ROMANIA

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

Output 1(b)

Report on institutional, procedural and legislative assessment

"Assessment of the institutional, procedural and legislative assessment of Romania EU funded programs"
Key findings and Recommendations
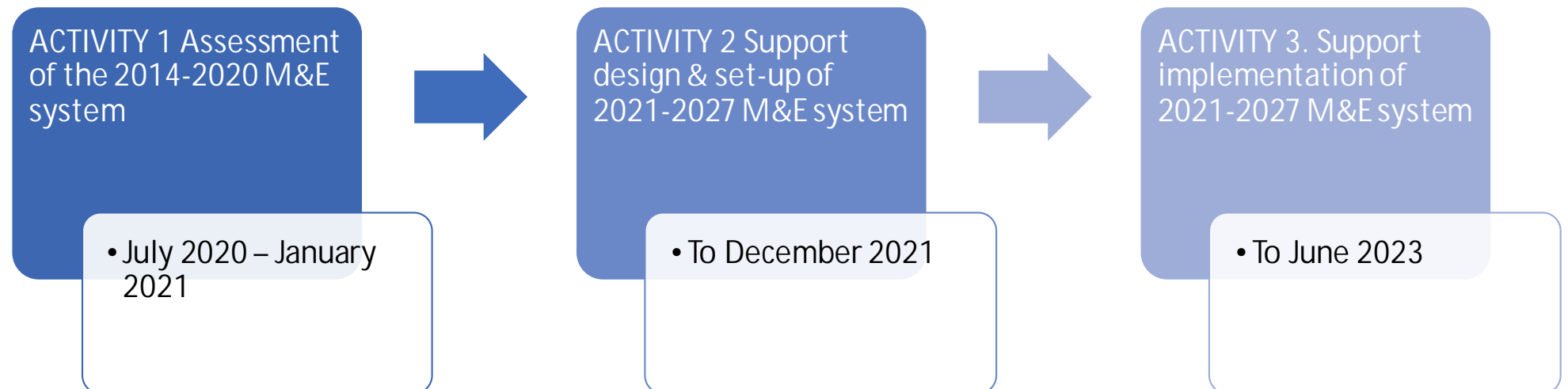
Dissemination meeting

30 March 2021

REMINDER OF RAS ACTIVITIES

Supporting the Government of Romania in developing and operationalizing a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system for ESIF programmes 2021-2027

- Activity I: Assessment of the existing M&E system for ESIF programs

- Activity II: Options to improve the M&E system of EU co-funded investments in Romania

- Activity III: Implementing improvements in the M&E system

ACTIVITY 1 Assessment of the 2014-2020 M&E system
- July 2020 – January 2021

ACTIVITY 2 Support design & set-up of 2021-2027 M&E system
- To December 2021

ACTIVITY 3. Support implementation of 2021-2027 M&E system
- To June 2023

ACTIVITY I: REVIEW OF RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN

All 19 OPs covered

Extensive document review

- EU/ national legislation, PA and OP documents, procedures and guides, AIRs, Evaluation Plans and Reports, audit reports

61 interviews held in total

- MAs/IBs, Coordinating Bodies, Evaluation Network etc.

3 Focus Groups

Indicator analysis

- Sample-based quantitative and qualitative

Good practice cases from other countries

Timeline of data collection

Data collection instruments	Timeline				
	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021
Document review	✓	✓			
Key informant interviews (KII)		✓	✓	✓	
Quantitative analysis of indicators			✓	✓	
Focus groups					✓
Survey of institutional actors		✓	✓		
Beneficiaries' survey		✓	✓		
Case studies				✓	

MAIN FINDINGS

Monitoring System

STRENGTHS

- **Overall regulatory compliance**
  Accredited bodies and procedures, regular review
- **PA-level working groups**
  Have proved useful for exchanging ideas/ practices
- **Indicator Guides prepared and Satisfaction of Beneficiaries with guidance given** Including personal support from MA/IB staff with reporting under many Ops
- **Practical IT applications built by some MAs/IBs**
  As workarounds in cases where SMIS not meeting needs
  SMIS Unit standing by to improve system for 2021-2027
- **Availability of TA resources to increase capacities**
  Used by many OPs to recruit additional personnel
- **Some improvements in MC debate quality**
  Sub-group structures also successful under several OPs

