

1 Introduction

1.1 Objectives of the evaluation

The main objective of Ex-ante evaluation of Sector Operational Programme (SOP) for Environment (ENV) in Romania is to help ensure relevance and coherence of the drafted ENV SOP with the Community strategic guidelines and the national and regional priorities chosen; to optimise the allocation of budgetary resources under the ENV SOP and improve programming quality through identification and appraisal of medium and long-term needs, the goals to be achieved, the results expected, the quantified targets, the coherence, if necessary, of the strategy proposed for the region, the Community value-added, the extent to which the Community's priorities have been taken into account, the lessons drawn from previous programming and the quality of the procedures for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and financial management.

Ex-ante evaluations are compulsory on the basis of art. 46 of the European Council Regulation laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and focus specifically on performance and results.

Ex ante evaluation focuses primarily on an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses and potential of the country, region or sector concerned. It provides the relevant authorities 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, where possible, 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.

Ex-ante evaluation is performed against the following criteria:

- *Relevance*: to what extent are the programme's objectives relevant in relation to the evolving needs and priorities at national and EU level?
- *Effectiveness*: how realistic is the programme in achieving its specific and global objectives by 2013 or earlier?
- *Efficiency*: how well are the resources allocated with respect to outputs or results?
- *Consistence and Coherence*: are the proposed objectives and measures logically linked to the socio-economic analysis, are they mutually consistent and are they well embedded in the regional, national and Community policy objectives and interventions;
- *Utility*: are the expected and unexpected effects realistic and globally satisfactory in the context of wider social, environmental and economic needs?

- *Sustainability*: will the effects obtained in the proposed programmes remain, even after the end of the programme without further public funding?
- *Management and monitoring arrangements*: how they may affect the achievement of programme objectives & contribute the chosen processes to positive results?

1.2 Methodology

The evaluation process is divided into three main stages:

- *Document and data analysis* is carried out to assess the experiences and results of preceding programmes. This includes previous evaluations of the ENV SOP, ex-ante of the NDP, mid-term evaluation of the NDP and the monitoring results of the pre-accession programmes as well as updated statistical information and sector development reports. For external compliance, EU policy documents are used;
- *Interviews with key persons* refer to all decision makers and responsible persons or participants in the MEWM and other related ministries, who have taken part in the programme development at the different levels. The interviews serve to provide a broader assessment of the efficiency of the attainment of the objectives, as well as the procedures and the organisational structures;
- *Feed-back sessions* with the drafting team of ENV SOP and its complement serves as tool for communicating main findings in the evaluation process and sharing views on implementation of recommendations.

Methodological approach proposed for this evaluation comprises six main components and, in additions, assesses the readiness of the PC for implementation.

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. The SWOT analysis is carried out against the following criteria: consistency, coherency, balance between SW & OTs, focus on impressionable factors and availability of measurable and operational factors. Assessment of the relevance of the strategy is assessed in relation to the identified problems, needs and potentials deriving from the sector analysis, to the identified trends and future challenges, balance between SO, WO, ST or WT, existence of logical links with the proposed priorities and measures in ENV SOP. Assessment of partnership is based on the level of involvement of stakeholders from relevant sectors and regions, their impact on in drawing conclusions, methods for achieving sufficient consensus concerning the conclusions from the SWOT.

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. Assessment of the consistency of the chosen strategy is made at the level of