

Introduction

The Regional Operational Programme

1. The purpose of the Regional Operational Programme (ROP) is to support, to the extent possible, along with the other Structural Funds financed operational programmes, an equally balanced growth of all parts of Romania. This is to be achieved, not so much by redistributing public resources but by ensuring that all areas reach a minimum critical level of business, social and human capital infrastructure to allow growth to take place.

2. The ROP implements important elements of the National Strategy for Regional Development of the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007 - 2013. Its main objective is for the balanced development of all the regions of Romania, through the capitalisation of local and regional development potential, focusing on the urban growth poles and improving the infrastructure and business environment conditions. This objective is to be achieved through a differentiated allocation of funds per region, depending on the development level - measured by GDP per capita - and through a strong correlation with the activities financed under the other operational programmes.

3. The main categories of ROP beneficiaries are the authorities of the local and central public administration, Associations for Intercommunity Development (ADIs), and partnerships between Local Public Authorities (LPAs), social service providers (accredited according to the law), state universities, Public Institutes providing continuous professional training services, Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs), Trade and Industry Chambers, and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

4. The ROP can support projects with a major impact on regional and local development in the field of transport, social, business and tourism infrastructure. The development of these types of infrastructure creates conditions for the capitalisation of the existing material and human resources, according to the following priority axes:

- Support to sustainable development of urban growth poles;
- Improvement of regional and local transport infrastructure;
- Improvement of social infrastructure;
- Strengthening the regional and local business environment;
- Sustainable development and promotion of tourism; and
- Technical assistance for MAROP and IBs.

Evaluation Plan

5. This evaluation is conducted as part of the ROP Managing Authority's (MAROP) evaluation plan for 2009. It takes account of an ad hoc evaluation of Priority Axis (PA) 4.2 which was also conducted as part of the evaluation plan. In Chapter 6, we include our suggestions for future evaluations that might be added to the multiannual evaluation plan based on the conclusions from this evaluation.

The Evaluation

Scope

6. The evaluation scope covers all programme priority axes, as well as the entire management implementation and monitoring system for the ROP. The temporal scope is from 1 January 2007 to 30 June 2009, which is the cut-off date for the evaluation report. The evaluation recommendations are designed to support the MAROP in achieving the ROP objectives for the programming period 2007-2013.

Objectives

Overall Objective

7. The overall objective of the evaluation is to contribute to the successful implementation of the ROP 2007-2013 by evaluating the progress and performance registered in its management and implementation, within the period 1 January 2007 to 30 June 2009.

Specific objectives

8. The specific objectives of the evaluation are to:
- Examine the extent in which the ROP strategy (priority axes, objectives, etc.) is further relevant and coherent in the context of socio-economical modifications;
 - Analyse the progress registered in the programme implementation/objectives reached and identification of internal and external factors that have an influence over performances of the ROP Management Authority and Intermediate Bodies in its management and implementation;
 - Evaluate the efficiency of the ROP implementation system;
 - Provide the information needed to meet the strategic reporting requirement according to article 29 of Regulation no. 1083/2006; and
 - Identify the lessons learned and necessary measures for achieving ROP objectives, including those regarding the development of the relevant capacities.

Expected results

9. The expected results of the evaluation are defined by the six evaluation questions. The evaluation report is providing conclusions that address these questions and make recommendations to improve both the performance of the ROP in meeting its objectives and the efficiency of the management and implementation arrangements.

10. The six evaluation questions¹ are:

1. To what extent the priorities and objectives defined in the ROP strategy keep their relevance in the context of the social and economic changes occurred as compared to the time of the programme drafting?

¹ The report uses the precise wording of the evaluation questions, taken from the ROP Evaluation Plan.

2. Does the progress registered in the ROP implementation lead to the achievement of the programme objectives?
3. What are the major external and internal factors that can influence or have influenced the performance of MAROP and IBROP in the programme management and implementation?
4. Is the ROP implementation system appropriate for the selection, contracting and monitoring of the projects launched at the level of each development region and within each key area of intervention?
5. How are the performances of the ROP implementation system reflected at the level of reimbursement claims?
6. What is the ROP contribution during the evaluated period to the implementation and achievement of strategic objectives?