WEAKNESSES

- **Risk of limited result orientation**
  Possible over-emphasis on compliance and absorption
- **Gaps in understanding of certain indicators**
  MA/IB staff and Beneficiaries – despite guidance issued
- **Detailed indicator issues**
  ERDF/CF - 'specific' results too far from interventions
  ESF – 'common'/'specific' duplication
- **SMIS – limited functionalities reduce efficiency**
  Manual data input, lack of aggregation, PDF stockage, low inter-operability with national databases
- **Periodic work overload of monitoring staff**
  But only in some cases (e.g. OPHC, OPC) - not all OPs
- **Skills gaps persist in key areas in MAs/IBs**
  Data analysis, specialist knowledge in 'technical' fields
- **MCs not proactive overall.** Limited links with national policy – e.g. Roma Disabled
- **EC audits - negative on monitoring systems**
  LIOP, OPC, OPDP – inc. Cat. 4 *'Essentially does not work'*

Outcome of EC audits undertaken in 2019 on LIOP and OPC - focused on the 2017 AIRs

Common findings for both LIOP and OPC :

- Incorrect selection/definition of certain indicators;

- Inaccurate reporting of indicators, with impact on Performance Framework;

- Insufficient audit trail when collecting data related to indicators for the AIR.

Specific findings for LIOP:

- Reporting values achieved in 2007-2013 for phased projects;

- Reporting of only partially completed infrastructure as 'completed';

- Insufficient supervision of IB Transport reporting by MA.

Specific findings for OPC:

- Lack of minimum information stored in MySMIS;

- Insufficient differentiation between More Developed and Less Developed regions.

Ratings ranging from Category 2 *'Works, but some improvements are needed'* to Category 4 *'Essentially does not work'*, in the severest cases
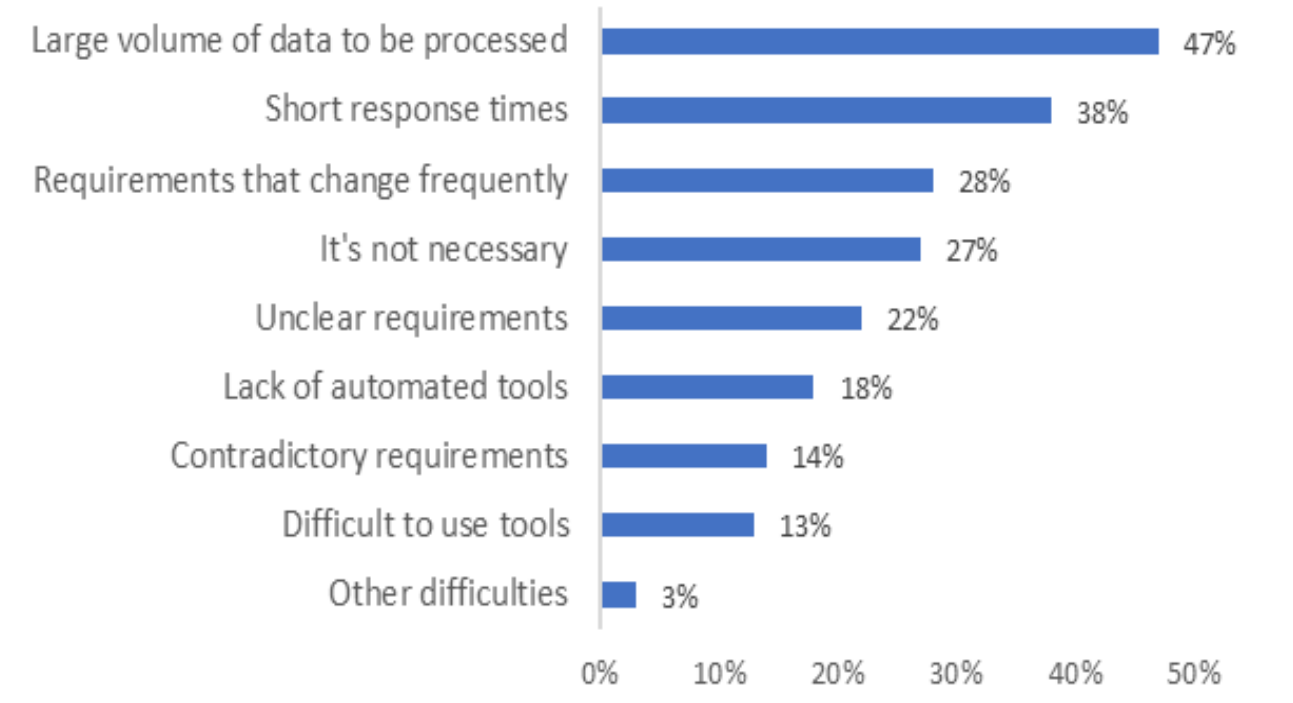
BENEFICIARY PERSPECTIVE

