



Improving Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity in the Context of EU-funded Programs in Romania (2021-2027)
P 174133

**Towards a results-oriented M&E system
Institutional, procedural, and legislative assessment**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Date: March 30, 2021

Location: Webex

PARTICIPANTS

World bank (WORLD BANK) Team: Tatiana Proskuryakova (Country manager), Victor Sulla (TTL), Maddalena Honorati (Co-TTL), Adina Iorganda (SPJ Specialist), Richard Harding (International expert), Elena Botezatu (Expert), Alina Bosoi (Expert), Jerome Bleuchot (Expert), Liviu Fetic (Expert), Andrei Zambor (Assistant);

Ministry of European Investments and Projects (MEIP): Marius-Mihai Vasiliu (Secretary of State), Irina Radu (Director);

MEIP Evaluation Unit: Claudia Magdalina (Head of Service), Maria Mălureanu (Expert), Alexandra Voiculescu (Expert);

Workshop guests: Annex 1

Workshop agenda: Annex 2

Background

Romania is expected to receive approximately EUR 30.6 billion of funding from European Structural and Investment Funds. These funds will support operational programs across 11 EU thematic objectives. The Government of Romania will also need to implement changes in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices. Therefore, the Ministry of European Investments and Projects have engaged the World Bank through a reimbursable advisory service (RAS) agreement aimed at Improving Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity in the Context of EU-funded Programs in Romania. The World Bank has collaborated with the Government of Romania in evaluating the current M&E system in the 2014-2020 period, determining options for system improvements, and going to support going forward the implementation of the recommendations.

MAIN POINTS:

MEIP introductory points

Mr. Vasiliu introduced the approach regarding the current programming period and how the M&E system will be built, considering the specific elements of the 2021-27 period and the differences from the 2014-2020 period. The process starts with the impact assessment of the M&E system used in the 2014-20 period conducted by the World Bank, identifying the weak points and the problems that have occurred. The start of the 2021-2027 implementing period will overlap with the closing of the 2014-20 programs and with the implementation of National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), which is planned for 2021-2026, and this represents a challenge for Romania's administrative capacity. In this context, there is a need to change the way problems are handled, by implementing nationwide the result orientation approach required by the EC for the PNRR. The focus should be on results, on the impact on the economic activity and not only on the funds absorption rate. The current policy of MEIP is to simplify the programming process for Cohesion Funds, according to the provisions of the regulatory framework. All organizations involved in implementation are expected to follow this new approach.

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P 174133

WB introductory points

Mrs. Tatiana Proskuryakova reminded that Romania is a tremendous success story of the European Cohesion Policy. It has demonstrated remarkable growth rates and improvement in the average income during the EU membership years. This was possible through the structural reforms and the access of the European funding during the latest two programming periods. However, there are persistent regional and social gaps, with a quarter of population living in poverty. It's not the funding that stops Romania from closing these gaps, but the way that public policies are organized. Mrs. Tatiana Proskuryakova also pinpointed that the focus should be on results and on putting the beneficiaries first, rather than focusing just on spending the money. Moreover, the discussion should focus on the way we measure results, and on the development of an effective and agile policy tool that gives real time information for policy makers.

EC introductory points

Simplification was used for drafting the next generation of programmes, by reducing the number of policy objectives and investment priorities. For the first time, there will be an extensive list of common indicators for the MAs to choose the relevant ones.

The EC help-desk has reviewed 47 evaluations regarding cohesion policy in Romania, with the main findings echoing the WB report. The limited number of impact evaluations highlights the lack of outcomes and reflect delays in implementation, similar to other EU members. Also, many evaluations are affected by data limitations, including limited use of administrative data.

Key findings and recommendations of the WB assessment report

Mrs. Maddalena Honorati presented the key findings and recommendations of the “Assessment of the institutional, procedural and legislative assessment of Romania EU funded programs” report. This activity included an assessment of 19 OPs, using several data collection methods: an extensive document review, 61 key informant interviews conducted with relevant stakeholders, quantitative analysis of indicators, focus groups, a survey of institutional actors (300) and a beneficiaries’ survey (more than 1000 respondents). Some key findings were highlighted.

Overall, the functions and processes of the M&E system have significantly improved compared with the previous programming period. One of Romania’s monitoring system strengths is the experience of the staff involved the process, built over the last 10 years. The assessment identified weaknesses regarding the overemphasis on the compliance with the regulatory framework, limiting the result orientation and the overall performance of the system.