The evaluation questions are further divided into 17 specific areas of examination. The evaluation report is organised to address each of these areas.

Methodology

11. The evaluation activities were divided between **core evaluation work** and the **customised activities** for the evaluation questions raised in this evaluation. The evaluation period was divided between an initial field work period up to 30 June 2009, when a first partial draft report was submitted, and a second field work period up to 31 August 2009, when the full draft report was submitted. A comprehensive consultation on the draft report was held in September and October 2009 and the final draft report was submitted to the MAROP on 15 October 2009. The final report was presented for consideration and for the debriefing of the key recommendations at the Steering Committee meeting on 26 October 2009.

12. **The core activities** for the initial period were: the review of documentation, analysis of data and information and interviews with key stakeholders. The evaluation started with interviews in Bucharest with the central actors in MAROP and was followed by a short first round of visits to the Intermediary Bodies (the eight Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and the Directorate for Managing Community Funds for Tourism at the Ministry of Tourism). The key experts considered the evidence collected from the twin perspectives of the priority axes and the regional progress and have focused on three critical evaluation questions:

- The current position in terms of allocation, selected operations² and reimbursement of expenditure;
- The internal and external factors that are influencing performance; and
- The specific challenges that have been met in the project selection and contracting stages of the implementation cycle.

13. At the same time, the evaluation team separately enquired into the other main evaluation areas. These are (1) the effect on ROP performance of changes to the underlying socio economic factors that were relevant when the ROP was drafted, (2) the financial management and control system and the prospects for absorption of the ERDF allocation, and (3) the implementation of the Communications Strategy.

² “Selected operations” is the term used by the EC to refer to operations for which a funding contract has been finalised. The equivalent term in Romania is “committed”. For this reason the report refers to “commitments”

14. An interim draft evaluation report, containing ROP related information as at the first quarter of 2009 and a partial analysis was produced at the end of June 2009 and circulated to the MAROP and the IBROP for comment. A workshop was convened in Bucharest on 15 July 2009 during which comments on the draft were received and discussed. Arising from this workshop, an activity list with 89 points was made to guide the second field work period of the evaluation.

15. Further analysis was made covering all the evaluation questions. This covered the remaining activities proposed in the evaluation workplan and confirmed by the project inception report. These activities included:

- Design and transmittal of an evaluation questionnaire to 128 beneficiaries (public authorities) for which 64 responses were received; The summary of the questionnaire responses is presented in full in **Annex 2**;
- A second round of regional visits (regional workshops) to consult the RDAs and Beneficiaries from both the public and private sectors on the evaluation issues; The key points emerging from the workshops are summarised in **Annex 3**;
- Interrogation of SMIS for information on all project applications that were entered there;
- Further analysis of the systems for project selection, the financial circuits and the preparation of the financial prognosis;
- Meetings with other relevant parties including internal auditors, the Audit Authority and ACIS.

16. The internal quality of the draft reports was managed by the Team Leader by compiling the comments received from stakeholders on the drafts and ensuring that they were appropriately considered. The final draft report, and the final version of the Evaluation Report (version of 26 October 2009) was externally quality assured by an evaluation expert (Mr Klaas Jan Reincke, Managing Director of CyclePlanDrive, Tallinn Estonia) with no prior involvement in the project. The Quality Reports issued by this external evaluation expert are attached to this final version of the Interim Evaluation Report.

Format of the Evaluation Report

Assessment terminology

17. A fundamental part of any evaluation is to reach conclusions on the evaluation questions that are given to the evaluation team for consideration. For the purposes of this evaluation a formal quantitative rating scheme for the ROP performance criteria was not used but a standard assessment terminology has been applied in this report, in particular for the portfolio analysis of the Priority Axes and Key Areas of Intervention in Chapter 2. The assessment terminology uses a four point positive scale to summarise the evaluation conclusions, as follows: