were interviewed.** (KII) After several rounds of revisions and amendments, the procedures specify in detail the roles and responsibilities, activities, information flows, and deadlines/durations for certain activities. The M&E processes are clearly defined by stand-alone program and project monitoring procedures, as well as

[99] Program monitoring at the level of Interreg Programs (RO-HU, RO-BG, RORS) (edition 1, Revision 0, May 2019), p. 4 and MA Program Monitoring Procedure for Interreg-IPA CBC Romania–Serbia Program (edition 1, revision 0, 2015).

by program evaluation procedures. Procedures have annexes and templates and are perfectly aligned with the eMS working flow and modules. The project monitoring procedure at the MA level was substantially amended and simplified in 2019, contributing to a more streamlined project management at the level of all ETC programs.

529. **Even though the internal procedures are designed in full compliance with EU regulations, there is still room to streamline the procedural framework for better internal coherence, both at the level of the GD and the JS** (see Annex 5): (i) there are two program monitoring procedures in MDPWA; (ii) there are specific program evaluation procedures for each program, even though the number of evaluations conducted at the level of each program is small and the activity is carried out by the same unit: the Evaluation Unit (namely, the Program Evaluation Unit for Territorial Cooperation Programs), within the MA Directorate for ETC Programs (in the GDETCP). The Evaluation Unit is separated from the MA and collaborates with the RORS MA when drafting and implementing the evaluation plan; and (iii) as in the case of the POCU MA, the GD could simplify the procedural framework by designing one procedure per function applicable both at the level of the GD/MA and JS in Romania.

Design of Indicators

530. **(LR) The Performance Framework is monitored based on the program monitoring procedure at the Interreg program level.**[100] According to this procedure, the indicators system is comprised of two sets of indicators:

- One set is defined at the program and PA level and will support program M&E activities, and is comprised of results indicators and output indicators; and
- The second set is established at project level and will support project monitoring and evaluation activities.

531. **The program results indicators necessitate supplementary collection efforts (surveys, etc).** Program indicators are monitored annually, and the registered progress is captured in the AIR. Reporting on indicators' progress only takes finalized projects into consideration.

532. **(LR) The main structures responsible for monitoring these indicators are:**

- JMC—is regularly consulted regarding the indicators system throughout the programming period (i) to check if the indicator system was correctly established; and (ii) if the information is sufficient for its activity.
- MA—monitors program indicators based on eMS.
- JS—monitors project indicators based on eMS.

533. **(KII) The achievement of indicator targets is constantly monitored during implementation, so that through projects' targets, program-level targets can be achieved.** Due to this fact, decisions on project calls or reallocations between PAs are taken in a timely manner, leading to best possible performance until the end of program implementation.

534. **(LR) The Performance Framework was revised twice during implementation.** Whereas the first version of the program (2015) approved by the EC did not showcase a detailed Performance Framework *per se*, it contained output and results indicators with targets and baseline as required by the regulation. Since its approval, the program has undergone two revisions, tackling both the Performance Framework and amending financial indicators. In the 2017 program revision, the financial indicators were revised, considering that the wrong methodology was used to set their values. The 2018 revision of the program was also due to the financial data, but for different reasons:

[100] Program monitoring at the level of Interreg programs procedure (RO-HU, RO-BG, RORS) (edition 1, Revision 0, May 2019).

(i) “to reflect the 2018 progress in implementation at program level, after contracting the projects selected after the first call for proposals;” (ii) to revise the financial allocations because of “the rate of indicators’ achievement, which was low in some priority axes that had already consumed their budget prior to the second call for proposals, with the strategic projects.”

535. **(LR) The quality of the Performance Framework was assessed through the 2019 Implementation Evaluation Report based on key principles of the Better Regulation Toolbox (RACER criteria: relevant, accepted, credible, easy to monitor, robust).** Main findings of the report are: (i) no problems are registered regarding achievement of output indicators; (ii) the design of applications was improved to allow better connection between project and program indicators, which improved project quality; (iii) some results indicators can be improved in terms of relevance and robustness, while others—SO 3.1 RI3-2, Vehicles crossing the border; SO 3.2 RI3-3, Population accessing sustainable and efficient public utilities networks; SO 4.1 RI4-1, Number of tourist arrivals in the eligible area; and SO 4.1 RI4-2, Nights spent by tourists in the eligible area—are not fully adequate, as what they measure is not directly attributed to the changes produced by the project; and (iv) the modification of the specific results indicators is not appropriate at this stage in implementation and can be more deeply considered in the next period.

536. **(IA) As a general recommendation following indicator analysis, in the next programming period, the MA should consider providing metadata for indicators, to avoid potential misunderstandings.** Furthermore, disaggregation may be useful for population-related indicators, so as to better capture the program’s effects on different target groups and territories and inform decisions with respect to future interventions. Also, indicators that generate high costs/administrative burden should be avoided, or a simplified methodology can be used to collect these.

Design of IT systems

537. **(LR) As per Art. 125 (2) (d) and (e) of the CPR, which requires the MA to establish a system to record (i.e., collect and enter) and store data on each operation in a digital form, the eMS is used for the Interreg-IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Program.** The eMS was set up by the EC through INTERACT program at the level of all CBC programs that want to join, in order to collect information on project and program progress. Additionally, the eMS provides program beneficiaries with a system to submit information in electronic form. Beneficiaries, the MA, the AA, and program bodies exchange information via an electronic data exchange system. The eMS is a monitoring system with communication portal to support submission, assessment, approval, contracting, implementation, monitoring, and payment for projects in the context of Interreg-IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Program. The system supports collection of all information on submitted projects, implementation of the approved projects, their achievements, modifications and closure. Additionally, aggregated data on the progress of projects and a program are recorded in the system. All program bodies can communicate with beneficiaries via the system and re-use the data already collected. The data in eMS is structured in several layers and follows a strict workflow. Some steps are mandatory; others can be switched on and off depending on the configuration.

Strengths and weaknesses in the monitoring system’s performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

538. **(LR) The GD for ETC programs and the RORS MA has taken all necessary measures to ensure compliance with legislative requirements.** All EC provisions meant to ensure results orientation were observed during the elaboration and amendments to the program. (KII, IS) The operational procedures, both at the level of GD and MA (which are developed and approved by the general director) and at the level of the JS (drafted by the JS and approved by the MA) are perceived as being very useful for the monitoring process, as well as for all other functions, and are the backbone of all activities performed in the GD, the MA, and the JS. Institutional stakeholders working on program

management have reported satisfactory levels of clarity, utility, and ease of use for the program and project monitoring procedures.

539. **(KII) There is a general agreement among stakeholders that the monitoring system is compliant with the relevant legislation, both in terms of design and in practice**. Evidence from the document review and interviews confirms that the monitoring system meets at least the minimum requirements of the regulations.

540. **(KII, IS) Overall, the program's monitoring function is fully compliant with the legislation and is performing well, allowing projects to be tracked in detail and for bottlenecks to be identified.** Project progress reports, submitted every three months or more often, together with close collaboration with beneficiaries (by phone and/or email and also in meetings), are the main means of identifying bottlenecks. While there are no "early warning" mechanisms instituted, the current practices allow for a thorough understanding of the program's challenges. Problems are reported by project monitors to superiors and then to the MA structures and the MA management, and this is regulated by beneficiaries.

541. **(KII, IS) Data quality is considered satisfactory**. This is ensured by the eMS and beneficiaries procedures, as the data that is recorded and transmitted by eMS must comply with certain requirements and formats according to project submission guides and reporting/implementation manuals. If they do not comply, the responsible program structures return the data for correction or request clarifications/additions from applicants/beneficiaries for processing. The interviewers find that for project monitoring, data is efficiently collected and provides a sufficient qualitative and quantitative picture. If there are non-conformities during data validation, they are remedied in a timely manner by the project officers or beneficiaries. The only problem is related to the inability to correct data that recipients initially entered incorrectly when they submitted the application. Also, the eMS system does not allow cross-checks between projects belonging to the same beneficiary. The format in which the data must be entered is preset by the application.

542. **(KII) To ensure the quality of data uploaded to the system and to mitigate possible reporting bottlenecks, several measures have been undertaken by the responsible structures:**

- At the MA RORS level: drafting project submission guides and eMS reporting manuals according to the fields in the system, providing training sessions regarding the use of the eMS system to applicants/beneficiaries/users within the program structures, direct contact of the beneficiary by JS, and posting notifications on the system login page and the program page.
- At the level of the Project Monitoring Service: trainings with beneficiaries, representatives of MA, STC (emphasis being placed on providing these trainings at the level of all beneficiaries); and update the application with the developer.
- At the eMS level: data entry support activities, training sessions with beneficiaries, before application, as well as after the launch of each call for projects (organized with JS support, how to report in the system, program needs, how to record data, type of information etc.), manuals and notifications have been developed; the beneficiary is supported with everything at hand. There is a dedicated email address where beneficiaries can post their questions.

543. **(KII) The main challenge is to ensure that applicants/beneficiaries introduce data into eMS that is accurate, complete, and timely, so that program structures can process them without requiring clarification**. The process can be improved in two ways: (i) by updating the system with new data validations entered in certain fields, featuring information/warning messages, etc.; and (ii) continuing to train beneficiaries and users of the program structures.

Efficiency of Monitoring Processes

544. **(KII IS) Of utmost importance in the decision-making process are the reports that estimate the achievement of physical and financial indicators,** based on contracted/selected projects by PAs, as well as the reports based on the degree of execution and fulfillment of indicators for completed/implemented projects, which are easily compiled based on the data provided by the eMS.

545. **(KII) Data on indicators and performance inform some strategic decisions as well, and has program monitoring applications for AIR purposes;** for instance, when deciding to launch the targeted call on certain indicators that remained untouched; or when deciding to contract projects on the reserve list, so that a maximum absorption rate can be reached.

546. **(KII) Information extracted from the eMS covers almost all reporting needs for the program structures,** especially because the financial data aggregated by the system can be exported in Excel format, as well as because of the fact that some tables generated by eMS include all data from the time of introduction by the applicant/beneficiary and until the time of certification, marking all processes and data validations from the workflows. The format for data collection allows its efficient processing and interpretation, because the system allows the generation of reports, especially financial, both at project and program level, which can be easily exported to Excel. For example, the financial data of a project is visible in tabular format and can be easily exported to Excel.

547. **(KII, IS) Although there is no automated early warning system, the reports provide useful** information on the performance of the OP implementation, particularly following the disengagement target, as well as the project/program indicators. If a target is not met, proposed measures to address the identified challenge are defined and pursued by the program management unit.

548. **(KII) The project monitoring system at the MA level is designed in a unitary way.** Progress reports cover a predefined period. Each program has its own templates and beneficiaries submit periodic reports.

549. **(KII) The procedure for monitoring projects at the MA level has been modified.** There is only one procedure applicable to all programs, and the efforts are aimed at continuous adaptation to challenges: the correlation of technical progress with financial progress, to be achieved in real time, to provide data required for program monitoring. The most useful reports in the project monitoring decisions are those that reflect the risk analysis. The new monitoring system that was implemented last year is based on risk analysis. This is generated at beginning of the project, followed by the first plan of measures. The risk analysis is continuously updated. The action plan is approved by the head of the MA for each project.

550. **(IS) Program management staff finds beneficiaries have satisfactory capacity to prepare the reports, and understand their reporting duties.** At the same time, they report it would be useful to improve clarity regarding responsibilities and roles in data collection, as well as provide clearer guidance and data collection tools and improve the data validation mechanism.

551. **(BS) Beneficiaries find reporting requirements straightforward, as more than 72 percent of them have never reported the same information again.** Though never reporting the same information on different occasions, some beneficiaries point to the duplication of reporting in the partner report and the consolidated report/progress report. The indicators are sufficient to adequately evaluate progress, according to 100 percent of respondents. In 2019, 70 percent of beneficiaries reported less than 5 indicators, while 30 percent reported between 5–10. Indicators are collected ongoing along project activities by more than 80 percent of respondents, while 36 percent recall collecting these indicators quarterly. The main data sources for indicators were: project activities (100 percent), participants' data fiches (72 percent), and institutional databases (18 percent), along with an audio-visual rating for communication activities. The majority of beneficiaries used eMS for to transfer indicator data. Regarding the utility of the existing systems for collecting and

transmitting data, eMS is considered extremely useful, with a certain degree of automation and ease of use by more than 70 percent of beneficiaries, even though the administrative burden produced by the system is relatively high according to other respondents. Also, the risk of error appears to be relatively high, while sometimes the data is not automatically saved. Overall, more than 60 percent of respondents never had any issue with eMS when reporting indicator data, and some found it difficult to select data for a specific indicator.

552. **(BS) Project performance is good**, **as the expected target for indicators is close to initial expectations.** No beneficiary reported changing the initial set of targets. The MA communicates problems to beneficiaries, and the measure most frequently adopted is to adjust the project timeline. Both the progress reports and the indicators are found to be helpful in improving and reflecting project progress (90 percent). Overall, the difficulty of meeting M&E reporting requirements was average to easy (63 percent to 36 percent). The main M&E difficulty was processing large amounts of data (55 percent), and 45 percent reported no difficulties whatsoever. The main solution for overcoming the reporting problem was to mobilize the whole project team.

553. **(BS IS) Beneficiaries find it extremely useful to communicate directly with the monitoring consultant from the JS, by phone or mail,** and appreciate the trainings provided by other entities, the regional structure, and the MAs. All beneficiaries reported attending trainings. The topics that interest the most in future trainings are: financial reporting, rural development, risk management, public procurement, quality insurance, and eMS training.

554. **(KII) The MA and JS provided a series of trainings to beneficiaries on project monitoring and eMS**, **but not only, to get closer to them.** The trainings were moved online during the COVID-19 crisis, but the efficiency of these has yet to be assessed. In the previous period, trainings were organized in the territory, but this can no longer be done because of the pandemic, especially in neighboring states.

555. **(BS) Administrative burden is relatively low, especially when uploading data to the system and preparing reports**. Data collection and the calculation of indicators are found relatively burdensome by 60 percent of beneficiaries. No additional human resources or costs were needed.

556. **(BS) A significant number of beneficiaries (50 percent) consider that the monitoring and reporting templates should be the same for all programs.** Some additional suggestions beneficiaries made for improving monitoring activities in the next programming period include: (i) more simplification; (ii) fewer documents to upload into the system; and (iii) making sample forms available online to show examples of how exactly the requested documents should look.

Performance of IT systems

557. **(KII) The eMS is a strategically important element in evidence-based decision making at the program management level.** eMS is developed by the Interact Program and is made available to cooperation programs. It is perceived as a major improvement over the past programming period, given that it is currently used for all steps related to program management, and by all structures involved in management, as well as by beneficiaries throughout the entire process—from the submission of project proposals to project completion. The general feedback of the GD and MA staff, as well as beneficiaries, is that eMS is tailored enough for the program and greatly supports the GD/MA in identifying specific needs and problems, so that management can undertake correlative measures in a timely manner. The eMS unit has been conducting extensive training activities at both the staff and beneficiary levels, so everyone knows how to use the eMS system, including directors. Also, according to their training planning, whenever a new cohort of beneficiaries enters program implementation, eMS and the project monitoring team deliver training to them.

558. **(KII, IS)** The **eMS assists all actors involved, beneficiaries and program structures alike.** It supports all activities and offers updates by aggregating, comparing, and corroborating data from various sources. All users within the institution have accounts in the system. Directors receive system

notifications; for example, if an expense has been certified. The centralized situations could be easily accessed by the directors, who can generate additional reports, depending on the situation. The staff in all program structures were well-trained on using the eMS, which guarantees that competencies are aligned and that staff are able to coordinate internally to access the same data and M&E reports. However, participants underlined one drawback of eMS: "The problem is that the system is quite rigid. It cannot be easily changed, given that a programmer who knows the system very well and who obviously costs money should be hired for this. There is also the risk of errors affecting the system as a whole."

559. **(KII, IS) While the eMS system fully supports the program and project implementation duties, there are some limitations that are expected to be overcome by the new JEMS IT system used for the next period**: (i) the current system is not adapted to evolving needs or cannot be updated/modified quickly enough in relation to changes in the work environment (e.g., procedures/guides cannot be changed given the limitations of workflows in existing IT systems); (ii) the system is quite rigid; (iii) the systems have not implemented SMART technologies to warn users about certain work processes (approximating reporting deadlines, exceeding the reporting period, announcing delayed projects/with comparative reporting problems, financial vs. technical evolution)—if no reports are sent by the beneficiary, the system does not warn; (iv) the eMS interface could be easier for beneficiaries to use; (v) comparative reports are missing, such as technical vs. financial reports; in the future reports will aim to be generated automatically; and (vi) intercorrelation is not possible; an attempt was made to connect to the SFC of the EC, but the project was not successful (because the EC changed the system many times—there are different databases, different users, difficult to align, etc.).

560. **(KII) The head of the IT unit provided some suggestions for improvement.** These included: (i) an integrated system should be designed at the national level, so that IT systems are interconnected (integration between national IT systems should be done in collaboration with MEFI and STS); (ii) the MEFI should assume the role of national coordinator and allow communication between systems, at least in terms of automatic collection of reporting information; (iii) integration with national systems is not an end in itself at the European level, as they are more interested in integrating the systems at European goal. In the 2007–2013 period they were integrated with the national SMIS system, and then broke away from it. The system is currently difficult to integrate in MySMIS because they have different philosophies and different partners; and (iv) even though interoperability with national systems is one way to reduce internal bureaucracy, until now there have not been any discussions with the National Digitization Authority.

561. **(BS) Beneficiaries also provided some suggestions for improving the eMS system**: (i) all information should be automatically be translated into English from the beneficiary language; (ii) a user-friendlier interface is needed; along with (iii) better automation; (iv) more simplification; and (v) better storage for data/information already in the system.

562. **Even though the IT monitoring system allows for comprehensive progress tracking, there are separate functions/tools for observing financial and physical progress,** and it is often difficult to get a clear picture of implementation progress. An integrated dashboard that captures in real time financial, output, and results indicators would be a useful tool, cascaded from project to PA and program level.