Regarding the Evaluation system, the key strengths are centered on the leading role by MEIP Evaluation Unit (ECU), including contributions from Evaluation Steering Committees. In terms of the weaknesses identified, these are largely caused by the connection between the evaluation and the OP decision making. Also, there is a lack of interest in MCs about evaluation findings, lengthy and cumbersome public procurement and restricted availability of high-level expertise.

The report includes a set of recommendations to improve ESIF M&E systems for 2021-2027 programming period:

- Increase awareness and capacity of decision-makers;
- Establish a participatory approach to develop specific indicators;
- Ensure optimal functionality of SMIS from the beginning of the programming period;
- Radical simplification of data management, monitoring and reporting procedures;

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P 174133

- Provide unitary guidance to beneficiaries;
- Build evaluation culture on both demand and supply sides;
- Decentralize evaluation function to individual MAs (except ETC), by setting up Evaluation Units under the direct coordination of the general directors, but retain central coordination;
- Ensure full involvement of the MAs and IBs in the preparation of evaluation plans;
- Plan data collection system to generate comprehensive context data for planned evaluations;

Proposed Action Plan and areas for World Bank support

Mrs. Claudia Magdalena presented the Action Plan envisaged to operationalize the recommendations from the report. The proposed activities were structured under eleven main themes contributing to developing a result-oriented M&E system. These themes are: (i) support for decision makers; (ii) indicators (including drafting unitary guidance); (iii) IT systems; (iv) simplification of M&E procedures, data collection & risk management; (v) coordination between OP structures (including better alignment to national strategies); (vi) support for beneficiaries; (vii) Evaluation Plans; (viii) evaluation structures (setting up of Evaluation Units); (xii) dissemination of evaluation results; (x) M&E staff skills development.

Mr. Victor Sulla presented future WB support under the M&E RAS. In the next two years the WB team will focus their efforts on providing: unitary Guidance on Indicators, and on Evaluation Plans drafting; drafting additional indicators (specific or contextual at OP level); simplifying M&E procedures, both at the level at MA and in relation to beneficiaries, providing trainings to MA and IBs' staff and to selected beneficiaries.

Q&A session

The presentation was followed by a substantive discussion. The key points were:

- The reason for developing common output and result indicators is to minimize the need for additional specific indicators. The common indicators were defined in collaboration with the MS, precisely with the objective of providing common indicators for a large share of interventions.
- MRDPW will coordinate eight regional programmes in the next programming period, while the MA will ensure a unitary and result-oriented M&E system.
- Regarding the digital transformation, all the main registries should be connected and include the necessary automatization and open data to be used, including artificial intelligence.
- The MEIP team pointed out that for the future programming period, the data collection will be placed at the beneficiary level, having context indicators to be used in the evaluation of fund interventions. The change at the societal level is possible only if a change at the project level is observed.
- Interoperability is an important issue, but not yet implemented. The WB team pointed

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P 174133

out the importance of connecting the government policies priorities with the M&E system. The 2021-2027 M&E system will be based on the new framework for European funds.

- The results and the recommendations of the analysis come at the right time for the MEIP team which is in the process of drafting the new generation of OPs, and are useful for developing more pragmatic tools to reduce the gap between M&E results and decision making.

List of abbreviations

CTE - European Territorial Cooperation
DCSM -System Coordination and Monitoring Directorate
EU - European Union
IBs -Intermediate Bodies
M&E - Monitoring and Evaluation
MA - Management Authority
MS - Member States
MEIP - Ministry of European Investments and Projects
PNRR - National Recovery and Resilience Plan
MRDPW - Ministry of Regional development and Public Works
RAS - Reimbursable Service Agreement
RDA - Regional Development Agency
ROP - Regional Operational Program
TA - Technical assistance
TTL - Task Team Leader

