

Executive Summary

Objectives and approach of the ex-ante evaluation

The main objective of Ex-ante evaluation of Sector Operational Programme for Environment in Romania is to help ensure relevance and coherence of the drafted Programme with the Community strategic guidelines and the national and regional priorities; to optimise the allocation of budgetary resources, and improve programming quality. Ex ante evaluation focuses primarily on an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses and potential of the sector. It provides with a prior judgement on whether development issues have been diagnosed correctly, whether the strategy and objectives proposed are relevant, whether there is incoherence in relation to Community policies and guidelines, whether the expected impacts are realistic. It also provides the required foundations for monitoring and for future evaluations, by ensuring that there are explicit and quantified objectives. It helps to specify selection criteria for the selection of projects and to ensure that Community priorities are respected. Finally, it helps to ensure the transparency of decisions by allowing for a clear explanation of choices made and their expected effects. The Ex-ante evaluation is performed against the following criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, consistence and coherence, utility, sustainability and management and monitoring arrangements.

Methodology

Methodological approach proposed for this evaluation comprises six main components. In the appraisal of the socio-economic and sector analysis and the relevance of the strategy to the needs identified, the analysis of the SWOT forms the basis for defining the strategy, its policy objectives and activities. Evaluation of the economic rational, consistency and coherency of the strategy is the main component of the ex-ante evaluation. In this respect, appropriateness of the proposed strategy, its rationale, consistency and possible policy risks are evaluated, as well the reasons for establishing priorities, budget division, justification of the chosen thematic, spatial and financial priorities, complementarity and synergy between the priorities and the actions proposed. Appraisal of the coherence of the strategy with regional, national and EU policies verifies the relation between the policy objectives of the programme with other national, regional as well as the EU horizontal and cohesion policy objectives. Internal coherency is assessed to avoid efficiency problems and to ensure the availability of financial resources from national or regional policy instruments. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a tool for minimizing the risk of potentially environmentally damaging projects through application of the SEA results in the selection of investment priorities. Evaluation of the expected results and impacts assesses the suitability of indicators for the proposed objectives, if they are measurable and if they can be used for future monitoring and evaluation. And finally, Appraisal of the proposed implementation system

addresses the quality of the implementation, monitoring and evaluation arrangements and their contribution to the efficiency of the Programme and to the efficient implementation of structural funds interventions through the National Strategic Reference Framework and National Development Plan.

The evaluation process is divided into three main stages: data collection and analysis, interviews with the key decision makers and responsible persons or participants in sectoral ministry and other related ministries as well as feed-back sessions with the drafting team

Main findings

The Sector analysis reflects the environmental status in Romania, the description is based on reliable statistical data and leads to problem identification and prioritisation, which provides the sufficient basis for SWOT analysis. The SWOT analysis itself is a summary of the current situation analysis for the environment sector in Romania covering all the topics concerned, distinguishing between thematic areas and prioritising problems. SWOT variables contain measurable targets, which lays the ground for strategy development and measure planning. Overall, the proposed strategy, the strategic objectives does not cause doubts about its relevance in relation to the identified problems, needs and potentials arising from the sector analysis.

In the water and waste water priority axis, the rationale part contains justification for scoping infrastructure upgrading and extension, its territorial coverage, estimating financial needs and analysing the institutional context. The development of integrated waste management systems and reduction of historical contaminated sites priority axis is well designed, consistent, clearly related to the sector and SWOT analyses, provides sufficient justification for intervention, there are clear priorities chosen and justified. The strategic objective under the reduction of pollution from district heating systems in selected priority areas priority axis is in compliance with the European Union and national policy documents, the rationale part contains justification for intervention, however, the list of measures, which still deserves certain consideration. There are no specific observations in regard to the implementation of adequate management systems for nature protection priority axis. The Implementation of adequate infrastructure of natural risk prevention in most vulnerable areas priority axis is also well designed and properly structures. The technical assistance priority axis sufficiently addresses the needs of the parties involved in the programming, management and implementation of the Programme under evaluation in terms of scope and audience.

In general, the environment sector Operational Programme is in compliance with the European strategies. Both the National Development Plan and the National Strategic Reference framework contain little linkages to the environment sector in Romania, which makes it difficult to assess their compliance. The proposed Operational programme, its priorities and the operational objectives also coincide with the so-called cross cutting themes of the European Union on employment, equal opportunities, environment and information society. More emphasis needs to be put on job creation issue, possibly, through inclusion of relevant indicators.

The programme design proposed in the draft Operational Programme for the environment sector in Romania is generally of satisfactory quality. The relevance of objectives is ensured, the main problems are identified and prioritised, and subsequently addressed by appropriate measures. The main deficiency relating to programme design is the lack of objectively verifiable indicators of achievement.

Main recommendations

It is recommended to unify measurement units throughout the text and edit the text itself in the sector analysis. For the SWOT analysis, the 'strength' part needs to be supplemented, while the 'opportunities' part needs to be reduced to the factors external to the sector. In addition, land use management needs to be added to the 'weaknesses' part. And the 'Comments to SWOT Analysis' section needs to be adjusted accordingly. The main recommendation made in the evaluation of the programme design relates to setting objectively verifiable indicators as a means for improving programme design.

Under the water and waste water priority axis, it is recommended restructure and to shorten the rationale and strategy parts focusing on the essential issues. Merging floods prevention and water and waste water management under one priority axis may be considered as a means for simplification of programme implementation. In addition, the list of indicative measures may be reviewed and shortened. Under the waste management priority axis, it is advised to consider inclusion of environmental education activities in the list of activities, especially in the area of waste sorting in the urban areas. It may be important to consider increase financing for this specific priority axis. Under the air quality priority axis the main recommendations deal with reconsideration of objective related to public health, lack of references to other sectors operational programmes addressing environmental problems, reassessment of effectiveness of measures, inclusion of relevant indicators and editing of text. There is a need to include measurable indicators also under the nature protection and nature protection priority axes. Under the technical assistance priority axis, it is recommended to separate the list of activities by recipients, to include measure targeting land use planning; to include references to Human Resource development Operational Programme and to complete the table of indicators of achievement. Revisiting of relevant sections containing indicators of achievement is necessary to provide the basis on which programme results can be measured.