563. **(KII) In the next programming period, the main changes envisaged include greater flexibility** of applications and simplified information requested from beneficiaries.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

At the administrative level

564. **(KII, IS) All interviewed management representatives and program management staff acknowledged that staff with M&E tasks properly understand and execute their responsibilities.** Notably, it is mentioned that most of the specialists involved in managing ETC programs are among the most experienced public servants/staff in Romania, having dealt with PHARE pre-accession funds. Basically, PHARE funds were managed and absorbed in an organizational formula that is very similar to the one used in the current exercise.

565. **(KII) In terms of resources necessary for quality data collection and reporting, it is appreciated that the management of ETC programs has all the necessary assets,** so that "sufficient data are being collected so that the M&E system can play a key role in decision making". The JS/JTS and MAs are equipped with all necessary human and material resources to ensure proper data collection and reporting, In line with the Head of Program Monitoring, "the workload is reasonable enough," and no extra hours are usually put in by staff.

566. **(KII, IS) All actors involved in this process participate in trainings that are relevant to their** attributions **and responsibilities**. The structures of the program benefit from continuous training strategies/plans, permanently adapted to the needs of each employee, considering the legislative and procedural changes, if necessary. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the staff attended online training sessions and meetings, facilitated by EU consultants from the EU. There is a constant need for training, and joint workshops/meetings with colleagues from other programs in Europe. However, program management staff suggest that additional training could help improve M&E activities.

567. **(KII, IS)** However**, as in the case of all CBC programs, there is no correlation between program performance and key performance indicators included in the job descriptions of the GD/MAs/JS/JTS staff.** Given that the staff of the MA is composed of civil servants, the performance indicators comply with the provisions of the Administrative Code and are generally related to the timely and compliant performance of tasks. It was tried for a while to add to the job descriptions additional indicators related to program performance, but, as it was emphasized, "they did not bring added value in practice."

568. **(KII) Staff fluctuation is a challenge for the MA project monitoring activity, whereas generally the activity is reasonable in terms of workload.** The activity is carried out by a team of 15 people at the level of the Project Monitoring Service, and overtime is only required in exceptional circumstances. Employees benefit from continuous training provided by the EU.

569. **(KII) More** generally**, on a training coordination mechanism, the interviewers find that the** most effective way to provide training for all actors is via online trainings, based on topics identified following a survey. However, it is apparently difficult to design a system for coordinating training at the national level, given the cross-border specificity of ETC programs.

At the beneficiary level

570. **(BS)** Beneficiaries' **costs associated with monitoring activities range from 50 to 200 lei/hour,** while more than 60 percent reported an average of fewer than 40 hours per month per person.

571. **(**LR, IS) Monitoring data and information is available and disseminated, both internally and on the program website, but limited to the provisions of the regulations and internal procedures. More dissemination efforts would be welcomed, especially for making the following information publicly available: Minutes of the JMC; any real time data in an editable format (Excel, others) or information regarding progress on indicators/absorption/ program performance (information can be updated in real time based on data directly extracted from the eMS); project beneficiary data in editable format

(Excel, others); description of the institutional architecture with the attributions of each structure involved (including Serbian counterparts); financing (subsidy) contract; relevant internal procedures of the GD MA and JS (for instance, the JS FLC procedure is publicly available); a GD organigram with roles and responsibilities; and any beneficiary guidance document.

Effectiveness of the Monitoring System

572. **(KII) Results orientation is a key factor at the European policy level in the current programming period, and M&E carried out at the program level closely follows this goal.** The interviews highlighted that at the level of all the CBC programs, achieving the targets of the indicators is constantly monitored during implementation.

573. **(KII) In the decision-making process, reports that estimate the achievement of physical and financial indicators are seen as very important, and are approached responsibly.** Relevant data are based on the contracted/selected projects, by PAs, as well as on those regarding the degree of execution and fulfillment of indicators for the completed/implemented projects, as stressed by interviewees: "In general, decisions about our programs are made with M&E figures in front, so that the necessary adjustments can be made in a timely manner not only to avoid the risk of disengagement, but also to ensure the results of ETC programs, such as launching dedicated calls aimed at meeting certain program-level indicators, using backup lists or outsourcing." (CBC programs management)

574. **(IS) Program** management **staff report that the role of M&E is particularly appreciated by the MA, IB, and MEFI, which promote and institutionalize M&E activities in their institutions.** (KII) In terms of the influence of the political actors and their involvement in the strategic management of programs, all interviewees made clear that there is no intrusion and they do not affect decision making.

575. **(KII) In cooperation programs, an M&E system is already in use, to ensure the program's best possible performance.** At the level of ETC programs, sufficient data is currently being collected so the M&E system can play a key role in decision making. The whole process of data collection takes place through electronic monitoring systems, and no parallel records are required (CBC programs management).

576. **(LR) As in other OPs, there is limited evidence of a formalized way to ensure active involvement of the ministries and other relevant structures in program implementation at the regional or local level.** Moreover, there is no evidence regarding whether participants actually transmit information to various meetings (including JMC) further in their institutions.

577. **(LR) Regarding the value of monitoring in communication activities, in theory, the system is built to allow for the participation and engagement of all relevant stakeholders, including the public, as per regulations.** The MA is obliged to publish a "citizens' summary" of each AIR, and the annual report itself on the program website. For the ROSB program, the citizens' summary is a user-friendly document that allows for quick understanding of program performance and activities. But there is no information published regarding monitoring and evaluation, apart from what is required by the regulations. However, even though there is a well-known interest from the public in the absorption level of the program, no information is publicly available on the program web page (except AIR), in a friendly and easy to access format. As mentioned above, the eMS system is connected to the keep.eu website, therefore data is published on the EC website.

578. **(KII) However, in the next programming period, a new monitoring system needs to be developed**. It should better respond to the needs of the future program, and be based on new technologies, intuitiveness, simplicity, flexibility, and harmonization at the European level with other cooperation programs. The monitoring system can also be improved to better facilitate online work.

Success factors and good practices in monitoring

Presentation of identified good practices

Electronic monitoring system (eMS)

579. **(KII) A good practice at the program level is that all data exchanges between program structures and beneficiaries are performed by eMS,** in line with EU regulations. All program structures use the system: MA, NA, JS, AA, and beneficiaries, including external evaluators. All aspects of program management are done through eMS. The eMS is designed to work for all OPs in a flexible way. There are system users' manuals for each OP, which are posted on the website. The workflow can be tracked in real time, from the moment the beneficiary sends the project to the moment the expenditure is certified.

580. **(KII) The eMS application ensures the entry, update, saving, validation, aggregation, and visualization of data and information on different levels of access, depending on the role and rights granted to user accounts.** The data entered, validated, and transmitted to the next level of processing in the workflow can no longer be modified or altered, thus ensuring the audit trail. The architecture of the eMS system is developed based on a workflow that includes the following main modules and functions: programming; project call management; registration of project applications; evaluation; recommendation for financing; financing decision; teaching projects and entering additional information; financing contracts; partner reporting; first level controllers; project reporting; JS verification; MA verification; payments; verification; reporting; program reporting; and administration.

581. **(KII) The eMS system can currently generate several types of reports, such as:** all kinds of reports in Excel and PDF, aggregated financial statements at project/program level in Excel format, as well as tables and annexes in the formats required by the applicable EU regulations; predefined reports generated automatically according to the requirements of the regulations (it does not generate AIRs, it has the data that AIRs need), they can be extracted in Excel and processed, depending on the needs. Beneficiaries can enter participants, target groups—details, number, description—and the information can be aggregated.

582. **(KII) eMS is interconnected with keep.eu at the European level**. Keep.eu imports from eMS data on the beneficiary, financing, results, project, and program, which are all public data, automatically interconnecting once every three months. As a result, data on program results are automatically visible on the EC website.

Key success factors for ESIF monitoring

583. **(KII) Performance orientation is embedded in the organization's culture.** Three components contributed to the development of an M&E culture at the level of all CBC programs: EU guidelines, electronic monitoring systems (used both at the program and project level), and a human component, meaning proactive staff who understand the benefits of such an approach.

584. **Informed by the analysis above, two key success factors in monitoring are:**

- Good IT systems, as the eMS system is focused on improving beneficiaries experience in relation to reporting and compliance, as well as providing timely evidence for decision-making processes; and
- Continuous training of beneficiaries and staff regarding eMS usage and monitoring and reporting duties, as well as other topics relevant for their activities.

Program Evaluation System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Assessment of the evaluation system's institutional and procedural framework

Evaluation Strategy and Planning Process

585. **(LR) The Interreg-IPA CBC evaluation plan was developed in line with the program evaluation** procedure for the MA for Interreg-IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Program and with IPA II Implementing Regulation[101] and the CPR provisions.

586. **(LR) The Interreg-IPA CBC evaluation plan includes two evaluations:** (i) the implementation evaluation (2019 deadline met), which focuses on evaluating physical and financial progress, the management and implementation system, and evaluating the communication strategy; and (ii) the impact evaluation (deadline 2021). Topics considered important to be explored (e.g., horizontal principles, sustainability, reasons for not meeting/exceeding the targets of the indicators) have also been included in the evaluation plans. evaluation plan for Interreg-IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Program contains an indicative budget, as follows: (i) the implementation evaluation, performed externally, is €60,000; and (ii) the impact evaluation, performed externally, is €120,000. Therefore, the total estimated budget for carrying out the two interim program evaluations is €180,000.

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

587. **(LR) The evaluation of the program is the responsibility of the program Evaluation Unit in the MA Directorate for ETC Programs/GDETCP/MDPWA**. It is performed according to the Interreg-IPA CBC evaluation plan, also developed by the same structure, based on the contribution of the MA.

Strengths and weaknesses in the evaluation system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

588. **(LR) The evaluations envisaged by the evaluation plan for the IPA programs are planned in full compliance with EU regulations and the M&E guidelines published by the EC.** All evaluation criteria set out in the EC guidelines were covered by the program evaluations. All actors involved in the evaluation process fulfill their roles in compliance with national and EU regulations.

Efficiency of Evaluation Processes

589. **(KII) Whereas the program Evaluation Unit is the champion of the evaluation activity, the management of the PO RORS was involved in decision-making regarding the evaluations that were included in the evaluation plan.** The evaluation plans are also subject to the approval of the JMC, so that consultation with key actors is ensured. (LR) The evaluation plans allow for flexibility and responsiveness, and the RPRS evaluation plan was modified so it could better meet needs. Other stakeholders know little about evaluation findings; for instance, the head of the Project Monitoring Service is not fully aware of the evaluations that are being conducted.

590. **(KII) The conduct of evaluations is currently conditioned by public procurement procedures, which in some cases do not occur exactly when they were originally scheduled and would have been most impactful**. It is a general consensus within the GD ETC that it takes too long (often more than a year) from the moment the need for an evaluation is identified until the task is completed, including findings and recommendations. In order to get quick answers to acute problems in a program's implementation, which would be of interest to the management staff, more flexibility would be needed. A more flexible system with ad hoc analysis and quick response is indeed very useful in the

[101] Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) no 447/2014 of May 2, 2014 on the specific rules for implementing Regulation (EU) no 231/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession assistance (IPA II)—Art. 41—Evaluation and Art. 42—Reporting, information and communication.

decision-making process. This could be achieved by implementing a framework contract at the GD level that could allow for ad hoc evaluations to be organized whenever the need emerges.

591. **(IS) Program management staff consider the MA to be the most efficient location for Evaluation Units, as opposed to being centralized at ministerial level or delegated to JTS.**

592. **(KII) In practice, evaluations have become less responsive to new developments and identified needs,** as there have been delays in implementing evaluation plans due to the prolonged process of preparation and conduct of public procurement. For example, at the first launch of the procurement of the implementation evaluation procedure for RORS, no bids were submitted, so the procedure had to be relaunched.

593. **(KII) The management of the evaluation process is negatively influenced by the overall evaluation market.** The process suffers because the evaluation market in Romania is low, not very extensive, and evaluators have trouble understanding specific aspects of cooperation programs, which "may require quite a lot of time and additional explanations from the program staff." Therefore, program evaluation appears to be perceived as "time consuming and without much added value."

594. **(LR) Regarding the interfaces between M&E systems, the monitoring indicators are useful, but not sufficient for evaluation.** Evaluations usually need additional data from other databases or sources, but unfortunately these are not connected with eMS or other monitoring tools at program level. Without a way of connecting the eMS to other tools, evaluations might be rather limited. Evaluation reports are accessible, as all evaluation final reports are publicly available as per regulations.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

595. **(LR) Evaluation Unit staff carry out other horizontal evaluations as well, having an overview of the programming and implementation of Interreg programs in Romania.** The ETC Evaluation Unit consists of two full-time expert staff positions. With regards to evaluation-related tasks, the staff is partly working for Interreg-IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Program and partly for other Interreg programs. The staff is independent of the staff who fulfil the task of MA and the functions of the Certifying Authority. (KII) The staff is well positioned to manage external evaluations, but not so fit for managing internal evaluations. Regarding internal evaluations, the head of the Evaluation Unit pointed out that "both the limited staff and the multinational nature of the programs make the evaluation of a cross-border cooperation program very difficult to carry out with internal resources."

596. **(KII) The organizational culture at the GD level is not very supportive of evaluation.** As mentioned earlier, according to DG staff, "Evaluation is sometimes perceived as a mandatory thing to do, according to the regulations, and not as a tool of real use in the decision-making process. This is not due to a lack of interest, but due to the prioritization of other issues, such as programming and implementation, which are stringent, as opposed to evaluation, which allow for the postponement of the list of immediate priorities."

Effectiveness of the Evaluation System

597. **(KII, IS) Regarding the utility of evaluation results for program implementation, it has been found that recommendations are often only applicable in the next programming period,** or that preliminary recommendations no longer have a place in the final reports, because MA staff have already acted on issues arising from monitoring and solved most of the issues identified by the evaluators. Moreover, some recommendations were not realistic enough or applicable to the specifics of a program.

598. **(KII) The evaluation process is perceived as highly formal and bureaucratic; to make decision-makers more interested, the GD staff acknowledge that it should happen in real time, when**

decisions are made. It happens that the recommendations for a given cut-off data become irrelevant at the time they are made, as the program monitoring process is closely followed by the GD decision makers and rapid decisions are taken to overcome possible problems.

599. (**KII) Regarding the functionality of the program evaluation, the process appears to be time consuming, and with little added value,** especially due to the public procurement procedures that delay implementation of the evaluation's analysis.

600. **(KII) Evaluations appear to be most useful in the programming stage.** At the time of planning, the program's expected evolution was considered when establishing the evaluations and the planned timeline. (LR) Also, the ex ante evaluation appears to have been taken into consideration when finalizing the program.

601. **(IS) All RORS program evaluation reports were accompanied by recommendations, based on which action plans for their implementation were developed.** Program management staff found interim and ex post evaluations as the most useful, and recommendations were mostly implemented. At the same time, for staff working on project evaluations and planning, the most useful evaluations were the impact evaluations and intermediate ad hoc ones. Program management staff report that the results of the evaluations influenced the planning of the next period.

Success factors and good practices in program evaluation

602. **(LR, KII) Overall, the system ensures that evaluations are fully compliant with EU regulations.** Based on KII findings, the main challenges in evaluations are: (i) delays in providing timely evaluations due to burdensome public procurement procedures and lack of ETC evaluation expertise on the market; and (ii) evaluation is often perceived as something mandatory, because of the regulations, and not as a tool of real use in the decision-making process.

603. **Consequently, the MA can implement some measures to overcome these challenges**:

- Implement a framework contract procurement type procedure at the beginning of the next programming period to allow for timely delivery of planned evaluations and rapid uptake of ad hoc evaluations.
- Organize timely online dissemination events of the evaluation findings and recommendations implementation plan at the level of all staff with programming and implementation tasks. This will enable staff to become more familiar with evaluation topic and more aware of the evaluation's importance for the program success.
- Assign a representative of the Evaluation Unit to be a permanent representative with voting powers in the JMC. That will provide more visibility for evaluation at the decision-making level, while better connecting program implementation to program evaluation.

J. Interreg/ENI CBC Romania-Ukraine JOP, Romania-Moldova JOP, Black Sea Basin JOP

Program Monitoring System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Description and Program Structures

604. **(DR) The MDPWA ensures the coordination of operational and financial management of the non-reimbursable external funds related to the programmes of the "European Territorial Cooperation" objective.** The following structures in the GDETCP are responsible for implementing the programs' M&E activities:

1. MA Directorate for ETC programs
    - MA Service (Unit) for Cooperation Romania, Ukraine, Moldova
    - MA Service (Unit) Black Sea Basin
    - Program Evaluation Unit for Territorial Cooperation Programs
2. National Authorities Service (Unit) for European Programs
3. Project Monitoring Service (Unit)
4. Expenditure Statements and the eMS Office

605. **In addition to the centralized structures in the MDPWA, there are some other regional structures:**

- The National Authority in Romania (is the Ministry of Public Works, Development and Administration through the National Authorities Service (Unit) for European Programs) for the Romania Ukraine JOP, Romania Moldova JOP and the Black Sea Basin JOP, support provided for MA in the management of the program in accordance with the principle of sound financial management; supports the MA/JTS in conducting project monitoring and follow-up on their territory and other tasks.
- The National Authority in Ukraine (for the Romania Ukraine JOP), in Moldova (for the Romania Moldova JOP) and from each participating country (Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Turkey, Ukraine) for the Black Sea Basin JOP have the same tasks as the National Authority in Romania as established by the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 897/2014.
- Regional Branch Offices for Cross-Border Cooperation—Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) in Suceava (for the Romania Ukraine JOP) and Iasi (for the Romania Moldova JOP) and South East Regional Development Agency (SERDA)—Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) in Constanta (for the Black Sea Basin JOP) assists the MA, the JMC and the AA in carrying out their respective functions. Relevant M&E functions are: organize training sessions for beneficiaries, monitors the projects (from the technical and financial point of view), including by onsite visits to the projects; verifies and performs the ex post visits to the project.
- JTS branch offices in Ukraine and Moldova. In order to ensure a better communication with the Ukrainian and Moldovan stakeholders and to facilitate their access to information related to the program, but also for supporting the MA in the evaluation process and implementation follow-up, two JTS branch offices are established in Ukraine, both in the Northern and Southern part of the program area (Chernivtsi and Odessa Oblasts) for the Romania Ukraine JOP and in Moldova for the Romania Moldova JOP. The tasks of JTS branch office are limited to communication actions and supports MA and the National Authority from both countries. The JTS branch office's tasks are as follows (the relevant ones for M&E): Supports the JTS in the monitoring process of the projects, by organizing the site visits to the projects partners located in the Ukraine. Supports the JTS in performing ex post visits to the projects located in

Ukraine and Moldova in order to check the sustainability of the projects, including the fulfillment of the Art. 39 (3) of Commission Implementing Regulation no. 897/2014.