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P 174133

Annex 1

List of participants

ADELA DOROBANTU, ADELINA ALEXE, ADINA IORGANDA, ADRIANA CERNEA, ADRIANA S., ADRIANA SCHEAU, ADRIANA MURESAN, ADRIANA TOMA, ALEXANDRA VOICULESCU, ALEXANDRA BACIU, ALEXANDRA IONITA, ALINA AMZICA, ALINA BOSOI, ALINA IONESCU, AM POIM, ANA BULAI, ANA-MARIA T., ANCA BARBU, ANDREEA NISTOR, ANDREEA SCARLAT, ANDREEA VOICU, ANDREI ZAMBOR, ANDREI CHIVU, ANGELICA VLADDESCU, AUREL RIZESCU, BOGDAN VOICU, CARMEN MARIS, CHIRIL BABINCIUC, CLAUDIA COMAN, CLAUDIA VASILCA, CLAUDIA MAGDALINA, CONSTANTA MIHAESCU, CORNELIA, CRISTIAN ZAMA, CRISTINA BADESCU, CRISTINA CIOBANU, CRISTINA HODINA, CRISTINA LINCARU, CRISTINA PATRASCOIU, CRISTINA HODINA, CRISTINA PATRASCOIU, DAN VAIDEANU, DANIELA BULEANDRA, DANIELA CIRLAN, DANIELA PASNICU, DANIELA GHEORGHIAN, DELIA CRACIUN, DIANA GHEORGHE, DIANA GRADEA, DIANA ILIESCU, DIANA STANESCU, DORIAN DELUREANU, DRAGOS IORGA, ELENA BOTEZATU, ELENA DROBOTA., EVA MILITARU, FELICIA SZUCS, FELIX ARDELEAN, GABRIELA DRAGAN, GINA PAUN, GINGHINĂ ANCA, IONELA MIHĂILESCU, GABRIELA MACOVEIU, IRINA MATEI, IRINA NEGOITA, IRINA NEGOITA, IULIAN SELER, IZABELLA GRADINESCU, JEROME BLEUCHOT, LIVIU FETIC, LUCIA B., LUCIAN SANDU, MADALINA POPESCU, MADALINA CHERA, MADDALENA HONORATI, MADLEN SERBAN, MARIA MALUREANU, MARIA URSU ANR, MARIANA ACATRINEI, MARILENA ALECU, MARISANDA PIRIIANU, MARIUS VASILIU, MICHAELA, MICHELE GIOVE (EY ROMANIA), MIHAELA ISFAN, MIHAELA RADUCAN, MIHAELA MANOLESCU, MIHAELA RABOJ, MIHAI PANAITI (REGIO), MONICA ROMAN (ASE), MONICA Z., NICOLAE POSTAVARU, NICOLAIE BURGHELEA, NICOLETA ZECHERU, OIROSDRU SUD MUNTENIA, RALUCA PETRICA, RALUCA STOIAN, RAZVAN CURDUMAN, RAZVAN OTEL, RICHARD HARDING, ROBERT PETRARU QURES, ROXANA CHITU, ROXANA IRIMIA, SILVIA CORNATEL, SILVIU BOICIUC, SILVIU CARABA, SIMION CIPRIAN, SORIN DINU, SORIN GRIGORESCU, SORIN COSMULESCU, STEFANA BUHAESCU CIUCA, STELA SACHELARESCU., STELUTA BULACEANU, TATIANA PROSKURYAKOVA, TEODORA PREOTEASA, TERRY WARD EC HELPDESK, TESCAN LAURENTIU, TIBERIU DOBRESCU, UDREA TUDOR, VALENTINA DIMULESCU, VALENTINA NICULAE, VASILE ASANDEI.

Annex 2

Agenda of the event

Towards a results-oriented M&E system
Institutional, procedural, and legislative assessment

Agenda

March 30th, 2021

10.00 - 10.50 Opening and background

- ❖ Mr. Marius-Mihai Vasiliu, Secretary of State, Ministry of European Investments and Projects
- ❖ Mrs. Tatiana Proskuryakova, Country Manager, World Bank
- ❖ Mr. Mihai Panaite, evaluation officer, DG REGIO, European Commission
- ❖ Mr. Terry Ward, team leader, European Commission Help-Desk

10.50 - 11.10 Presentation of the report main findings and recommendations. *Presentation of World Bank report “Institutional, procedural and legislative assessment of the Romania EU funded programs”*

- ❖ Mrs. Maddalena Honorati, Co -Task Team Leader, World Bank

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P 174133

11.15 - 11.30 Presentation of the specific measures to operationalize the proposed recommendations. *Presentation of tentative action plan.*

- ❖ Mrs. Claudia Măgdălina, head of Evaluation Unit, MIPE
- ❖ Mr. Victor Sulla, Task Team Leader, World Bank

11.30-11.50 Open discussion around key recommendations and implementing measures

- ❖ Mr. Lars Sondergaard, Program Leader, World Bank Romania
(replaced by Mr. Richard Harding, International Expert)

11.50 - 12.00 Closing remarks and next steps

- ❖ Mrs. Teodora Preoteasa, General Director, Ministry of European Investments and Projects
(replaced by Mrs. Irina Radu, Director)
- ❖ Mrs. Tatiana Proskuryakova, Country Manager, World Bank
(replaced by Mr. Victor Sulla, TTL)

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