Extent to which Beneficiaries were able to meet their monitoring responsibilities on time – all OPs
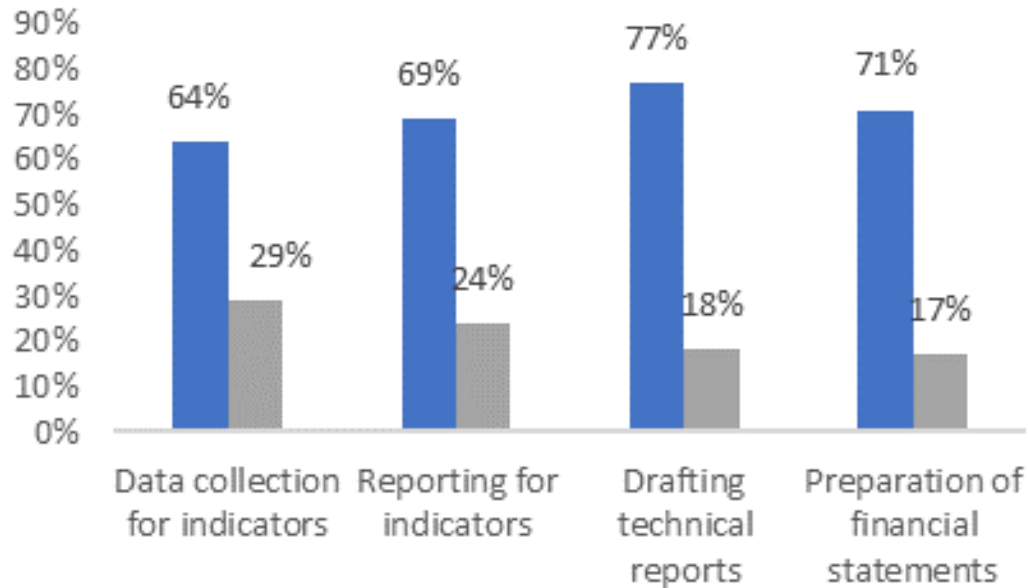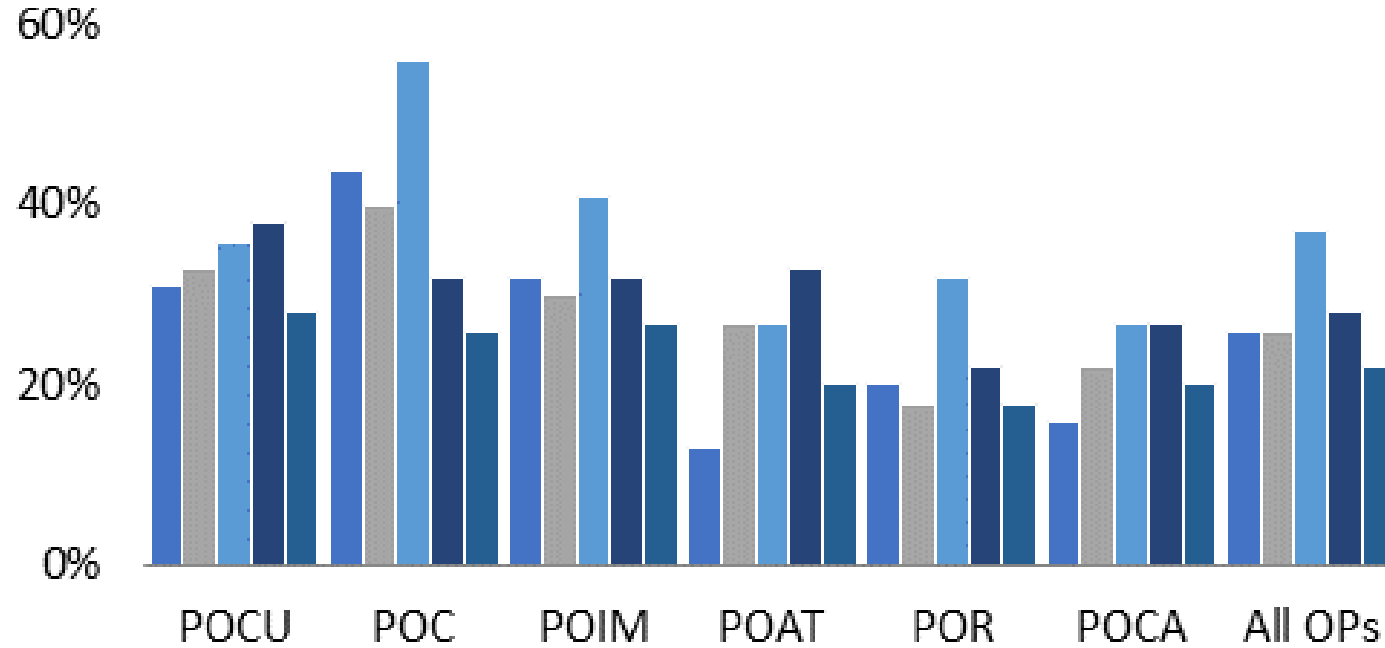
Difficulties encountered by the Beneficiaries in meeting their monitoring requirements

Source: Beneficiary Survey

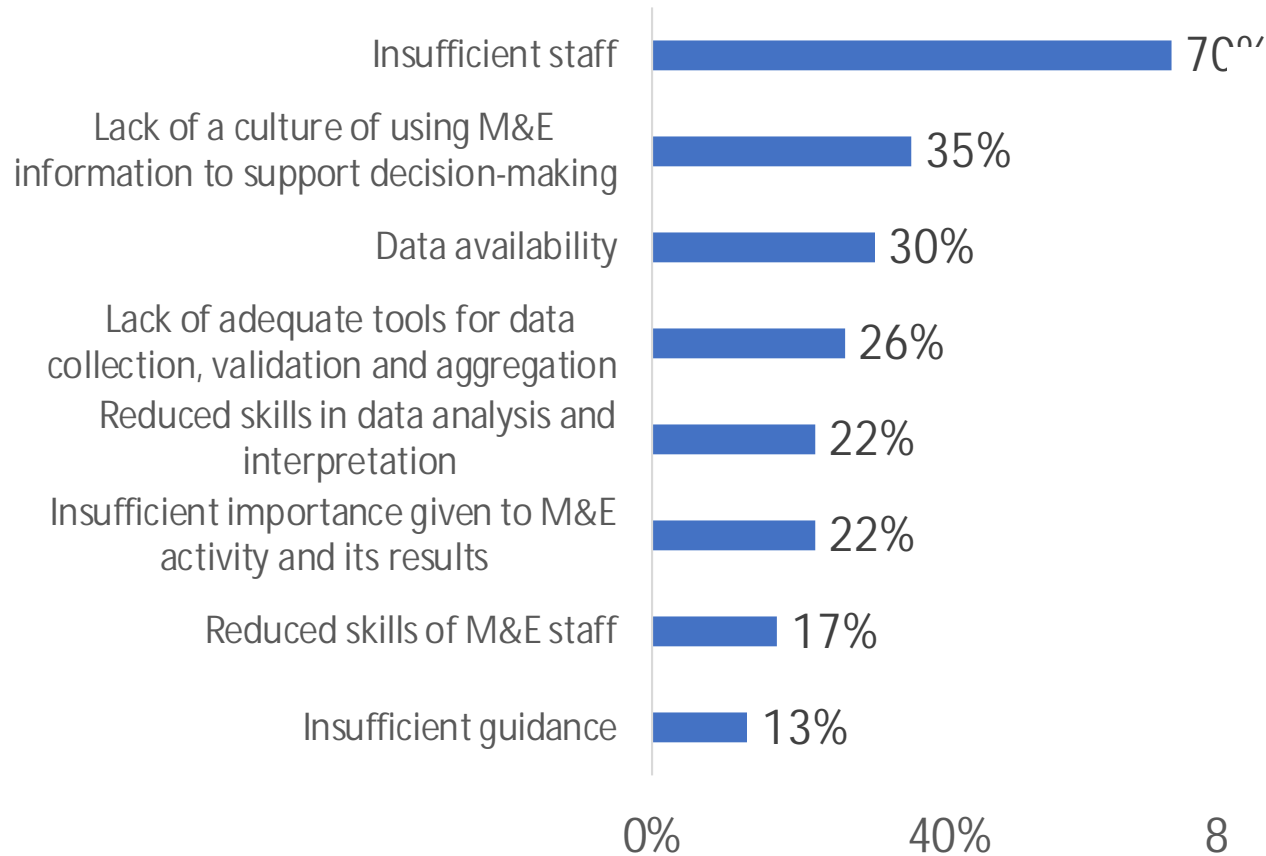SMIS - main challenges related to data collection, transmission and aggregation

Legend:
- Selecting the data needed for the indicators
- Exporting data required for indicators
- Structuring the data required for the indicators
- Connecting to the system
- Slow internet connection
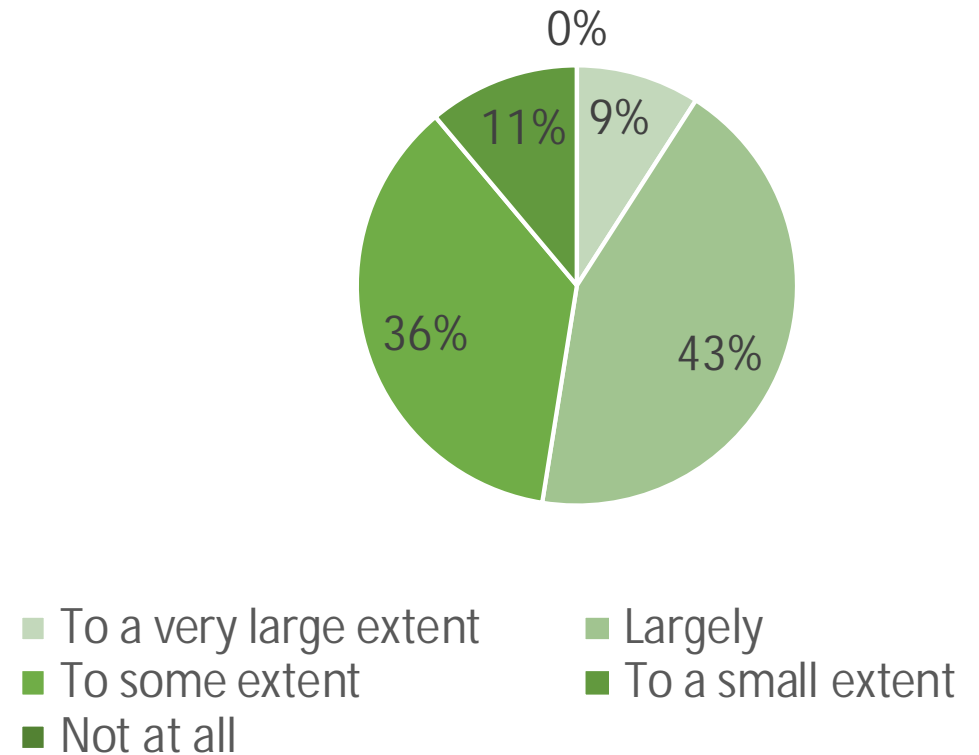
Source: Beneficiary Survey

INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Main challenges for M&E activities

Challenge	Percentage
Insufficient staff	70%
Lack of a culture of using M&E information to support decision-making	35%
Data availability	30%
Lack of adequate tools for data collection, validation and aggregation	26%
Reduced skills in data analysis and interpretation	22%
Insufficient importance given to M&E activity and its results	22%
Reduced skills of M&E staff	17%
Insufficient guidance	13%

0%   40%   8

Extent to which beneficiaries understand their reporting obligations

- 0%
- 9% — To a very large extent
- 43% — Largely
- 36% — To some extent
- 11% — To a small extent
- 0% — Not at all

Legend:
- To a very large extent
- Largely
- To some extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all

Evaluation System

STRENGTHS

- **Institutional lead by MEIP Evaluation Unit (ECU)**
  Added coordination via Evaluation Steering Committee

- **Comprehensive Evaluation Plans in place**
  With quality control by Evaluation Scientific Committee

- **Existence of Evaluation Network**
  Potential driver for exchange of good practices

- **Good staff capacities in all Evaluation Units**
  Relevant training – ROP MA plus ECU actions for all OPs

- **Evaluation usefulness for future programming**
  Although consensus on this mainly relates to ex-ante

- **Centralised web resources for evaluation results**
  Focal point for growing evaluation 'community'

WEAKNESSES

- **ECU centralisation lessens ownership for some OPs**
  Certain MAs/IBs feel too distant from evaluation process

- **Lengthy and cumbersome public procurement**
  Impacts negatively on effectiveness of evaluation

- **Difficulties for evaluators to obtain relevant data**
  Excessive time data gathering diminishes efficiency

- **Restricted availability of high-level expertise**
  Due to tender conditions and budgetary constraints

- **Low evaluation value for current implementation**
  Late arrival of results, lengthy reports, questions on quality

- **Lack of interest in MCs about evaluation findings**
  Limited accountability in following recommendations
  No evidence evaluation used for other national policies

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Number of evaluations completed by type, Fund and programming period

Period and Fund concerned by evaluation	2007–2013				2014–2020				Both periods				
	ERDF+CF	ESF+YEI	Multi-Fund	Total	ERDF+CF	ESF+YEI	Multi-Fund	Total	ERDF+CF	ESF+YEI	Multi-Fund	Total	Overall
Impact-oriented (I)*	17	2	1	20	2	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	23
Process/implementation-oriented and/or Monitoring/progress oriented (P+M)	0	4	0	4	18	5	0	23	0	0	0	0	27
Total	17	6	1	24	20	6	0	26	0	0	0	0	40

*Although evaluations under ROP are intended as impact oriented, lack of relevant data led to their classification as "process/implementation and monitoring oriented"

Source: EC Evaluation Helpdesk (updated Feb 2021)

PROGRESS IMPLEMENTING EVALUATION PLANS

Evaluation System 3

Awareness of the OP Evaluation Plan
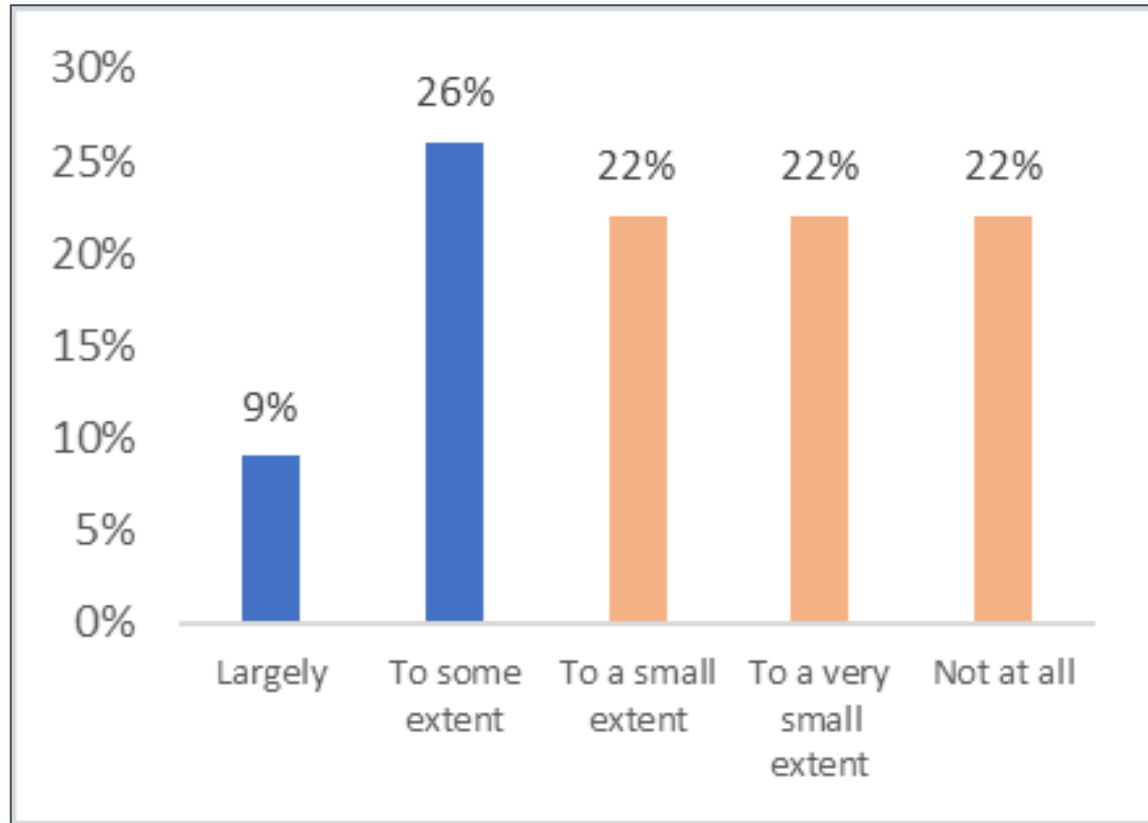
Perception of status of implementation of the OP Evaluation Plan

Source: Institutional Stakeholders Survey
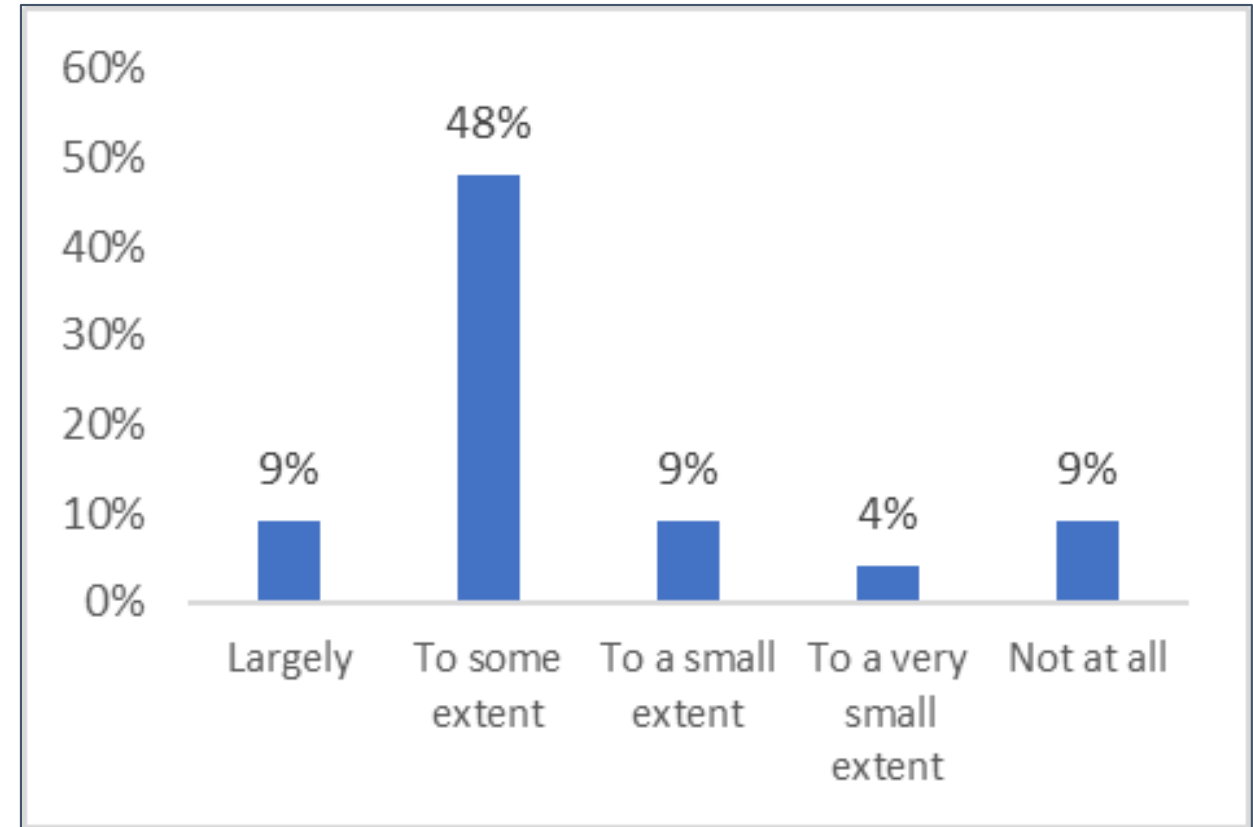
RECOMMENDATIONS