606. **(DR) The JMC follows the program's implementation and progress toward its priorities using the objectively verifiable indicators and related target values set in the OP.** EC and EU delegations in CBC partner countries are involved in the work of the JMC as an observer. It is invited to each meeting of the JMC at the same time as the representatives of the participating countries. For RO-UA the JMC is chaired by a representative of the MA. The secretariat of the JMC is ensured by a representative of the Joint Technical Secretariat based in Suceava. The JMC meets at least once per year. For the Joint Operational Program (JOP) Romania-Moldova 2014–2020, the JMC is chaired by a representative of the MA. The secretariat of the JMC is ensured by a representative of the Joint Technical Secretariat in Iasi. For the Joint OP Black Sea (BSB) 2014–2020, the JMC is chaired by a representative of the MA. The secretariat of the JMC is ensured by a representative of the Joint Technical Secretariat established within the South East Regional Development Agency (SERDA), in Constanta, Romania. The JMC meets at least once per year.

Specific Monitoring Tools

607. **(KII)** After **several rounds of upgrades and updates, all OPs related to ENI CBC programs are clear, well-structured, and mastered by MA and JTS staff**, contributing to good internal coordination and smooth program management. The current configuration has proven its functionality during the implementation of the two programming cycles, without any gaps or systemic problems, and all actors involved in M&E have the necessary capacity to fulfill their responsibilities.

608. **(BS) While eMS is successfully used by the BSB program for monitoring indicators, email is most** frequently **used to transfer data on indicators to RO-UA and RO-MD MAs and JTSs.** 75 percent of beneficiaries from RO-MD used email for this process. Also, 90 percent of RO-UA beneficiaries who responded stated that they use email for data transfer, with only a small part using the eMS.

Assessment of the monitoring system's institutional and procedural framework

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

609. **(KII) As with all procedural activities that take place at the ETC program level, there are, where appropriate,** working **procedures for monitoring programs, evaluating programs, and monitoring ETC projects**, which establish and clearly delimit roles and responsibilities. All respondents agree that procedures are clear and straightforward and that activities are conducted based on these procedures. The M&E procedural framework for ENI CBC programs is presented in Annex 5.

610. **(DR) The RO-UA and RO-MD programs use the eMS-ENI electronic system, which Romania developed separately for the two programs.** Correspondently, there is a JTS eMS-ENI system operational procedure that establishes how to manage the access rights in the system, the rules for entering/registering, updating, saving, validating data by users (project beneficiaries, MA, JTS and other users in accordance with the procedure). It describes the system architecture, including system modules/functions and users (management of the program, submitting of projects and their evaluation, contracting, monitoring, payments, reporting, etc.).

Design of Indicators

611. **(DR) A summary of the proposed indicators and methodological details for each proposed indicator** is reflected in Annex IV, Report on the indicators of the JOP Romania-Ukraine 2014–2020 and of the JOP Romania-Republic of Moldova 2014–2020 and Annex 3D for the BSB program. It provides an overview of the output and results indicators proposed for the corresponding priority, indicating the target and their baseline value (in accordance with the regulation, baseline values are set for results indicators only).

612. **(KII) In the case of the Black Sea Basin program, the entire data collection process takes place** through **the eMS, with no parallel records.** In the case of the eMS-ENI, the Implementation Module is not fully functional, therefore the monitoring process is done temporarily based on Excel files whose templates are aligned to those of the application form. It is expected that in the next period, both the electronic system and the indicators will be improved based on the experience of the current period, so that data collection, aggregation, and reporting will be more effective.

613. **(KII) Difficulties in reporting indicators are not so much related to the M&E system as to the definition of some indicators themselves, as observed following key informant interviews.** For example, the indicator "Number of visits to supported sites," although a common indicator at EU level, has no unitary definition, as it is very difficult to report for outdoor sites with unrestricted and unmonitored access. It is expected that this will be resolved in the next programming period.

614. **(IA) Following** analysis **of a sample of indicators, it was observed that the BSB program includes relevant and well-focused indicators on interventions. Some recommendations for the future programming period have emerged:**

- Categories of outputs (e.g., products, events, tourist or cultural sites) should not lose their flexibility, but can be more specific or more selective, mentioning exactly what kind of investments were made.
- Additional indicators related to the number of participants or beneficiaries they expect to reach can be included.
- The results indicators should be based on an even more robust and streamlined measurement methodology, with a clear population from which to extract a representative sample that can offer relevant answers about the results.

615. **(IA) in the case of the RO-MD program, the indicators selected for the analysis are positively** assessed**; they capture the effects of the program and have an adequate monitoring methodology.** As improvement points, it would be necessary for the outcome indicators to be better focused on the area of intervention (to ensure a clearer correspondence between activities, output indicators, and outcome indicators, aiming at less complex aspects than the employment rate) and to allow disaggregation.

616. **(BS) For RO-UA and RO-MD programs, more than 60 percent of respondents to the BS do not know how reported indicators are aggregated and used at the program level.**

Design of IT systems

617. **(DR) The eMS and eMS-ENI (which is not fully operational) systems used to manage the CBC programs are adapted to CBC specificities, and ensure compliance with all relevant EC regulations**. eMS, the system developed by the Interact Program and used by the Black Sea Basin program, is seen as a major improvement over the past programming period, given that it is currently used for all steps related to program management, and by all structures involved in management (MA, NA, Secretariats, AA), as well as beneficiaries at all stages, from the submission of project proposals to the completion of projects.

618. **(DR) The Program Electronic Monitoring System (eMS-ENI) used for the RO-UA and RO-MD programs currently serves as an operational management tool only for submitting the project applications and their evaluation,** and not for contracting, monitoring, and other phases. The system architecture includes the modules/functions—contracting, monitoring, payments, audit, reporting, etc. (as presented in the eMS-ENI procedure) but these are not functional. The existing eMS-ENI electronic system needs further developments to respond to all program requirements and to ensure adequate functionality of eMS-ENI so as to better address the needs of its users and program structures.

619. **(KII) The eMS system used by the Black Sea Basin program is regarded as adding value, facilitating the utilization of M&E data in evidence-based decision making.** The eMS assists all actors involved, beneficiaries and program structures alike. It supports all activities, and offers updated situations by aggregating, comparing, and corroborating data from various sources. All users within the institution have accounts in the system. Directors receive system notifications; for example, if an expense has been certified. The aggregated situations could be easily accessed by the directors, who can generate additional reports, depending on the situation. The staff in all structures of the program were well-trained to use the eMS, which guarantees not only that all competencies are aligned, but also that the staff is able to coordinate internally to gain access to the same data and to coherent M&E reports.

620. **(DR) The MAs are responsible for communicating data to the keep.eu database in order to** provide the EC with up-to-date information on the program's implementation. While the eMS system is interconnected with keep.eu database and data is communicated automatically, for JOP Romania-Moldova and Romania-Ukraine 2014–2020, the data are submitted manually by those in charge of updating the keep.EU platform. For JOP Black Sea Basin 2014–2020 has been set to automatic data sending at every two months from the eMS to keep.eu. The registration of data in KEEP has become a compulsory element of the reporting from the programs toward the EC in the 2014–2020 period. It also allows for data aggregation across countries and programs. KEEP (https://keep.eu/) is a database developed by the Interact Program, which is a repository of information about projects funded by Interreg, Interreg-IPA, and ENPI/ENI CBC, provided by the programs themselves.

Strengths and weaknesses in the monitoring system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

621. **(KII) The new monitoring system that was implemented in 2019 is based on an extensive risk** analysis**, followed by hands-on mitigation plans that are approved by the heads of the MAs**. This is considered a good practice that informs decision-making processes because it takes into account all scenarios and proposes specific solutions for coping with potential problems. Technically, such a system signals most issues in a timely manner, thus providing decision-makers with sufficient time to find and implement feasible solutions so as to avoid bottlenecks.

622. **(BS) Most of the beneficiaries (60 percent for RO-MD and RO-UA) think it would be useful to have monitoring and reporting procedures applied uniformly by all MAs.** Similarly, 75 percent of the beneficiaries from RO-MD CBC consider that the monitoring and reporting forms should be the same for all programs.

Efficiency of Monitoring Processes

623. **(KII) The** eMS **system is very useful in the monitoring process and implicitly in decision making,** being used commonly by ETC programs in Romania, except RO-UA and RO-MD programs that use eMS-ENI, as discussed above. Despite working well, there are also needs that are not covered by the eMS in its current version—for example, the system does not allow highlighting the exact duration of a project that has been suspended for a period of time, because it cumulates the implementation time and the period for which it was suspended.

624. **(KII) For the Black Sea Basin program, the main challenge related to eMS was to align the requirements set out in the program and in the ENI regulation with the functionalities of the eMS developed according to the ERDF requirements**. The problems and specific needs of the program reported by beneficiaries of the OP Black Sea Basin are addressed regularly, as they have been communicated to the developer at the Interact level, who improved and adapted some features.

625. **(DR) MA/JTS reports are delivered on time (if submitted to the EC, or presented to JMC, delays are unacceptable).** In accordance with the project monitoring procedure, the JTS shall notify

the beneficiary of the deadline to submit project reports; if the report is not submitted by the deadline, JTS sets an additional deadline. If the project report is not submitted until the additional deadline, JTS notifies MA and the beneficiary regarding the monitoring visit of the project that will be conducted by JTS.

Performance of IT systems

626. **(KII) For Moldova and Ukraine, the eMS-ENI is not functional on the Implementation Module; the M&E data are recorded in tabular formats that are progressively updated, depending on the activities that take place.** It is not an efficient way to work and, to respond to requests/needs of its users, the same data are recorded in multiple databases. After the system's development, the data related to project implementation will have to be recorded but, due to the existing gap, they will not effectively support the program structures in the monitoring activity by, for example, providing real-time reporting.

627. **In its current** configuration**, the eMS-ENI needs its contracting and monitoring components developed,** and the acquisition of specific software development services is foreseen by the program in the next period. So far, the IT system has served the program on the activity of online submission of projects, especially project evaluation.

628. **(KII) ENI program requirements oblige beneficiaries to report correctly, and thus adapt to the IT system.** Staff involved in program implementation provide training to beneficiaries on how to align their reports with program requirements.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

629. **(KII) For ENI CBC** programs**, there is no correlation between program performance and key performance indicators included in the job descriptions of the GD/MAs/JTS staff.** Given that the MA staff are civil servants, the performance indicators comply with the provisions of the Administrative Code and are generally related to the timely and compliant performance of tasks. It was tried for a while to add to the job descriptions additional indicators related to program performance, but, as the GD emphasized, "they did not bring added value in practice."

630. **(KII) In terms of** resources **necessary for quality data collection and reporting, it is appreciated that the management of ETC programs has all needed assets,** so that sufficient data are collected and the M&E system can play a key role in decision making. The MAs are equipped with all necessary human and material resources to ensure proper data collection and reporting, "the workload is reasonable enough," and no extra hours are usually put in by staff. At the level of the RO-UA JTS, there is a personnel shortage on monitoring (currently there are two positions available).

631. **(KII) The fact that roles and responsibilities related to M&E are so well organized and steered is, according to interviewees, due to the experience of the staff in both MAs and JTSs.** Notably, it is mentioned that most of the specialists involved in managing ETC programs are among the most experienced public servants in Romania, having dealt with PHARE pre-accession funds. Basically, PHARE funds[102] were managed and absorbed in an organizational formula that is very similar to the one used in the current exercise.

632. **(KII) Also, all** actors **involved in the monitoring process participate in trainings relevant to their responsibilities**. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the staff attends online training sessions and meetings, facilitated by consultants from the EU. There is a constant need for training,

[102] The PHARE program is one of three pre-accession instruments funded by the European Union to assist candidate countries in Central and Eastern Europe that are candidates for accession to the Union. Originally created in 1989 to assist Poland and Hungary, the PHARE program covered ten countries. It supported Romania in a period of economic restructuring and massive political change.

especially on program evaluation, especially at the level of the JTS, even though joint workshops/meetings with colleagues from other programs in Europe are frequently organized.

Effectiveness of the Monitoring System

633. **(DR) In accordance with ENI regulation, M&E findings are be taken into account in the programming and implementation cycle.** The M&E system shall support the preparation, discussion, and adoption of key decisions regarding program strategy and implementation by the JMC.

634. **Project implementation reports (progress/interim/final) are drafted by beneficiaries and submitted to JTS/MA.** Based on the data/indicators within these project reports, MA/JTS draft the program implementation reports, which are presented to the JMC and considered for corrective action and lessons learned. They are approved by JMC and then submitted to the EC, which analyzes and approves the report. The JMC shall assess the quality of monitoring and evaluation outputs and discuss their contents, taking these into account when making decisions regarding program strategy and implementation. The reports are also communicated to the AA and other relevant stakeholders.

635. **(KII) How indicators are** defined **in the programming stage is essential to ensuring the best possible correlation with OP objectives**. At the same time, it is important that applicants understand how to define project indicators, and their correlation with the program indicators is particularly important in monitoring the implementation progress.

636. **(BS) Regarding** administrative **burden, beneficiaries from RO-MD and RO-UA indicated that data collection has the highest cost**. Also, uploading information to the system and preparing reports ranked as second and third in terms of the impact of administrative burden on CBC programs.

Success factors and good practices in monitoring

637. **(DR) Because monitoring appears to be managed similarly by ETC programs implemented in Romania, key common success factors for monitoring are:**

- a good eMS IT system for CBC BSB program and continuous beneficiary training; and
- improved common project monitoring procedures at the level of the MA extensively based on regular risk assessments.

638. **(DR) For ENI CBC programs, M&E findings are considered not only during programming, but also during the implementation cycle, as they annually design and update an M&E plan**. This is based on the regulatory framework for the 2014–2020 period that asks programs to submit an indicative M&E plan for the duration of the program, which is updated annually.

Program Evaluation System: Strengths and Weaknesses

Assessment of the evaluation system's institutional and procedural framework

639. **(KII) Evaluations for ENI-funded programs (RO-UA, RO-MD, BSB) are carried out directly by the EC (as per** Art**. 78 of the ENI implementing regulation).** Also, a results-oriented monitoring mission (ROM) is carried by the EC Commission. Such a mission was carried out in 2018 for each ENI JOP at the initiative of the EC, and proved useful for streamlining program management.

Evaluation Strategy and Planning Process

640. **(KII) The evaluations are listed in the Annex of the JOPs. Also, there is limited evidence regarding the** involvement **of the MA in drafting evaluation ToRs by the EC.** However, the evaluation activity is regularly monitored based on the M&E plan updated annually, as per EU regulations.

Institutional and Procedural Aspects

641. **(DR) Given that ENI programs are evaluated by the EC, there is no program evaluation procedure for these specific programs.** However, there are some provisions regarding program evaluation in the MA monitoring procedure at the program level.

Strengths and weaknesses in the evaluation system's performance

Fulfillment of Regulatory and Procedural Requirements

642. **(KII) The EC carried** out **a mid-term evaluation for all ENI CBC programs in 2018, and the recommendations have been taken by the programs.** In addition, the Romania-Ukraine program carried out an evaluation of information and communication activities, the results of which are not yet publicly available.

643. **(JMC) However,** at **the level of ENI programs, the evaluation culture appears limited, and its benefits are not sufficiently known or understood; for example, at the level of decision makers.** Interviewees report this is due to the fact that most of these evaluations were completed when the decision-making process could no longer be influenced (for example, the EC evaluation at the level of the ENI instrument is conducted late, especially on the strategy side).

Efficiency of Evaluation Processes

644. **Considering that the EC is evaluating ENI CBC programs, the evaluation process appears to be clear and straightforward at the MA level**. However, the ownership of the MAs, and especially the JTS over the evaluation results, appears to be limited. Therefore, additional trainings and knowledge-sharing events, especially those involving JTS, could potentially increase interest in evaluations.

Adequacy of Administrative Capacities

645. **(DR) Although** program **evaluation is not currently the responsibility of the MA or the JTS, as the evaluation of ENI programs is carried out by the EC,** the MAs should further develop this capacity and ensure that data are available for evaluations. Effectiveness of the Evaluation System

646. **(KII) M&E** outcomes **are used in the management of ENI CBC programs, with a focus on monitoring data, which are more salient at the expense of evaluations.** Complemented by the EU legislative framework, and consultations organized with partner countries, M&E outcomes appear to contribute to viable decisions and build evidence for further action, especially for the next programming period.

Annex 2: Indicators' Analysis

Objective

This indicator analysis was performed to assess the overall quality of indicators included across the ESIF M&E system. This analysis was meant to see whether the ESIF M&E system is performing effectively, based on how well the indicators are designed and used, and also to inform the development of the indicators system for the forthcoming ESIF programming period. The assessment complements the other instruments used in the analysis.

Overview of methodological approach

The analysis was based on a sample of the ESIF indicators. The analysis takes advantage of the large pool of indicators being tracked across all OPs, to draw a sample (see Table 1) and assess their quality against a set of pre-defined characteristics. The analyzed indicators correspond to IPs that were considered representative for the OPs, in respect to:

a. Relative importance at the OP level—only IPs included in the performance framework will were considered for the sample, as they reflect their relative importance at the OP level and are more likely to have been more closely monitored within the framework of the performance review.
b. Continuity of IPs and specific objectives in the 2021-2027 programming period- Among those IPs that are included in the performance framework (a), the selection focused on IPs where there is overlap in the specific objectives for the 2021-2027 programming periods.[103]
c. Budget - the selection focused on the IPs included in the performance framework (a) and with continuity in the specific objectives (b) that have the highest budget allocation.
d. Only one IP was selected for the same priority axis
e. Main policy area— only one IP was selected by PA.

For the OPs that do not have a performance framework, a maximum of two PAs was selected, in order of their allocation. In addition, this sectoral assessment approach did not cover the OPs for which Romanian authorities are not managing authorities.

Table 1. Analyzed OPs and indicator sample size

Fund	Operational Program (OP)	IPs	No. of indicators in sample
ERDF	Competitiveness Operational Program (OPC)	1a, 2c	29
	Regional Operational Program (ROP)	3a, 4c	13
	Operational Program Technical Assistance (OPTA)	AP3	5
ERDF/CF	Large Infrastructure Operational Program (LIOP)	7a, 7b, 7c	42
ESF	Human Capital Operational Program (POCU)	9iv, 8i, 10i	46
	Administrative Capacity Operational Program (OPAC)	11i	38
FEAD	Operational Program Support for Disadvantaged Persons (OPDP)	1	19
ETC OPs	IPA CBS Romania-Serbia Program (RO-SR)	AP1	12
	Romania-Moldova ETC Program (RO-MD)	TO2	7

[103] The team foresees comparing the Investment Priorities from the 2014-2020 programming period to the Specific Objectives in the 2021-2027 programming period.

	Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria (RO-BG)	**PA1**	**6**
	Joint Operational Program Black Sea Basin (Black Sea)	**1**	**4**

The summary addresses two different approaches for reviewing indicators: qualitative and quantitative. The purpose of the qualitative analysis is to determine whether the set of indicators of an OP, IP, or SO are sufficient to monitor project achievements. The purpose of the quantitative analysis is to determine if the indicators are well formulated and how they can be improved.

Different criteria were considered when designing the templates for the analysis. For the qualitative analysis, some of the characteristics from SPICED[104] were complemented with specific criteria the consultant considered useful, given the scope of the analysis. *Sufficient, Parsimonious,* and *Empowering/Ownership* were the ones included and adjusted, while *Interpreted and Communicable, Cross-checked, Diverse,* and *Disaggregated* were kept as such. These criteria, referred to as "Modified SPICED," were used to analyze indicators as a group, at the level of the IP, because the qualitative analysis is more "use-oriented." For the quantitative template, the SMART,[105] CREAM,[106] and CONEVAL[107] criteria were used, adjusted for the current assessment (see Table 2), and the analysis was performed for each individual indicator.

Table 2. Criteria for the quantitative assessment of individual indicators

Adequacy	**Clarity**	**Timeliness**
Administrative burden	**Credibility**	**Data collection and reporting**
Data quality	**Means of verification**	**Monitorable**

More information on the interpretation of the criteria can be found in Appendix 1 of this material.

Main findings of the quantitative analysis

In general, the indicators analyzed for each OP are well constructed; that is, they are clear, specific, and relevant, and meet basic design criteria. The general average of the samples of indicators analyzed for all OPs is 8.08 (out of a maximum of 9), considering the average value for each OP. Keep in mind that the analyzed samples vary among OPs, going from 4 analyzed indicators up to 46 (see Table 1). Appendix 2 shows the number of indicators that complied with each criterion used for the quantitative assessment of indicators, out of a total of 221 indicators analyzed for all OPs. Appendix 2 shows the percentage of indicators complying with each criteria in the quantitative template for each OP. Overall, it is found that indicators are well designed. While *timeliness* is the category with most

[104] Roche, C. 1999. Impact Assessment for Development Agencies: Learning to Value Change. Oxfam GB.

[105] Gladys Lopez-Acevedo, Philipp Krause, and Keith Mackay, Editors, Building better Policies, The World bank, 2012

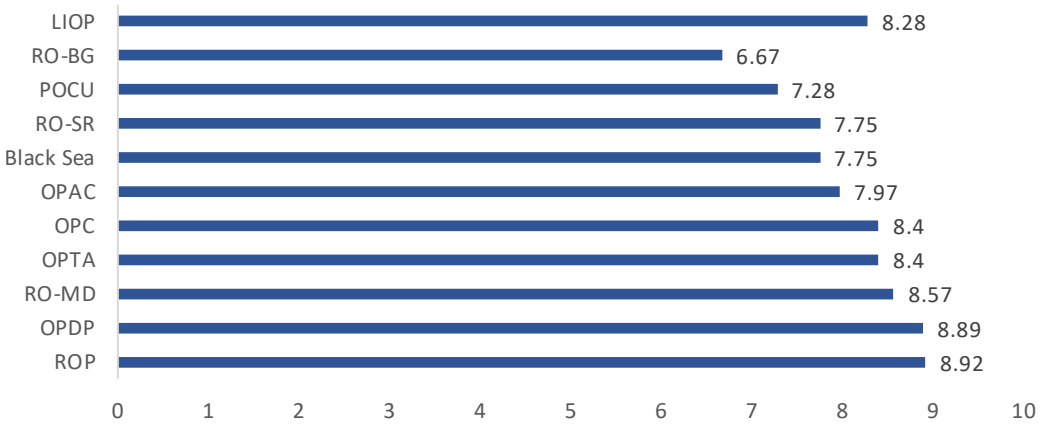
[106] Salvatore Schiavo-Campo. "'Performance' in the Public Sector," p. 85. (World Bank Manual - Building a Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation System, 1999), 2011.

[107] Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social. Metodología para la aprobación de indicadores de los programas sociales. México, DF. CONEVAL, 2014.

compliance (170/179), *credibility* was found to be the criterion fulfilled by less indicators (139/179); meaning there is room for improvement in terms of having enough information about the indicator so its measurement can be replicated by external actors. Another criterion for which some issues arose is *clarity,* meaning that the way in which indicators are written may be improved so as to not allow for interpretation, making sure that every potentially ambiguous term includes a definition or is changed (see Annex 2).

The assessment shows an overall good quality of the indicators. Ranging from 0 to 9, the highest ranked OP is "POR" (ERDF), with 8.92 out of 9, and the lowest assessment belongs to Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria (CBC OPs), with 6.67 out of 9 (see Figure 1). However, in this case, the lower score was given because there was not enough published information to validate the *clarity* and *data quality* criteria for most of their indicators.

Figure 2. Average compliance with quantitative criteria



In a group analysis by fund, the highest average compliance corresponds to ERDF's OPs (8.57 out of 9), followed by ESF's (8.05), and in third place, ETC's OPs (7.69). In addition, a wider variation can be seen in ETC-funded OP indicators, since average compliance ranges from 6.67 to 8.57, a 1.9 gap. In contrast, ERDF's OPs have the most consistent indicators quality according to the assessment criteria, with only a 0.52 difference in average compliance.

Figure 2. Average compliance with quantitative criteria by fund

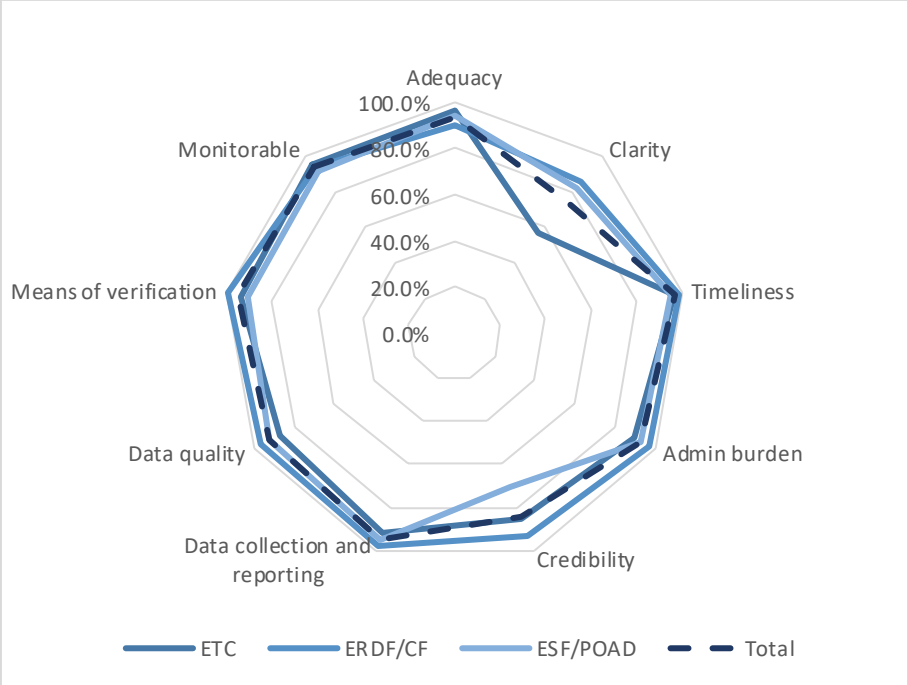


Figure 2 shows the criteria where most indicators have areas of improvement as grouped by fund. The *clarity* and *credibility* variables show the lowest performing indicators, mainly in ETC-funded OPs. In this case, ETC OPs show the lowest degree of clarity, generally stemming from ambiguous terms or variables. This is mostly true for two ETC OPs: Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria, and Joint Operational Program (JOP) Black Sea Basin, OPs with a 16.7% and 25.0% compliance, respectively (see Figure 3 and Appendix 2).

Considering that only indicator samples were used for this analysis, another observation is to have a further analysis to find out if, like in the case of POCU, there are a lot of indicators. Excessive indicators may result in a burden for those involved in their monitoring and not necessarily give useful information to improve the performance and results of the programs or projects[108]. Also, in the analyzed cases, many of the indicators are variables collected from the registration forms filled out by participants, and it would be helpful to use these to automatically calculate specific indicators, as well.

Main findings of the qualitative analysis

In terms of *sufficiency*, a common finding among most of the analyzed samples is that OPs have sufficient indicators to monitor all steps of the interventions. However, in a few cases, such as Romania-Republic of Moldova ETC Program ("the intervention logic has relevant indicators, both common and specific, but not sufficient enough to capture the links between output and outcome indicators"),[109] the JOP Black Sea Basin ("indicators are useful but not sufficient to present the effects of the program, because they focus very much on the results of investments in the form of resources

[108] For example, in the case of POCU, some common indicators are similar to specific indicators, generating a larger number of indicators than needed; further analysis in this sense can be found in the qualitative assessment results when assessing the parsimony of different groups of indicators

[109] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

created, without capturing their dimension"),[110] and OPAC ("the link between indicators [output and result, common and specific] needs to be more obvious"),[111] it seems that indicators are not sufficient to capture the links between output and outcome or results levels, and that having additional indicators would help make these links more obvious. This insufficiency seems to mainly appear at the highest levels of the results chain. One outstanding case is that of ROP indicators, where it has been found that "the current set of indicators is insufficient for monitoring of interventions of this type."[112] Considering the aforementioned, in earlier stages of implementation one recommendation is for those OPs that found insufficient indicators to review each step of the results chain and ensure the needed indicators to cover all the steps.

Indicators systems need to be *parsimonious*, meaning that when considering a related group of indicators, they are not redundant (that is, they do not measure the same or similar aspects). In the overall analysis, OPs concluded that their sets of indicators were found to be parsimonious, specifying in most cases that after the analysis, indicators do not seem to be redundant, and that existing indicators are the minimum necessary. Examples to support this finding are presented in the assessments of the RO-MD ETC Program ("The analyzed set of specific and common indicators doesn't seem to be redundant at the output level, because there are few indicators"),[113] Interreg V-A RO-BG ("The indicators are parsimonious. All the common and specific indicators are well established and no redundancy or overlapping has been identified in their conceptualization and measurement"),[114] and IPA CBS RO-SR Program ("The analyzed set of specific and common indicators doesn't seem to be redundant or excessive").[115] Although the above is true for almost all analyzed OPs, it was found that in some cases, parsimony could be further improved, especially by addressing similarities among common and specific indicators. In the case of POCU, for example, given the analyzed sample, the OP identified that "a number of challenges remain, particularly in relation to the number of indicators and the causal links; the set of common indicators could be enough to monitor the persons benefiting from support under POCU interventions."[116] It seems that it may be plausible to only use common indicators to monitor persons benefiting from their interventions. However, further considerations related to other criteria being assessed should be considered before taking that step.

[110] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[111] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[112] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[113] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[114] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[115] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[116] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

In terms of indicators being easily *interpreted,* the analysis looks to favor indicators that include all necessary elements to be communicated (no ambiguous terms, clear definitions, definitions that serve not only local or directly involved stakeholders, all necessary explanations). From the gathered information, a common finding among OPs is that their indicators include enough explanation or clarification, when needed, to be easily communicated and interpreted, and thus, beneficiaries have no problem reporting and understanding the indicators. Some examples of the assessments leading to this conclusion are that of the RO-MD Program and OPTA ("none of the indicators in this set included elements referring to local terms or characteristics that need to be further explained"),[117] or ROP ("all indicators can be easily verified and interpreted or communicated as easy to interpret/communicate and verify").[118] For actors not involved in the OPs, the information generated by the indicators is, in fewer of the cases, a bit difficult to understand because they sometimes include very technical terms, or their interpretation depends on a description of data collection methods that may not be so straightforward; one OP that identified this issue is POC ("although the indicators are generally well explained (including the specific ones), in some cases they include very technical terms that make them difficult to understand by actors not involved in POC").[119] Overall, indicators are *communicable*,[120] but effort can be made to avoid unnecessary technical language or include precise definitions to widen the scope of stakeholders that can easily interpret or communicate them. It is important to work on OPAC's specific indicators, as from their particular analysis, it is concluded that there is limited information and their definitions need to be more detailed ("The information is limited. The specific indicators definitions could be further detailed").[121]

One shared finding among different OPs with respect to *cross-check* and *comparability* criteria is that additional measurement methods or different sources of information should be identified; however, this would only be needed when there is a chance of unreliable data collection. This finding was shared among ETC programs, OPTA and POC. This finding comes from the fact that most data used for measurement are gathered by beneficiaries when submitting a series of forms or reports; so, if the needed controls are in place, it should not pose a significant problem. Among the findings related to cross-checking, it stands out that for several OPs, it seems that possible problems with cross-checks do not appear in results or impact indicators, and that the areas for improvement are found in the lower steps of the results chain. This was clear for the Romania-Republic of Moldova ETC Program ("In the case of the result indicators, data is gathered from national institutions and should be easy to compare/cross-check"),[122] and for POC ("Additional measurement methods or other sources of

[117] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[118] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[119] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[120] Indicators are understandable and no further explanation needs to be given to stakeholders that are not directly involved with their design, definition, and measurement.

[121] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[122] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

information will be needed to cross-check the measurement of output indicators").[123] The analysis of the sample of OPDP's indicators stands out, as it shows no problems for cross-checking. There were also mentions of needs to consider the fidelity of some data sources such as online surveys, as found in the JOP Black Sea Basin analysis ("The indicators based on data taken from project database can be more easily compared and cross-checked, while the indicators based on the results of [online] surveys may have a lower fidelity").[124]

In terms of assessing how *empowering*[125] indicators are, the analysis of some OPs highlighted several positive examples, where the MAs were directly involved in the design of the indicators system. These include, for example, Interreg V-A RO-BG ("There is a good ownership of the indicators at the MA level. The indicators definitions and their collection, measurement, and reporting provisions are well known by those responsible"),[126] RO-MD ETC Program and IPA CBS Romania-Serbia ("The MA was involved in designing the system of indicators and has full ownership in this respect"),[127] and also OPTA. For others, such as POC or POCU,[128] ownership was developed over time, once a more thorough understanding of the indicators was acquired, during implementation ("Ownership is diminished by the fact that the program structures were not involved in the design of the indicators system.")[129]

Finally, in terms of being *diverse and disaggregated*, a common finding among OPs is that there is space to improve disaggregating information, and therefore to have analysis by population groups relevant to the programs. The analysis shows that diverse and disaggregated indicators exist but that further disaggregation may be useful. In the assessment of RO-MD ETC Program indicators, for example, it was found that "indicators are not diverse, nor disaggregated and this aspect should be addressed in the future."[130] An the same line, one finding from the assessment of IPA CBS RO-SR Program indicators is that "further disaggregation may be useful for population-related indicators." In the case of OPAC indicators, the specific indicators do not include disaggregation, except those feeding into common indicators, where a male/female disaggregation is mandatory. However, this should be

[123] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[124] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[125] In this context, empowering indicators refers mainly to indicators over which those involved in their measurement and monitoring feel ownership. This empowers people to share, follow, use, and promote the continuous improvement of the indicators.

[126] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[127] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[128] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[129] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

[130] Sample analyses of OPs' indicators conducted and shared by the WB team, accessed in https://worldbankgroup-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/vsulla_worldbank_org/ErrR6_nBHLhHtQ3JUnI-bvcBcYkbRvUtFtBLwQ8NG5cJMQ?email=thania.delagarza.n%40gmail.com&e=5%3a3wsj8H&at=9

taken with caution, as it was also indicated that "this type of disaggregation is not relevant for OPAC interventions."[131]

Further insights into the quantitative and qualitative assessment can be found in the individual analyses of the indicators, at OP level.

Recommendations

A results-oriented monitoring exercise is more likely to be achieved if there are available indicators for the entire results chain, starting from inputs and making their way up, with visible and comprehensible linkages, toward long-term outputs; this can also be referred to as having sufficient indicators. The measurement of indicators should help improve the implementation process by alerting about problems in the implementation phase, as well as weaknesses in the project's design, ideally at every stage or level in the results chain.

The following recommendations come from the analyzed samples, but also in light of current preparations for the future programming period.