TO IMPROVE ESIF MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS FOR 2021-2027

1. Increase awareness and capacity of decision-makers (including MC members) on evidence-based decision making

    Improving the design of reports generated by IT systems to facilitate data visualizations and allow for analytics

    Improve links between results orientation and communication efforts

2. Establish a participatory approach to developing specific indicators for 2021-2027
    Prepare comprehensive and unambiguous guidance and make sure this is adequately absorbed by MA/IB staff and beneficiaries

3. Ensure optimal functionality of SMIS as soon as 2021-27 Ops are approved

    Consider establishing operational linkage between SMIS and other ESIF IT systems and interoperability with relevant national/ regional registries

4. Radical simplification of data management, monitoring and reporting procedures

    Radically simplify procedures, based on a thorough review in a coordinated manner for all OPs
    Facilitate automatic data aggregation from beneficiary level upwards, develop reporting formats that support decision making
    Maximize the use of SCOs and mainstream COVID-19 simplifications

5. Ensure accurate guidance to beneficiaries

6. Build evaluation culture on both demand and supply sides

Improve the way evaluation findings and recommendations are conveyed to the different stakeholders, to facilitate an improved understanding and uptake of recommendations

Improve the quality of the evaluation reports, in terms of usability/accessibility/specialization/length

Raise awareness of evaluation aspects (incl. through discussions with MAs/ IBs staff

7. Decentralise evaluation function to individual OPs (except ETC), but retain central coordination

Create separate OP-level evaluation units in each relevant MA with adequate capacity and as close as possible to decision makers

Retain and strengthen centralised capacity building, communication and coordination functions

8. Ensure full involvement of the MAs and IBs in the preparation of <u>evaluation plans</u>

Incorporate shorter, more operational-type evaluation options (e.g. ad-hoc)

Establish a clear calendar for evaluation exercises to promote predictability and evaluation market

Streamline procurement processes, including by using more flexible arrangements

9. Plan data collection system to generate comprehensive context data for planned evaluations

Harness capacities of existing data suppliers – consider integrating emerging 'new' forms of data

Fully inter-operable IT systems for data retrieval and processing

Comprehensive training programme embracing all relevant monitoring and evaluation disciplines

MAs/IBs and Beneficiaries according to evolving needs – include high-level decision makers

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We look forward to working together with you to deliver selected Actions