- To monitor all steps of the causal chain, include indicators for all levels of the results chain, ensuring there is a linkage and relation among them. While common indicators are likely to be used extensively, consider the development of specific indicators where necessary. Ensure that MAs are fully involved in the process, to increase ownership and involve sectoral specialists, to ensure the quality of the indicators.
- To facilitate monitoring, it is advisable to use common indicators, which aggregate information and/or to have the necessary mechanisms in place to allow for automated or easy collection of data.
- To promote a results-oriented approach, it is recommended to develop enough outcome indicators with clear links to the rest of the results chain. These indicators should be clearly focused on the area of intervention and allow for disaggregation.
- To avoid redundancy, review similarities between specific and common indicators; if needed, cut some of them off.
- To facilitate external verification, information such as year of baseline, definitions and characteristics of variables used, calculation formula, and results from previous years should all be available.
- Have individual fiches for all indicators in a homogeneous format; this will simplify reviewing, understanding, sharing, updating, and using indicators.
- Simplify the language used around indicators, such as the definitions, calculation methods, and other elements, including individual fiches.
- Ensure disaggregation of indicators, for all relevant categories of actions and target groups, to improve monitoring but also to inform evaluations.
- It is recommended that this program center efforts to have evidence of its data quality, and make sure that responsibilities for indicator generating processes are well defined. OP authorities should also make sure that necessary institutional arrangements for data collection are in place and that appropriate collection, aggregation, and reporting systems are set up and working.

[131] As per interviews conducted at OP level.

Appendix 1.

MODIFIED SPICED CRITERIA						
Criteria	**Sufficient**	**Parsimonious**	**Interpreted and communicable**	**Cross-checked and compared**	**Empowering/Ownership**	**Diverse & disaggregated**
Definition	Indicators should be enough to measure all the links in the result chains or all the levels of objectives in the logic framework. Check for input / output / result indicators. Take into account the possible use of indicators for evaluation purposes. Also take into consideration the sustainability period, if it's appropriate for the intervention	The number of the indicators is the minimum possible to facilitate the monitoring and the use of the indicators maintaining all relevant information. "The principle of parsimony reflects the notion that researchers should strive for simple measurement models that use the minimum number of parameters needed to explain a given phenomenon." (Raykov, & Marcoulides, 1999)	Locally defined indicators may not mean much to other stakeholders, so they often need to be explained.	The validity of assessment needs to be cross-checked by comparing different indicators and progress and using different informants, methods, and researchers.	The purpose, the frequency, and the type of report of the indicators should be known by those responsible for its achievement. When used for reports, publications, and other types of documents that are disseminated, indicators are more likely to generate ownership among those responsible for its achievement.	The set of indicators should enable the analysis of differences, for example: gender / type of enterprise /degree of urbanization etc., depending on the focus of the intervention. This information needs to be recorded in such a way that these differences can be assessed over time.

Guiding questions	Does the set of indicators established for the IP/SO cover all the links in the result chains or all the levels of objectives in the Logic Framework? Are there any measurement gaps between levels (inputs/outputs/results)? Is the indicators set relevant / adequate for the intervention? Does the indicators set cover the major aspects of the intervention? Is the indicators set able to show the progress towards the results?	Are there redundant indicators? Do the specific indicators measure similiar issues as the common indicators?	Indicators are used at a broader level than the one where they were defined? Specific indicators are explained? Is the available information enough to clarify that there is a relationship among them to be communicated as a group?	The process of data collection should be clear and trasparent, enabling outside parties to cross-check data for their validity. The set of indicators was validated together with the stakeholders (for example line-ministries) Quality control/ verification measures should be specified in all cases.	Is the indicator (or set of indicators) frequently refered to in reports, media, documents, or other dissemination tools? Is the indicator (or set of indicators) known to people outside the implementing team? How understandable are the results of the indicator? To what extent are the results of the indicator being used for decision making in the program?	Is the indicator disaggregated considering the different involved populations? Is the disaggregation relevant to measure changes? Is the level of disaggregation sufficient to identify all the relevant target groups? Is the indicator disaggregated enough to be able to explain the result?

Quantitative criteria									
Criteria	**Adequacy**	**Clarity**	**Timeliness**	**Administrative burden**	**Credibility**	**Data collection and reporting**	**Data quality**	**Means of verification**	**Monitorable**
Definition	The indicator measures as adequately as possible the behavior, the observed phenomenon; is sensitive to change (changes when intervening on the phenomenon), accepted and understood by stakeholders and specialists; it is programmatically important (it is related to intervention); in theory of change terms, indicators of outcome level should not be confused with other levels such as output or activities.	Indicators should be precise and unambiguous. The way in which indicators are written should not allow for interpretation and every potentially ambiguous term should include a definition.	The information given by the indicators should be available when needed.	The administrative burden of measuring and reporting indicators should not be prohibitive. Costs associated with establishing and digitalizing reporting are commonly one-time costs and may not be prohibitive.	There is enough information about the indicator so that it´s measurement is replicated by an external actor. There is no hidden information or steps in the process that are only known by specific people.	There should be institutional arrangements and responsibilities set-up for data collection and reporting There should be appropriate systems in place to enable the collection, aggregation and reporting of the indicator	Data resulting from the collection should be complete, exact, error-free; Statistical error should be minimal.	All the information needed to measure the indicator should be contained within the defined means of verification. Be sure that all sources of information are enlisted as means of verification.	An indicator is monitorable if the information in its means of verification is accurate and unambiguous. This implies that the baseline value of the indicator is known, and the precise information to locate the means of verification is also known, and that the periodicity with which it is updated is consistent with the frequency of measurement of the indicator.
Guiding Questions (Yes=1 No=0)	Does the indicator respond to the level of objective	Are all the terms and variables of the indicator	Is the information necessary to calculate the indicator available when it is going to be	Does the collection and reporting generate costs / administrative	Does the indicator sheet/file specify all the	Are the responsibilities defined for the process of	How good is the quality of the data produced	Are the means of verification sufficient	Does the indicator have a baseline value for

	you are looking for? (Level of objective (inputs / outputs / outcomes (intermediate) / impacts (long-term outcomes))	clearly defined? Are all the terms and variables not open to interpretation? Is there meta data of basic information needed available?	used and in the necessary periodicity? (The frequency of the means of verification for each variable (frequency per variable) / frequency of the indicator) If the registration of information is constant during the project, the answer is "Yes" How timely is the production of the indicator for use in decision making?	burden? At what level (MA/IB/beneficiary)? Is this indicator-related or system-related (SMIS, for example)? Was the cost of the means of verification considered in the project?	information necessary to be measured by external actors ? (year of the baseline, definitions and characteristics of the variables used, calculation formula, types of disaggregation, and results from previous years, etc.)	generating the indicator? Are there institutional arrangements in place? (if necessary) Are there appropriate collection / aggregation / reporting systems in place?	by the information sources for the indicator?	to obtain the necessary information to measure the indicator?	monitoring? Can it be monitored using the available instruments and methods?
Recommendation, applicable when the answer is no.	**Consider changing the indicator**	**Consider providing additional explanations and details. Delete, change, or define ambiguous terms, criteria, and variables. Indicators should not be open for interpretation.**	**Modify the indicator to ensure data is available when needed. Consider new means/ frequency of collection to ensure information is available on time.**	**Avoid indicators that generate high costs/ administrative burden.**	**Complete or clarify the information in the indicator fiche.**	**Consider detailing and ensuring the necessary means for data collection.**	**Consider improving data collection and verification.**	**Detail or modify the names of the means of verification necessary to measure the indicator.**	**Consider defining a baseline. Consider changing the indicator, if not monitorable.**

Appendix 2. Summary results from the analysis of 15 indicators using the quantitative template

Criteria	Validating question(s)	Number of indicators fulfilling each criterion
Adequacy	Does the indicator respond to the level of objective you are looking for? (Level of objective (inputs / outputs / outcomes (intermediate) / impacts (long-term outcomes))	197/221
Clarity	Are all the terms and variables of the indicator clearly defined? Are all the terms and variables not open to interpretation? Is there meta data of basic information needed available?	117/221
Timelines	Is the information necessary to calculate the indicator available when it is going to be used and in the necessary periodicity? (The frequency of the means of verification for each variable (frequency per variable) / frequency of the indicator) If the registration of information is constant during the project, the answer is "Yes" How timely is the production of the indicator for use in decision making?	210/221
Administrative Burden (Cost)	Does the collection and reporting generate costs / administrative burden? (At what level (MA/IB/beneficiary)?) Is this indicator-related or system-related (SMIS, for example)? Was the cost of the means of verification considered in the project?	203/221
Credibility	Does the indicator sheet/file specify all the information necessary to be measured by external actors? (year of the baseline, definitions and characteristics of the variables used, calculation formula, types of disaggregation, and results from previous years, etc.)	177/221
Data collection and reporting	Are the responsibilities defined for the process of generating the indicator? Are there institutional arrangements in place? (if necessary)	208/221
Data quality	How good is the quality of the data produced by the information sources for the indicator?	190/221
Means of verification	Are the means of verification sufficient to obtain the necessary information to measure the indicator?	206/221
Monitorable	Does the indicator have a baseline value for monitoring? Can it be monitored using the available instruments and methods?	205/221

Appendix 3. Percentage of OP indicators positively assessed in each quantitative category

OP	Adequacy	Clarity	Timeliness	Admin burden	Credibility	Data collection and reporting	Data quality	Means of verification	Monitorable	Average Score
Black Sea Basin	100%	25.0%	100%	100%	75%	100%	100%	75%	100%	86%
RO-MD	85.71%	85.71%	85.71%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	95%
RO-SR	100%	100%	100%	75%	100%	100%	100.00%	100%	100%	97%
RO-BG	100%	16.67%	100%	83.33%	66.67%	66.67%	50.00%	100%	83.33%	74%
POC	96.55%	79.31%	96.55%	89.66%	100%	93.10%	93.10%	100%	96.55%	94%
OPTA	100%	80%	100%	100%	80%	100%	100%	100%	80%	93%
LIOP	71.43%	83%	98%	98%	93%	98%	93%	98%	98%	92%
POR	92.31%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	99%
OPDP	100%	89.47%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	99%
OPAC	100%	86.84%	100%	97.37%	36.84%	100%	94.74%	89.47%	92.11%	89%
POCU	82.61%	71.74%	84.78%	82.61%	73.91%	84.78%	82.61%	82.61%	82.61%	81%
ESIF	94%	74%	97%	93%	84%	95%	92%	95%	94%	91%

Annex 3: Interviews by type of participants

	MEIP	AMPOCU	AMPOAD	AMPOCA	AMPOAT	AMPOC	AMLIOP	AMPOR	ETC General Directorate	Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria	Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary	CBC ENI Romania-Ukraine	CBC ENI Romania-Moldova	CBC ENI Black Sea Basin	INTERREG IPA Romania-Serbia	Members of the Evaluation Network
Interviews:																
Interview with management	By email	1	1	1	1	1	1		By email	By email	By email	By email	By email	By email	By email	-
Interview with head of programme monitoring	1	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-		-
Interview with head of project monitoring	-	1	1	1	1	By email	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Conducting interview with head of Evaluation Unit	1	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	NA	1	By email	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Conducting interviews with IBs/JTSs	NA	3	NA	NA	NA	2	1	8	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
Conducting interview with head of SMIS/ems unit	1	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	-
Conducting interview with contracting unit	-	1	1	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other interviews	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Total:	4	7	3	5	4	5	4	12	4	1	2	2	1	1	1	6

Annex 4: Analysis of Romania's OP Monitoring Committee Membership 2014–2020

Program		National authorities		Regional bodies/local authorities		Nongovernmental organizations		Total
		No.	*%*	*No.*	*%*	*No.*	*%*	
Regional OP (ROP) 2014–2020	*Members with voting rights*	8	33	8	33	8	33	**24**
	Observers	16	55	8	28	5	17	**29**
OP Technical Assistance (OPTA) 2014–2020	*Members with voting rights*	20	80	0	0	5	20	**25**
	Observers	7	78	0	0	2	22	**9**
OP Human Capital 2014–2020	*Members with voting rights*	12	35	8	24	14	41	**34**
	Observers	14	88	0	0	2	13	**16**
OP Administrative Capacity 2014–2020	*Members with voting rights*	25	58	0	0	18	42	**43**
	Observers	4	100	0	0		0	**4**
OP Competitiveness 2014–2020	*Members with voting rights*	22	71	0	0	9	29	**31**
	Observers	5	56	0	0	4	44	**9**
	Members with voting rights	13	52	0	0	12	48	**25**

Large Infrastructure OP 2014–2020	*Observers*	19	73	0	0	7	27	**26**
JOP Black Sea Basin 2014–2020	*Members with voting rights*	12	86	2	14	0	0	**14**
	Observers	3	100	0	0	0	0	**3**
JOP Romania—Ukraine 2014–2020	*Members with voting rights*	6	33	12	67	0	0	**18**
	Observers	3	100	0	0	0	0	**3**
JOP Romania – Moldova 2014–2020	*Members with voting rights*	8	57	6	43	0	0	**14**
	Observers	2	100	0	0	0	0	**2**
Interreg-IPA CBC Romania-Serbia 2014–2020	*Members with voting rights*	16	47	13	38	6	18	**34**
	Observers	8	100	0	0	0	0	**8**
JOP Romania—Bulgaria 2014–2020	*Members with voting rights*	16	33	18	37	15	31	**49**
	Observers	16	89	0	0	2	11	**18**
JOP Romania—Hungary 2014–2020	*Members with voting rights*	14	54	10	42	1	4	**25**
	Observers	15	58	3	12	8	31	**26**

Annex 5: Procedural Framework for M&E at the level of each of Romania's OPs 2014–2020

OP	Program monitoring			Project monitoring			Program evaluation		IT system	
	At the level of the MEFI/CBC GD	At the level of MA	At the level of IB/JTS	At the level of the MEFI/CBC GD	At the level of MA	At the level of IB/JTS	At the level of MEFI/CBC GD	At the level of MA	At the level of MA	At the level of IB
Regional Operational Program (ROP) 2014–2020		Operational Procedure for Program Monitoring and Reporting (PO.DGPOR.SGP IV)—ed. I, revision 3, date: 11.02.2020			Operational Procedure for Project Monitoring (PO.DGPOR.DMP.1)—ed. I, rev 3, date: 20.06.2020			Operational Procedure for Program Evaluation (PO.DGPOR.02) —ed. I, rev 1, date: 22.05.2018		
		Operational Procedure for the organization and functioning of the Monitoring Committee for ROP 2014–2020 (PO.DGPOR.SGP.1)—ed. I, revision 1, date: 13.03.2017								
Technical Assistance Operational Program (OPTA) 2014–2020		PO.DGATPE.30 Operational Procedure: OPTA 2014–2020 Monitoring (Ed.1, rev.1, 28.02.2019) PO.DGATPE.07 Operational Procedure: Elaborating Annual report/Final implementation report for OPTA 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 (Ed.1,			PO.DGATPE.05 Operational Procedure: Project monitoring (Ed.II, rev.2, 22.05.2020) PO.DGATPE.26 Operational Procedure: Modifying projects financed through OPTA 2014–2020 (Ed.1, rev.5, 26.05.2020)					

		rev. 1, 28.02.2019) PO.DGATPE.10 Operational Procedure: Organizing and functioning of the OPTA 2014–2020 Monitoring Committee (Ed.1, rev.1, 28.02.2019)								
OP Aid for Disadvantaged Persons (OPDP) 2014–2020		PO.DGPECU.33 Operational Procedure: Program Monitoring and Reporting (Ed. I, rev. 1, 3.09.2018)			PO.DGPECU.35Operational Procedure: Technical Monitoring and of Projects (Ed. I, rev. 0, 3.10.2019)					
OP Administrative Capacity Development (OP ACD) 2014–2020		PO.DGPECA.06/PMON Operational Procedure Program Monitoring (Ed. II, Revision 0) PO:DGPECA.05/SCM Operational Procedure Supporting the Activity of the Monitoring Committee (Ed.II, Rev.0)			PO.DGPECA.16/AIP Operational Procedure Project Implementation Assistance (Ed. III, Rev. 0) PO.DGPECA.23/VFL Operational Procedure for On-the-Spot Verification of POCA Financed Projects (Ed. III, Rev. 1) PO.DGPECA.24/MFL Operational Procedure for On-the-Spot Monitoring of POCA Financed Projects (Ed. III, Rev. 0)			PO.DGPECA.08/PEVAL Operational Procedure POCA Program Evaluation (Ed. II, Rev. 0)		
Competitiveness Operational Program 2014–2020		PO.DGPEC.11 Procedure for Organization and Functioning of the	POC.OIC.MO.Pr Operational Procedure—Monitoring		PO.DGPEC.03 Operational Procedure—					

		Monitoring Committee of the Competitiveness Operational Program 2014–2020 (Ed.I, Rev.0)	(Ed.II. Rev.4)		Monitoring of funded projects through the Competitiveness Operational Program (Ed.III. Rev. 4)					
Large Infrastructure Operational Program 2014–2020		PO.DGPEIM.32 Programe Management (Ed.1, Rev.1) PO.DGPEIM.21 Operational Procedure Supporting the Monitoring Committee (Ed.I, Rev. 0)	PO.DGPEIM.41 Operational Procedure—Monitoring transport projects (Ed. I, Rev. 1)		PO.DGPEIM.28 Operational Procedure—Project Monitoring LIOP (Ed.I, Rev.2) PO.DGPEIM.39 Operational Procedure—Monitoring regarding the Sustainability of the projects (Ed.I, Rev.0)					
Human Capital Operational Program 2014–2020 POCU		PO.DGPECU 07 Program monitoring and reporting (Ed.II, Rev.3) PO.DGPECU 08. Functioning of the Monitoring Committee (Ed.II, Rev. 2) PO.DGPECU 17. Program modification (Ed.I, Rev.1)			PO.DGPECU 12. Project monitoring	PO.DGPECU 3. Project monitoring Edu IB—similar for all IBs				

Joint Operational Program Romania—Hungary 2014–2020	Operational Procedure for Interreg programs Monitoring (Code: PO.DGCTE.02		Monitoring Procedure of The Interreg Projects/Program V-A Romania-Hungary (Code: PO.RO-HU.SC.05)	Project monitoring procedure for the European Territorial Cooperation objective 2014–2020 (PO.DGCTE-SMP.01—Project Monitoring Unit, edition 1, revision 0, 25.09.2019)	Monitoring Procedure of The Interreg Projects/Program V-A Romania-Hungary (Code: PO.RO-HU.SC.05)	Procedure for the evaluation Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Program (Code: PO.DGCTE.SAMRO- HU.31)		Operational Procedure of eMS electronic system for European Territorial Cooperation programs—Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria, Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary, Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia and Black Sea Basin JOP (PO.DGCTE.BeMS, edition 3, revision 0, 24.06.2019)	
Joint Operational Program Romania—Bulgaria 2014–2020	Operational Procedure for Interreg programs Monitoring (Code: PO.DGCTE.02			Project monitoring procedure for the European Territorial Cooperation objective 2014–2020 (PO.DGCTE-SMP.01—Project Monitoring Unit, edition 1, revision 0, 25.09.2019)	Project monitoring procedure (Code: PO.INTERREGVA.05	Operational Procedure for program evaluation Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria (Code:PO.DAM-PCTE.RoBg.31)		Operational Procedure of eMS electronic system for European Territorial Cooperation programs—Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria, Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary, Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia and Black Sea Basin JOP (PO.DGCTE.BEMS, edition 3, revision 0, 24.06.2019)	

Interreg-IPA CBC Romania—Serbia Program (RORS) 2014–2020	Program monitoring at the level of Interreg Programs (RO-HU, RO-BG, RORS) (edition 1, Revision 0, May 2019)	MA Program Monitoring Procedure for Interreg-IPA CBC Romania- Serbia Program (edition 1, revision 0, 2015)		Project monitoring procedure for the European Territorial Cooperation objective 2014–2020 (PO.DGCTE-SMP.01—Project Monitoring Unit, edition 1, revision 0, 25.09.2019)	JS Project monitoring procedure – I Edition. Revision 0	Program Evaluation Procedure for the Managing Authority for Interreg-IPA CBC Romania-Serbia Program (edition 1, rev. 0, 2016)		Operational Procedure of eMS electronic system for European Territorial Cooperation programs—Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria, Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary, Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia and Black Sea Basin JOP (PO.DGCTE.BEMS, edition 3, revision 0, 24.06.2019)	
Joint Operational Program Black Sea Basin 2014–2020		Operational Procedure—Monitoring at program level for Black Sea Basin JOP 2014–2020 (PO.DAM-PCTE.BMN.01, edition 1, revision 1, 12 March 2019)	JTS Project and Program Monitoring Procedure for the Black Sea Basin JOP 2014–2020 (PO.STC.POCBMN.03, edition 1, revision 3, 02.11.2020)	Project monitoring procedure for the European Territorial Cooperation objective 2014–2020 (PO.DGCTE-SMP.01—Project Monitoring Unit, edition 1, revision 0, 25.09.2019)	JTS Project and Program Monitoring Procedure for the Black Sea Basin JOP 2014–2020 (PO.STC.POCBMN.03, edition 1, revision 3, 02.11.2020)			Operational Procedure of eMS electronic system for European Territorial Cooperation programs—Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria, Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary, Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia and Black Sea Basin JOP (PO.DGCTE.BEMS, edition 3,	

								revision 0, 24.06.2019)	
Joint Operational Program Romania—Ukraine 2014–2020		Operational Procedure—Monitoring at program level for Romania—Ukraine OP (PO.DGCTE.ROUA.01, edition 1, revision 3)	JTS Monitoring Procedure (project and program monitoring) for Romania—Ukraine JOP 2014–2020 (P.STC.07, edition 1, revision 1, 19.03.2019)	Project monitoring procedure for the European Territorial Cooperation objective 2014–2020 (PO.DGCTE-SMP.01—Project Monitoring Unit, edition 1, revision 0, 25.09.2019)	JTS Monitoring Procedure (project and program monitoring) for Romania—Ukraine JOP 2014–2020 (P.STC.07, edition 1, revision 1, 19.03.2019)				JTS Operational Procedure—eMS-ENI system for RO-Ukraine JOP (P.STC.09, edition 1, revision 1, 2019)
Joint Operational Program Romania—Republic of Moldova 2014–2020		Operational Procedure—Monitoring at program level for Romania—Moldova JOP (PO.DGCTE.RO-MD.01, edition 1, revision 3)	JTS Monitoring Procedure (project and program monitoring) for Romania-Moldova JOP, edition 1, revision 1, 23.08.2017	Project monitoring procedure for the European Territorial Cooperation objective 2014–2020 (PO.DGCTE-SMP.01—Project Monitoring Unit, edition 1, revision 0, 25.09.2019)	JTS Monitoring Procedure (project and program monitoring) for Romania-Moldova JOP, edition 1, revision 1, 23.08.2017				JTS Operational Procedure of EMS–ENI system for Romania—Moldova JOP (edition 1, 2018)

Annex 6: Surveys Results

A. Beneficiaries Survey

Beneficiaries Survey	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	Support for Disadvantaged People (POAD)	Rom.-Bulgaria /Rom-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania -Serbia	ENI OPs	All OPs	
	Share of total, percent											# obs
Beneficiary type												
Central public administration	12	4	18	65	3	55	50	0	0	23	12	864
Local public administration	34	3	28	0	38	21	50	50	45	23	30	864
Deconcentrate	0	1	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	1	864
Private entities	18	91	14	0	58	0	0	0	0	4	46	864
NGO	36	1	30	35	1	25	0	50	55	35	11	864
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	864
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Next, we want to find out what types of reports you have been asked to make in 2019 and 2020 (if applicable). You can select several options												
Technical progress report	90	93	92	94	93	98	0	89	82	89	93	710
Financial reports	65	74	61	50	43	88	0	100	73	32	57	710
Indicator reports	56	60	47	44	29	47	0	33	45	25	41	710
Target group reports	77	9	9	19	8	36	100	33	36	25	20	710
Other	7	13	16	0	6	7	0	22	9	7	9	710
Approximately, how many technical reports did you submit in 2019?												
	4.5	4.3	15.5	3.3	3.0	5.2	1.5	3.8	1.4	0.5	4.4	1014
Given the reporting requirements throughout the project, do you remember a situation where you reported the same information in two different reports? If so, how many times?												
I have never reported the same information in two different reports	61	51	45	63	52	44	0	33	75	77	53	697

Beneficiaries Survey	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	Support for Disadvantaged People (POAD)	Rom.-Bulgaria /Rom-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania -Serbia	ENI OPs	All OPs	
1-2 times	19	12	15	13	15	19	50	22	17	15	15	697
3-5 times	5	13	10	6	7	10	0	22	0	0	8	697
More than 5 times	5	15	8	6	4	10	0	11	0	0	7	697
I do not know	10	9	23	13	23	17	50	11	8	8	17	697
Approximately, how many indicators did you have to report in 2019?												
Less than 5	48	59	54	75	79	63	100	86	64	75	68	606
5-10	31	30	11	25	19	31	0	0	36	20	23	606
11-20	14	9	16	0	0	4	0	14	0	5	5	606
More than 20	7	3	19	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	4	606
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Do you consider that these indicators were sufficient to adequately assess the progress of your project?												
Yes	83	82	78	94	79	85	100	86	100	70	81	613
Not	10	9	3	0	4	4	0	0	0	0	5	613
I do not know	7	10	19	6	17	12	0	14	0	30	14	613
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
On average, how often do you collect data for these indicators? (if you have multiple situations, check all that apply)												
Permanently, as the activities progress	58	47	43	50	36	53	50	50	83	48	45	617
Each month	25	7	42	25	5	12	0	0	8	17	13	617
Every quarter	25	43	23	25	35	29	0	50	33	17	33	617
Every six months	0	7	2	0	3	6	0	0	0	26	4	617
Every year	1	9	3	0	17	4	0	17	0	4	10	617
Once during the project	6	6	2	13	9	2	50	0	0	0	6	617
Please tell us if you have used any systems to automate the transfer of indicator data?												
SMIS	69	87	80	88	83	77	0	0	17	9	76	621
eMS	3	1	0	0	2	2	0	100	92	23	5	621

Beneficiaries Survey	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	Support for Disadvantaged People (POAD)	Rom.-Bulgaria /Rom-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania -Serbia	ENI OPs	All OPs	
Sent by email	69	66	52	38	52	38	100	29	33	82	56	621
CD transfer	24	38	13	0	12	4	0	0	17	5	16	621
I did not use any system	4	5	10	6	9	15	0	0	0	5	8	621
Other self-loading tool (ex POCUForm)	56	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	7	621
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	621
Please tell us some details about the difficulties you have encountered in using the following systems:												
SMIS - Difficulties in selecting the data needed for the indicator (s)	31	44	32	13	20	16	.	0	33	18	26	545
SMIS - Difficulties in exporting data required for indicator (s)	33	40	30	27	18	22	.	0	33	9	26	545
SMIS - Difficulties in structuring the data required for the indicator (s) as required by the system	36	56	41	27	32	27	.	0	50	18	37	545
SMIS - Difficulties connecting to the system	38	32	32	33	22	27	.	0	50	9	28	545
SMIS - Difficulties with slow internet connection	28	26	27	20	18	20	.	50	33	0	22	545
SMIS - Not the case	31	21	32	40	43	38	.	50	33	73	37	545
eMS - Difficulties in selecting the data needed for the indicator (s)	0	4	11	0	3	0	.	33	33	8	6	164
eMS - Difficulties in exporting data required for indicator (s)	0	4	0	0	9	0	.	17	22	33	9	164
eMS - Difficulties in structuring the data required for the indicator (s) as required by the system	0	4	22	0	9	0	.	33	22	25	10	164

Beneficiaries Survey	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	Support for Disadvantaged People (POAD)	Rom.-Bulgaria /Rom-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania -Serbia	ENI OPs	All OPs	
eMS - Difficulties connecting to the system	6	7	0	0	4	0	.	0	11	33	7	164
eMS - Difficulties with slow internet connection	0	4	0	0	4	0	.	17	11	25	5	164
eMS - Not applicable	94	89	78	100	84	100	.	50	56	50	82	164
Email - Difficulties in selecting the data needed for the indicator (s)	8	16	8	0	7	8	50	0	0	0	9	289
Email - Difficulties in exporting data required for indicator (s)	11	9	17	0	7	8	50	0	0	6	9	289
Email - Difficulties in structuring the data required for the indicator (s) as required by the system	5	15	13	0	12	17	0	0	0	17	12	289
Email - Difficulties connecting to the system	0	4	17	20	5	0	0	0	0	11	5	289
Email - Difficulties with slow internet connection	14	11	29	20	10	13	0	50	0	22	13	289
Email - Not applicable	65	64	54	80	75	71	50	50	100	72	69	289
POCUForm - Difficulties in selecting the necessary data for the indicator (s)	38	0	0	0	2	0	.	0	0	0	12	165
POCUForm - Difficulties in exporting data required for indicator (s)	42	0	0	0	4	0	.	0	0	0	13	165
POCUForm - Difficulties in structuring the data required for the indicator (s) as required by the system	44	4	0	0	4	0	.	0	0	0	15	165

Beneficiaries Survey	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	Support for Disadvantaged People (POAD)	Rom.-Bulgaria /Rom-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia	ENI OPs	All OPs	
POCUForm - Difficulties connecting to the system	19	4	0	0	2	0	.	0	0	13	7	165
POCUForm - Difficulties with slow internet connection	15	0	13	0	5	0	.	50	0	13	8	165
POCUForm - Not the case	42	96	88	100	93	100	.	50	100	75	78	165
During 2019, was the progress of the project indicators in line with the initial planning?												
The values of the indicators are well below the initial planning	3	3	12	7	4	6	0	0	0	5	5	592
The values of the indicators are somewhat below the initial planning	22	18	22	33	19	15	0	0	36	29	20	592
The values of the indicators are in line with the initial planning	57	58	35	53	53	60	0	86	36	14	52	592
The values of the indicators are somewhat above the initial planning	9	10	3	7	6	12	0	0	9	0	7	592
The values of the indicators are far above the initial planning	1	3	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	592
I do not know	3	0	13	0	8	6	100	14	9	10	7	592
Not applicable	4	8	15	0	8	0	0	0	9	43	9	592
Overall, to what extent have these indicators been helpful in monitoring the performance of your project?												
The indicators accurately reflected the progress of my project and were helpful in improving implementation performance	69	51	51	80	60	65	0	17	82	67	60	569
The indicators accurately reflected the progress of implementation, but otherwise were not useful	15	34	34	13	21	22	100	17	18	5	23	569

Beneficiaries Survey	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	Support for Disadvantaged People (POAD)	Rom.-Bulgaria /Rom-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania -Serbia	ENI OPs	All OPs	
The indicators did not accurately reflect the progress of my project	12	11	12	7	14	10	0	50	9	29	13	569
The indicators were not useful at all	4	5	3	0	7	4	0	17	0	0	5	569
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
To what extent have the monitoring reports been useful for monitoring the progress of the project?												
The reports accurately reflected the progress of my project	76	78	81	93	81	80	0	33	91	71	79	575
The reports partially reflected the progress of my project	19	20	17	7	16	16	100	67	9	29	18	575
The reports did not accurately reflect the progress of my project	4	2	2	0	3	4	0	0	0	0	3	575
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
How did you find out about the monitoring and reporting requirements applicable to your project?												
Written documentation available online (eg Beneficiary's Manual, guides, procedures, etc.)	87	77	67	88	64	90	0	86	100	58	73	578
Written documentation received from IB / MA	52	55	75	41	55	47	100	29	33	71	56	578
Verbal guidance from OI / AM	54	48	53	24	39	57	0	43	50	46	45	578
Information sessions held by OI / AM	22	19	38	12	37	29	0	43	58	67	33	578
Documents received from other beneficiaries	10	5	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	8	4	578
Consultants	11	29	30	6	48	6	0	0	8	13	31	578
Financing contract	68	73	75	53	61	67	0	43	58	79	66	578
Other sources (please detail)	0	7	7	0	0	0	0	0	17	4	3	578
In general, how would you evaluate existing guidelines / procedures?												

Beneficiaries Survey	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	Support for Disadvantaged People (POAD)	Rom.-Bulgaria /Rom-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania -Serbia	ENI OPs	All OPs	
Clarity - Scale 1 (min) - 5 (max) - 1	5	4	0	0	1	0	0	14	0	0	2	564
Clarity - Scale 1 (min) - 5 (max) - 2	6	18	7	6	5	2	0	0	0	4	7	564
Clarity - Scale 1 (min) - 5 (max) - 3	26	28	19	13	24	25	0	29	42	28	25	564
Clarity - Scale 1 (min) - 5 (max) - 4	39	34	46	38	38	35	100	29	17	36	37	564
Clarity - Scale 1 (min) - 5 (max) - 5	24	16	28	44	31	38	0	29	42	32	29	564
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Utility - Scale 1 (min) - 5 (max) - 1	0	2	2	0	1	0	0	14	0	0	1	565
Utility - Scale 1 (min) - 5 (max) - 2	10	7	5	0	3	2	0	14	0	0	4	565
Utility - Scale 1 (min) - 5 (max) - 3	16	26	14	6	16	15	0	14	0	12	17	565
Utility - Scale 1 (min) - 5 (max) - 4	27	37	32	44	34	31	100	14	50	40	34	565
Utility - Scale 1 (min) - 5 (max) - 5	48	27	46	50	46	52	0	43	50	48	44	565
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
To what extent have the monitoring and reporting requirements for your project been met?												
Data collection for indicators - All requirements were met on time	67	77	58	81	64	59	100	50	50	29	64	551
Data collection for indicators - Most requirements have been met, but some have been delayed	32	19	37	13	28	33	0	50	42	62	29	551
Data collection for indicators - Some requirements have been met and some have never been met	2	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	551
Data collection for indicators - Most requirements have never been met	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	551
Data collection for indicators - Requirements not met	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	551

Beneficiaries Survey	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	Support for Disadvantaged People (POAD)	Rom.-Bulgaria /Rom-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania -Serbia	ENI OPs	All OPs	
Data collection for indicators - Not applicable	0	3	4	6	5	6	0	0	0	10	4	551
Data collection for indicators - I do not know	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	8	0	1	551
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Reporting indicators - All requirements were met on time	70	82	57	81	68	61	100	67	58	52	69	544
Reporting indicators - Most requirements have been met, but some have been delayed	29	14	36	13	22	31	0	33	42	29	24	544
Reporting indicators - Some requirements have been met and some have never been met	2	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	544
Reporting indicators - Most requirements have never been met	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	544
Reporting indicators - Requirements not met	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	544
Reporting indicators - Not applicable	0	2	7	0	7	6	0	0	0	14	5	544
Reporting indicators - I do not know	0	1	0	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	544
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Drafting of technical reports - All requirements were met on time	75	91	76	94	74	75	100	33	58	59	77	537
Drafting of technical reports - Most requirements were met, but some were delayed	25	8	19	0	19	21	0	67	42	18	18	537

Beneficiaries Survey	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	Support for Disadvantaged People (POAD)	Rom.-Bulgaria /Rom-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania -Serbia	ENI OPs	All OPs	
Drafting of technical reports - Some requirements have been met and some have never been met	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	5	1	537
Drafting of technical reports - Most requirements have never been met	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	537
Drafting of technical reports - Requirements not met	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	537
Drafting of technical reports - Not applicable	0	1	6	6	4	2	0	0	0	14	4	537
Drafting of technical reports - I do not know	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	5	1	537
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Preparation of financial statements - All requirements were met on time	67	82	78	87	66	83	100	29	70	38	71	515
Preparation of financial statements - Most requirements were met, but some were delayed	26	17	9	0	15	17	0	71	30	33	17	515
Preparation of financial statements - Some requirements have been met and some have never been met	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	5	1	515
Preparation of financial statements - Most requirements have never been met	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	515
Preparation of financial statements - Requirements not met	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	515
Preparation of financial statements - Not applicable	3	1	6	13	15	0	0	0	0	19	8	515
Preparation of financial statements - I do not know	0	0	6	0	3	0	0	0	0	5	2	515

Beneficiaries Survey	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	Support for Disadvantaged People (POAD)	Rom.-Bulgaria /Rom-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia	ENI OPs	All OPs	
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
How do you assess the difficulty of meeting the monitoring and reporting requirements?												
Difficulty meeting monitoring and reporting requirements - 1 - Very easy	5	7	5	24	9	6	0	0	0	4	8	568
Difficulty meeting monitoring and reporting requirements - 2 - Easy	23	12	17	24	25	31	0	0	33	22	22	568
Difficulty meeting monitoring and reporting requirements - 3 - Average	47	43	59	53	57	57	100	71	67	65	55	568
Difficulty meeting monitoring and reporting requirements - 4 - Difficult	19	25	19	0	9	6	0	14	0	9	13	568
Difficulty meeting monitoring and reporting requirements - 5 - Very difficult	6	13	0	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	3	568
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
What types of difficulties did you face in meeting the M&E requirements of your project?												
Unclear requirements	32	36	13	6	18	24	0	43	0	17	22	574
Contradictory requirements	30	24	8	0	10	6	0	43	0	8	14	574
Requirements that change frequently	41	50	25	18	24	10	0	14	8	13	28	574
Short response times	46	47	40	0	40	20	100	14	8	29	38	574
Large volume of data to be processed	59	59	65	18	40	37	0	43	50	33	47	574
Difficult to use tools	19	35	15	0	6	8	0	29	8	0	13	574
Lack of automated tools	22	27	13	6	16	16	0	29	8	21	18	574
It's not necessary	16	16	18	71	29	43	0	14	42	46	27	574
Other difficulties	3	4	10	0	2	2	0	14	0	0	3	574
In the last two years, have you received training to help you meet your M&E requirements? If so, how useful was it?												
Trainings given by OI - Yes	45	48	47	25	62	10	0	86	100	89	54	482
Trainings given by OI - No	55	52	53	75	38	83	100	14	0	11	45	482

Beneficiaries Survey	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	Support for Disadvantaged People (POAD)	Rom.-Bulgaria /Rom-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania -Serbia	ENI OPs	All OPs	
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Training provided by OI - Utility - Completely useless	15	5	14	0	7	20	.	29	0	6	9	293
Training provided by OI - Utility - Somewhat useless	0	5	4	0	1	0	.	29	0	0	2	293
Training provided by OI - Utility - Somewhat useful	29	36	21	100	24	20	.	14	25	17	26	293
Training provided by OI - Utility - Very useful	56	55	61	0	68	60	.	29	75	78	63	293
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Training given by AM - Yes	17	24	50	50	23	29	0	50	86	65	30	418
Training given by AM - No	83	76	50	50	77	71	100	50	14	35	70	418
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Training provided by AM - Utility - Completely useless	20	13	14	0	19	0	.	60	0	0	14	166
Training given by AM - Utility - Somewhat useless	7	9	4	0	6	6	.	0	0	8	5	166
Training given by AM - Utility - Somewhat useful	33	43	14	17	26	25	.	0	50	23	27	166
Training provided by AM - Utility - Very useful	40	35	68	83	50	69	.	40	50	69	54	166
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Training provided by other entities - Yes	17	21	22	71	21	11	0	25	67	8	21	323
Training provided by other entities - No	83	79	78	29	79	89	100	75	33	92	79	323
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Training provided by other entities - Utility - Completely useless	21	7	36	0	26	0	.	50	0	67	23	94

Beneficiaries Survey	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	Support for Disadvantaged People (POAD)	Rom.-Bulgaria /Rom-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia	ENI OPs	All OPs	
Training provided by other entities - Utility - Somewhat useless	7	0	7	0	0	50	.	0	0	0	3	94
Training provided by other entities - Utility - Somewhat useful	29	53	0	100	39	50	.	50	0	0	35	94
Training provided by other entities - Utility - Very useful	43	40	57	0	34	0	.	0	100	33	38	94
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is minimum and 5 is maximum, how do you assess the M&E requirements in terms of administrative burden?												
Data collection - Administrative burden - 1	5	10	9	15	12	9	0	0	22	5	10	506
Data collection - Administrative burden - 2	20	10	15	8	22	17	0	33	11	32	18	506
Data collection - Administrative burden - 3	28	38	42	62	37	32	0	50	67	42	38	506
Data collection - Administrative burden - 4	13	17	21	15	14	32	100	0	0	16	17	506
Data collection - Administrative burden - 5	33	23	13	0	15	11	0	17	0	5	17	506
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Calculation of indicators - Administrative burden - 1	14	18	15	14	19	27	0	17	33	5	18	498
Calculation of indicators - Administrative burden - 2	29	26	17	29	21	18	0	17	11	53	23	498
Calculation of indicators - Administrative burden - 3	34	34	46	43	35	32	0	50	56	32	36	498
Calculation of indicators - Administrative burden - 4	10	15	20	14	13	16	100	17	0	5	14	498

Beneficiaries Survey	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	Support for Disadvantaged People (POAD)	Rom.-Bulgaria /Rom-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania -Serbia	ENI OPs	All OPs	
Calculation of indicators - Administrative burden - 5	14	7	2	0	12	7	0	0	0	5	9	498
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Uploading information to the system - Administrative burden - 1	15	7	21	14	18	13	0	17	44	6	15	499
Uploading information to the system - Administrative burden - 2	12	20	29	21	21	20	0	33	22	47	22	499
Uploading information to the system - Administrative burden - 3	32	24	23	36	34	22	0	50	11	24	29	499
Uploading information to the system - Administrative burden - 4	17	28	15	29	15	33	100	0	22	24	20	499
Uploading information to the system - Administrative burden - 5	24	21	12	0	12	13	0	0	0	0	14	499
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Preparation of reports - Administrative burden - 1	5	11	8	7	13	7	0	0	33	5	10	505
Preparation of reports - Administrative burden - 2	12	13	36	20	23	13	0	33	11	30	20	505
Preparation of reports - Administrative burden - 3	37	21	28	40	36	36	0	67	33	30	33	505
Preparation of reports - Administrative burden - 4	26	31	21	33	18	36	100	0	22	25	24	505
Report preparation - Administrative burden - 5	19	24	8	0	9	9	0	0	0	10	12	505
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
During the project, did you provide suggestions or feedback on monitoring and reporting requirements or issues related to these activities?												
Yes	25	28	24	40	13	23	100	67	11	25	21	526

Beneficiaries Survey	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	Support for Disadvantaged People (POAD)	Rom.-Bulgaria /Rom-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia	ENI OPs	All OPs	
No	75	72	76	60	87	77	0	33	89	75	79	526
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Do you consider that it would be useful to have monitoring and reporting procedures applied uniformly by all managing authorities?												
Yes	71	70	72	53	71	62	100	67	22	60	68	520
No	14	7	4	20	6	9	0	17	33	10	8	520
I do not know	15	23	25	27	23	30	0	17	44	30	24	520
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	
Do you think it would be useful for the monitoring and reporting forms to be the same for all programs?												
Yes	59	59	46	38	65	60	0	67	44	60	60	526
No	17	16	30	25	11	10	0	33	22	10	15	526
I do not know	24	25	24	38	24	29	100	0	33	30	25	526
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	

B. Institutional stakeholders Survey

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with project and program monitoring/supervision role	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	R0-Bulgaria-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia	ENI OPs	Multiple Ops
Institution										
Managing Authority (MA)	12	38	100	67	35	63	33	0	0	20
National Authority (NA, for cross-border cooperation programs)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Intermediate Body (OI)	12	62	0	17	25	0	0	0	19	0
Regional Intermediate Body (OIR)	77	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Regional Development Agency (ADR)	0	0	0	0	40	0	0	0	25	0
Regional Office for Cross-Border Cooperation	0	0	0	0	0	0	44	100	56	0
Monitoring Committee (CM)	0	0	0	17	0	38	22	0	0	80
CCMAP	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
To what extent have program-level M&E activities changed as a result of requirements or guidance applied to all programs (eg transmitted by the MFE or the EC)?										
To a very small extent	5	0	50	0	10	.	0	.	0	.
To a small extent	16	9	50	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
To some extent	21	18	.	50	30	.	50	.	18	.
Largely	21	45	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
To a very large extent	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	9	.
It's not necessary	5	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	27	.
I do not know	32	27	.	50	60	.	50	.	45	.
Assessment - I don't know / I don't answer	17	17	.	25	0	.	0	.	10	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
What is your opinion on the allocation of M&E roles and responsibilities in the institution where you work?										
Duties at OP level - - Some roles / responsibilities are missing from the institutional mandate	6	10	.	0	0	.	0	.	20	.
Duties at OP level - - All responsibilities have been assigned	59	60	100	75	78	.	0	.	40	.
Duties at OP level - - Exist in regulations, but are not covered in practice	6	10	.	0	0	.	0	.	10	.

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with project and program monitoring/supervision role	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	R0-Bulgaria-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia	ENI OPs	Multiple Ops
Duties at the PO level - - I don't know	29	20	.	25	11	.	100	.	20	.
Staff responsibilities - - Some roles / responsibilities are missing from the institutional mandate	6	10	.	25	0	.	0	.	40	.
Staff responsibilities - - All responsibilities have been assigned	59	60	100	50	78	.	0	.	50	.
Staff duties - - Exist in regulations, but not covered in practice	6	10	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Staff duties - - I don't know	24	20	.	0	22	.	100	.	10	.
On a scale of 1 (a very small extent) to 5 (applicable to a very large extent), how do you assess the M&E procedures applicable at institution level in the light of the following criteria?										
Project monitoring procedure - Clarity - 1	0	0	.	0	14	.	0	.	0	.
Project monitoring procedure - Clarity - 2	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Project monitoring procedure - Clarity - 3	6	25	.	0	0	.	100	.	10	.
Project monitoring procedure - Clarity - 4	63	13	50	25	71	.	0	.	30	.
Project monitoring procedure - Clarity - 5	31	63	50	75	14	.	0	.	60	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Project monitoring procedure - Utility - 1	0	0	.	0	14	.	0	.	0	.
Project monitoring procedure - Utility - 2	0	14	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Project monitoring procedure - Utility - 3	6	14	.	25	14	.	100	.	11	.
Project monitoring procedure - Utility - 4	50	14	.	0	57	.	0	.	22	.
Project monitoring procedure - Utility - 5	44	57	100	75	14	.	0	.	67	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Project monitoring procedure - Ease of use - 1	0	13	.	0	14	.	0	.	0	.
Project monitoring procedure - Ease of use - 2	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Project monitoring procedure - Ease of use - 3	28	13	.	0	14	.	100	.	44	.
Project monitoring procedure - Ease of use - 4	50	50	50	25	57	.	0	.	33	.
Project monitoring procedure - Ease of use - 5	22	25	50	75	14	.	0	.	22	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Project monitoring procedure - Relevance for proper monitoring - 1	0	0	.	0	14	.	0	.	0	.

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with project and program monitoring/supervision role	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	R0-Bulgaria-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia	ENI OPs	Multiple Ops
Project monitoring procedure - Relevance for proper monitoring - 2	0	14	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Project monitoring procedure - Relevance for proper monitoring - 3	13	0	.	0	14	.	100	.	0	.
Project monitoring procedure - Relevance for proper monitoring - 4	56	29	.	50	43	.	0	.	67	.
Project monitoring procedure - Relevance for proper monitoring - 5	31	57	100	50	29	.	0	.	33	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Program monitoring procedure - Clarity - 1	0	0	.	0	33	.	.	.	0	.
Program monitoring procedure - Clarity - 2	0	0	.	0	0	.	.	.	0	.
Program monitoring procedure - Clarity - 3	0	0	.	0	0	.	.	.	75	.
Program monitoring procedure - Clarity - 4	57	17	.	100	0	.	.	.	0	.
Program monitoring procedure - Clarity - 5	43	83	100	0	67	.	.	.	25	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Program Monitoring Procedure - Utility - 1	0	0	.	0	33	.	.	.	0	.
Program Monitoring Procedure - Utility - 2	0	0		0	0	.	.	.	25	.
Program Monitoring Procedure - Utility - 3	0	0	.	100	0	.	.	.	0	.
Program Monitoring Procedure - Utility - 4	57	0	.	0	0	.	.	.	50	.
Program Monitoring Procedure - Utility - 5	43	100	.	0	67	.	.	.	25	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Program monitoring procedure - Ease of use - 1	0	0	100	0	33	.	.	.	0	.
Program monitoring procedure - Ease of use - 2	0	0	.	0	0	.	.	.	25	.
Program monitoring procedure - Ease of use - 3	22	20	.	0	0	.	.	.	50	.
Program monitoring procedure - Ease of use - 4	44	0	.	0	0	.	.	.	0	.
Program monitoring procedure - Ease of use - 5	33	80	100	100	67	.	.	.	25	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Program monitoring procedure - Relevance to proper monitoring - 1	0	0	.	0	25	.	.	.	0	.
Program monitoring procedure - Relevance to proper monitoring - 2	0	0	.	0	0	.	.	.	25	.
Program monitoring procedure - Relevance to proper monitoring - 3	0	0	.	0	0	.	.	.	50	.

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with project and program monitoring/supervision role	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	R0-Bulgaria-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia	ENI OPs	Multiple Ops
Program monitoring procedure - Relevance to proper monitoring - 4	57	20	.	100	25	.	.	.	0	.
Program monitoring procedure - Relevance to proper monitoring - 5	43	80	100	0	50	.	.	.	25	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Evaluation procedure - Clarity - 1	0	0	.	0	25	.	.	.	0	.
Evaluation procedure - Clarity - 2	0	0	.	0	0	.	.	.	0	.
Evaluation procedure - Clarity - 3	0	17	.	100	0	.	.	.	33	.
Evaluation procedure - Clarity - 4	75	17	50	0	0	.	.	.	33	.
Evaluation procedure - Clarity - 5	25	67	50	0	75	.	.	.	33	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Evaluation procedure - Utility - 1	0	0	.	0	25	.	.	.	0	.
Evaluation procedure - Utility - 2	0	0	.	0	0	.	.	.	0	.
Evaluation procedure - Utility - 3	0	0	.	0	25	.	.	.	0	.
Evaluation procedure - Utility - 4	50	25	100	0	25	.	.	.	43	.
Evaluation procedure - Utility - 5	50	75	.	100	25	.	.	.	57	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Evaluation procedure - Ease of use - 1	0	0	.	0	25	.	.	.	0	.
Evaluation procedure - Ease of use - 2	0	0	.	0	0	.	.	.	0	.
Evaluation procedure - Ease of use - 3	30	25	.	100	0	.	.	.	33	.
Evaluation procedure - Ease of use - 4	50	25	50	0	0	.	.	.	33	.
Evaluation procedure - Ease of use - 5	20	50	50	0	75	.	.	.	33	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Assessment procedure - Relevance for proper monitoring - 1	0	0	.	.	20	.	.	.	0	.
Assessment procedure - Relevance for proper monitoring - 2	0	0	.	.	0	.	.	.	0	.
Assessment procedure - Relevance for proper monitoring - 3	0	0	.	.	40	.	.	.	0	.
Assessment procedure - Relevance for proper monitoring - 4	57	20	50	.	20	.	.	.	50	.
Assessment procedure - Relevance for proper monitoring - 5	43	80	50	.	20	.	.	.	50	.

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with project and program monitoring/supervision role	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	R0-Bulgaria-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia	ENI OPs	Multiple Ops
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Which of the following solutions do you think are suitable for improving the M&E activity?										
A clearer definition of responsibilities	50	44	.	0	22	.	0	.	50	.
Eliminate overlaps in defining tasks	39	44	100	50	22	.	100	.	50	.
More generous deadlines for carrying out activities	44	67	.	25	22	.	0	.	60	.
Standardization of forms	22	33	.	50	33	.	100	.	10	.
Modification of forms	11	44	.	25	44	.	100	.	30	.
Training	78	89	100	50	89	.	100	.	60	.
Additional guides and instructions	39	78	.	25	33	.	100	.	40	.
In your opinion, how do you assess the progress in achieving the objectives for 2023 in terms of the defined indicators, at the level of the OP for which you are responsible?										
The program will fully achieve its objectives, all targets are about to be achieved	18	33	.	25	33	.	0	.	40	.
The program will achieve its goals, over 75 of the targets are about to be reached	53	33	100	75	44	.	0	.	20	.
The program will partially achieve its objectives, between 50 and 75 of the targets are about to be reached	6	11	.	0	11	.	100	.	20	.
The program will achieve its objectives to a small extent, between 25 and 50 of the targets are about to be reached	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
The program will not achieve its goals, less than 25 of the targets are about to be met	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
I do not know	24	22	.	0	11	.	0	.	20	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
To what extent do you consider that the selected indicators adequately capture the results of the OP?										
The indicators accurately reflected the progress of the program and were helpful in improving implementation performance	89	71	.	75	44	.	100	.	67	.
The indicators accurately reflected the progress of implementation, but otherwise were not useful	6	14	.	25	33	.	0	.	22	.
The indicators did not accurately reflect the progress of the program	6	14	.	0	22	.	0	.	11	.

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with project and program monitoring/supervision role	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	R0-Bulgaria-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia	ENI OPs	Multiple Ops
The indicators were not useful at all	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
In your opinion, what are the main challenges / problems related to current data collection, transmission and aggregation systems?										
Difficulties in selecting the necessary data for indicators	54	33	.	33	40	.	100	.	60	.
Difficulties in exporting data required for indicators	62	50	.	33	40	.	100	.	60	.
Difficulties in structuring the data required for indicators in the way required by the system	46	83	.	33	60	.	100	.	40	.
Difficulties connecting to the system	31	17	.	33	40	.	100	.	0	.
Difficulties with slow internet connection	15	17	.	67	20	.	0	.	0	.
What improvements do you think would be appropriate in relation to the way the institution you work for manages the data collection process?										
Clear definition of data sources and collection intervals	50	22	.	0	63	.	0	.	13	.
Clearly establish responsibilities for data collection at the level of all institutions involved	57	56	.	33	13	.	0	.	25	.
Development of specific tools for data collection	57	56	.	67	75	.	100	.	50	.
Providing clear guidance / instructions for the actors involved	79	67	.	67	50	.	100	.	75	.
Verification / validation of data at source	36	78	.	0	38	.	0	.	25	.
Based on your experience, what are the main reporting issues / challenges you face?										
Data availability (eg on indicators, participants, etc.)	39	50	.	50	57	.	100	.	63	.
Data accuracy	50	75	.	75	71	.	100	.	25	.
Completeness of data	56	38	50	75	57	.	100	.	50	.
Data is not provided on time	56	63	.	75	57	.	100	.	38	.
Failure to report data by responsible persons / entities	33	13	.	25	57	.	0	.	50	.
Data analysis	22	38	50	0	0	.	100	.	0	.
Difficulties associated with writing the report	28	13	.	50	0	.	0	.	38	.
In your opinion, to what extent do the beneficiaries understand their reporting obligations?										
To a very large extent	11	0	100	0	17	.	0	.	10	.

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with project and program monitoring/supervision role	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	R0-Bulgaria-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia	ENI OPs	Multiple Ops
Largely	39	50	.	100	50	.	0	.	30	.
To some extent	50	33	.	0	17	.	100	.	30	.
To a small extent	0	17	.	0	17	.	0	.	30	.
Not at all	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
How do you assess the overall capacity of the beneficiaries to prepare the required reports?										
Very good capacity	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Good capacity	67	33	100	50	50	.	0	.	40	.
Average capacity	33	50	.	50	17	.	0	.	40	.
Low capacity	0	17	.	0	33	.	100	.	20	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
To what extent do the actors involved in the field of M&E have the necessary skills and capacity to perform M&E tasks?										
Institution management - - To a large extent	86	60	100	50	0	.	0	.	50	.
Institution management - - To a large extent	14	20	.	50	100	.	0	.	0	.
Institution management - - To some extent	0	0	.	0	0	.	100	.	0	.
Institution management - - To a small extent	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Institution management - - Not at all	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Institution management - - I don't know	0	20	.	0	0	.	0	.	50	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Program monitoring service - - To a large extent	67	60	100	50	0	.	0	.	0	.
Program monitoring service - - To a large extent	17	20	.	50	100	.	0	.	50	.
Program monitoring service - - To some extent	0	20	.	0	0	.	100	.	0	.
Program monitoring service - - To a small extent	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Program monitoring service - - Not at all	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Program monitoring service - - I do not know	17	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	50	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with project and program monitoring/supervision role	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	R0-Bulgaria-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia	ENI OPs	Multiple Ops
Project M&E service - - To a very large extent	71	25	100	50	100	.	0	.	0	.
Project M&E service - - To a large extent	29	50	.	50	0	.	0	.	50	.
Project M&E service - - To some extent	0	25	.	0	0	.	100	.	0	.
Project M&E service - - To a small extent	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Project M&E service - - Not at all	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Project M&E service - - I don't know	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	50	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Program evaluation unit - - To a very large extent	50	50	.	0	100	.	0	.	0	.
Program evaluation unit - - To a large extent	25	25	.	100	0	.	0	.	0	.
Program evaluation unit - - To some extent	0	0	.	0	0	.	100	.	0	.
Program evaluation unit - - To a small extent	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Program evaluation unit - - Not at all	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Program evaluation unit - - I don't know	25	25	.	0	0	.	0	.	100	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Monitoring Committee - - To a very large extent	25	50	.	50	0	.	0	.	0	.
Monitoring Committee - - To a large extent	50	25	.	50	0	.	0	.	50	.
Monitoring Committee - - To some extent	0	0	.	0	0	.	100	.	0	.
Monitoring Committee - - To a small extent	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Monitoring Committee - - Not at all	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Monitoring Committee - - I don't know	25	25	.	0	100	.	0	.	50	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Members of the evaluation working group - - To a very large extent	75	25	.	0	.	.	0	.	0	.
Members of the evaluation working group - - To a large extent	25	25	.	100	.	.	0	.	0	.
Members of the evaluation working group - - To some extent	0	25	.	0	.	.	0	.	0	.
Members of the evaluation working group - - To a small extent	0	0	.	0	.	.	0	.	0	.
Members of the evaluation working group - - Not at all	0	0	.	0	.	.	0	.	0	.

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with project and program monitoring/supervision role	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	R0-Bulgaria-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia	ENI OPs	Multiple Ops
Members of the evaluation working group - - I don't know	0	25	.	0	.	.	100	.	100	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
To what extent do you know the OP evaluation plan?										
Largely	0	0	.	33	0	.	0	.	25	.
To some extent	44	20	.	0	0	.	100	.	0	.
To a small extent	22	60	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
To a very small extent	22	20	.	0	100	.	0	.	25	.
Not at all	11	0	100	67	0	.	0	.	50	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
To your knowledge, to what extent has the evaluation plan been implemented?										
Largely	14	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	50	.
To some extent	86	40	.	50	100	.	100	.	0	.
To a small extent	0	40	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
To a very small extent	0	20	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Not at all	0	0	.	50	0	.	0	.	50	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
To your knowledge, to what extent did the results of the evaluations influence the planning of the next programming period?										
Largely	57	25	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
To some extent	43	25	.	100	100	.	100	.	100	.
To a small extent	0	25	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
To a very small extent	0	0	100	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Not at all	0	25	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
To what extent have the findings of the evaluations been widely disseminated within and outside the entity in which you work?										
Largely	83	50	.	0	100	.	0	.	0	.
To some extent	0	25	100	0	0	.	0	.	100	.

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with project and program monitoring/supervision role	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	R0-Bulgaria-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia	ENI OPs	Multiple Ops
To a small extent	0	0	.	100	0	.	100	.	0	.
To a very small extent	17	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Not at all	0	25	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
How do you assess the functionality of the M&E system at the level of the AM / OI in which you work?										
Very good	45	0	33	0	100	.	0	.	0	.
Hi	55	75	.	67	0	.	100	.	100	.
Moderate	0	0	67	33	0	.	0	.	0	.
Weak	0	25	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Very thin	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
What do you consider to be the main challenges in terms of M&E activities?										
Data availability	50	100	33	33	0	.	0	.	0	.
Insufficient staff	50	50	33	100	100	.	0	.	67	.
Reduced skills of M&E staff	10	25	.	33	0	.	0	.	0	.
Insufficient guidance	20	50	.	0	0	.	100	.	67	.
Lack of adequate tools for data collection, validation and aggregation	10	50	33	67	0	.	100	.	33	.
Reduced skills in data analysis and interpretation	20	25	33	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Lack of a culture of using M&E information to support decision-making	10	50	67	67	100	.	100	.	0	.
Insufficient importance given to M&E activity and its results	10	50	33	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
To what extent does the management of the MA / IB in which you work actively promote M&E?										
Largely	64	50	.	67	100	.	0	.	100	.
To some extent	18	25	.	33	0	.	0	.	0	.
To a small extent	9	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
To a very small extent	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Not at all	0	25	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with project and program monitoring/supervision role	Human Capital (POCU)	Competitiveness (POC)	Large Infrastructure (POIM)	Technical Assistance (POAT)	Regional (POR)	Administrative Capacity (POCA)	R0-Bulgaria-Hungary	Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia	ENI OPs	Multiple Ops
I do not know	9	0	.	0	0	.	100	.	0	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
To what extent do you consider that M&E have been institutionalized and that M&E activities have been integrated into the day-to-day work of the entity you represent?										
Largely	64	50	.	67	100	.	0	.	67	.
To some extent	18	25	100	33	0	.	0	.	0	.
To a small extent	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
To a very small extent	0	25	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
Not at all	0	0	.	0	0	.	0	.	33	.
I do not know	18	0	.	0	0	.	100	.	0	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Do the specialists in the MA / OI where you work use M&E for learning and development?										
Yes	45	50	50	33	100	.	0	.	67	.
Not	0	25	.	0	0	.	0	.	0	.
I do not know	55	25	50	67	0	.	100	.	33	.
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with evaluation role	All OPs
	Share over total respondents ( )
Institution	
Managing Authority (MA)	59
National Authority (NA, for cross-border cooperation programs)	12
Intermediate Body (OI)	6
Regional Intermediate Body (OIR)	6
Regional Development Agency (ADR)	12
Monitoring Committee (CM)	6
Total	**100**
What is your opinion on the allocation of M&E roles and responsibilities in the institution where you work?	
Tasks at the level of the institutions responsible for the implementation of the OP - - Some roles / responsibilities are missing from the institutional mandate	25
Tasks at the level of the institutions responsible for the implementation of the OP - - All responsibilities have been allocated	75
Staff responsibilities - - Some roles / responsibilities are missing from the institutional mandate	14
Staff responsibilities - - All responsibilities have been assigned	71
Staff duties - - I don't know	14
Which of the following solutions do you think are suitable for improving the M&E activity?	
A clearer definition of responsibilities	14
Eliminate overlaps in defining tasks	43
More generous deadlines for carrying out activities	43
Standardization of forms	14
Modification of forms	14
Training	100
Additional guides and instructions	57
To what extent do you consider that the selected indicators adequately capture the results of the OP?	
The indicators accurately reflected the progress of the program and were helpful in improving implementation performance	71
The indicators accurately reflected the progress of implementation, but otherwise were not useful	14

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with evaluation role	All OPs
	Share over total respondents ( )
The indicators did not accurately reflect the progress of the program	14
Total	100
In your opinion, what were the main problems / challenges related to the indicators defined for the OP?	
Too many indicators	43
Irrelevant indicators	43
Unclear indicators	29
It's not necessary	14
I do not know	14
To your knowledge, are data collection responsibilities included in the relevant legislation / guidelines / procedures?	
Yes, all responsibilities are included - At program level	83
Yes, all responsibilities are included - At project level	17
Total	100
Yes, some responsibilities are included, but some are missing - At the program level	67
Yes, some responsibilities are included, but some are missing - At the project level	33
Total	100
In your opinion, what are the main challenges / problems related to current data collection, transmission and aggregation systems?	
Difficulties in selecting the necessary data for indicators	29
Difficulties in exporting data required for indicators	29
Difficulties in structuring the data required for indicators in the way required by the system	29
I do not know	29
What improvements do you think would be appropriate in relation to the way the institution you work for manages the data collection process?	
Clear definition of data sources and collection intervals	33
Clearly establish responsibilities for data collection at the level of all institutions involved	17
Development of specific tools for data collection	50
Providing clear guidance / instructions for the actors involved	17

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with evaluation role	All OPs
	Share over total respondents ( )
Verification / validation of data at source	17
I do not know	17
Based on your experience, what are the main reporting issues / challenges you face?	
Data availability (eg on indicators, participants, etc.)	50
Data accuracy	33
Completeness of data	17
Data is not provided on time	33
Failure to report data by responsible persons / entities	33
Data analysis	33
Difficulties associated with writing the report	33
Not applicable	17
How often do you use the following types of information to substantiate program management recommendations?	
Information on the degree of achievement of the indicators targets - - Always	50
Information on the degree of achievement of indicator targets - - Often	50
Total	**100**
Sectoral statistics - - Always	25
Sectoral statistics - - Often	50
Sectoral statistics - - Rarely	25
Total	**100**
National statistics - - Often	50
National statistics - - Rarely	50
Total	**100**
Data on the implementation of complementary interventions supported by European funds - - Often	50
Data on the implementation of complementary interventions supported by European funds - - Rarely	50
Total	**100**
Data on the financial progress of the program - - Always	50

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with evaluation role	All OPs
	Share over total respondents ( )
Data on the financial progress of the program - - Often	50
Total	**100**
Data on calls launched and contracts signed - - Always	50
Data on calls launched and contracts signed - - Often	25
Data on calls launched and contracts signed - - Rarely	25
Total	**100**
In your opinion, does the management staff use the information from the performance reports in their current activity?	
RAI - - Yes	67
RAI - - I don't know	33
Total	**100**
Half-yearly reports - - Yes	50
Half-yearly reports - - I don't know	50
Total	**100**
Progress reports - - Yes	60
Progress reports - - I don't know	40
Total	**100**
Reports on the degree of achievement of indicators - - Yes	80
Reports on the degree of achievement of indicators - - I do not know	20
Total	**100**
Evaluation reports at OP level - - Yes	83
Evaluation reports at OP level - - I don't know	17
Total	**100**
How would you describe the receptivity of CEOs / executives who use data to substantiate decisions / policies?	
Very receptive	83
Receptive only to a small extent	17
Total	**100**

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with evaluation role	All OPs
	Share over total respondents ( )
To what extent do the actors involved in the field of M&E have the necessary skills and capacity to perform M&E tasks?	
Institution management - - To a large extent	67
Institution management - - To a large extent	17
Institution management - - To some extent	17
Total	**100**
Program monitoring service - - To a large extent	100
Total	**100**
Project M&E service - - To a very large extent	40
Project M&E service - - To a large extent	40
Project M&E service - - To some extent	20
Total	**100**
Program evaluation unit - - To a very large extent	67
Program evaluation unit - - To a large extent	33
Total	**100**
Monitoring Committee - - To a very large extent	25
Monitoring Committee - - To a large extent	75
Total	**100**
Members of the evaluation working group - - To a very large extent	60
Members of the evaluation working group - - To a large extent	40
Total	**100**
In the last three years, what have been organized on M&E training courses on the following topics?	
The logic of the intervention	83
Project monitoring	50
Collection and reporting of indicators	33
Preparation of reports	33
Data analysis and interpretation	50

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with evaluation role	All OPs
	Share over total respondents ( )
Software use (Excel, Powerpoint; statistical analysis programs, etc.)	33
What are the main gaps in understanding, interpreting and using information?	
Reduced skills in data analysis	17
Limited ability to interpret data	33
Insufficient knowledge of the analyzed field	33
Insufficient information on the purpose for which the data are used, which is reflected in the low relevance of the reports produced	50
I do not know	33
Not necessary	17
To what extent have the evaluation plans you manage been implemented?	
Largely	83
To some extent	17
Total	**100**
Please rate the quality of the evaluation reports that your unit has managed:	
Interim evaluations - Very good	33
Interim evaluations - Good	67
Total	100
Ex-post evaluations - Very good	20
Ex-post evaluations - Good	40
Ex-post evaluations - I don't know	40
Total	**100**
Process Evaluations - High	50
Process evaluations - I don't know	50
Total	**100**
Impact assessments - Very good	40
Impact Assessments - High	60
Total	**100**

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with evaluation role	All OPs
	Share over total respondents ( )
Ad hoc evaluations - Very good	33
Ad hoc evaluations - Good	33
Ad hoc evaluations - I don't know	33
Total	**100**
For each evaluation, please provide us with information on the status of implementation of the recommendations made and the follow-up measures, as well as whether there have been impediments in the implementation of the recommendations.	
Interim evaluations - - All recommendations have been implemented	75
Interim evaluations - - Between 25 and 50 of the recommendations were implemented	25
Total	**100**
Ex-post evaluations - - All recommendations have been implemented	67
Ex-post evaluations - - Between 50 and 75 of the recommendations were implemented	33
Total	**100**
Process evaluations - - All recommendations have been implemented	50
Process evaluations - - Between 75 and 100 of the recommendations have been implemented	50
Total	**100**
Impact assessments - - All recommendations have been implemented	33
Impact assessments - - Between 75 and 100 of the recommendations have been implemented	33
Impact assessments - - Between 50 and 75 of the recommendations have been implemented	33
Total	**100**
Ad-hoc evaluations - - Between 75 and 100 of the recommendations were implemented	100
Total	**100**
To what extent have the findings of the evaluations been widely disseminated within and outside the entity in which you work?	
Largely	67
To some extent	33
Given that there have been different approaches to managing evaluation activities from one MA to another, what do you think is the most effective approach to locating the evaluation unit?	
Centralized at MFE	17

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with evaluation role	All OPs
	Share over total respondents ( )
Managed by AMs	83
Total	**100**
How do you assess the functionality of the M&E system at the level of the AM / OI in which you work?	
Very good	50
Hi	33
Weak	17
Total	**100**
What do you consider to be the main challenges in terms of M&E activities?	
Data availability	60
Insufficient staff	60
Reduced skills of M&E staff	20
Insufficient guidance	20
Lack of adequate tools for data collection, validation and aggregation	40
Reduced skills in data analysis and interpretation	40
Lack of a culture of using M&E information to support decision-making	20
Insufficient importance given to M&E activity and its results	20
Other issues (please, detailed)	20
In your opinion, what are the M&E activities that the institution you work for best implements?	
Data collection	50
Data validation	33
Data analysis and processing	50
Reporting	83
Performance management	17
Evaluation	50
Overall, do you consider the importance and role of M&E to be appreciated?	
At the MA / OI level - - Yes	67

Institutional stakeholders Survey: respondents with evaluation role	All OPs
	Share over total respondents ( )
At the MA / OI level - - No.	17
At AM or IB level - - Yes	67
At AM or IB level - - No.	17
At the inter-ministerial level - - Yes	33
At the inter-ministerial level - - No.	17
At the inter-ministerial level - - I don't know	17
At the MFE level - - Yes	50
At the MFE level - - No.	17
At the MFE level - - I don't know	17
To what extent does the management of the MA / IB in which you work actively promote M&E?	
Largely	67
To some extent	17
To a small extent	17
To what extent do you consider that M&E have been institutionalized and that M&E activities have been integrated into the day-to-day work of the entity you represent?	
Largely	67
To some extent	33
Total	**100**
Do the specialists in the MA / OI where you work use M&E for learning and development?	
Yes	83
I do not know	**17**
Total	**100**

ROMANIA

Project title: “Technical assistance to support evaluation capacity”

Beneficiary of project: Ministry of European Investments and Projects

Publishing date: March 2021

Project co-financed from the European Regional Development Fund through Romania’s Technical Assistance Operational Program 2014-2020