Ministry of Public Finance
Authority for Coordination of Structural Instruments (ACIS)

Conducting Evaluations for the Period 2009-10

Operational Programme Technical Assistance Interim Evaluation

Final Report

Contract: 13/02.10.2009 – Carrying out Evaluations during the Implementation of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) and the Operational Programme Technical Assistance (OPTA)

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DISCLAIMER

This report is the outcome of an independent evaluation carried out by a consortium consisting of KPMG Romania, GEA S&C and Pluriconsult, under a contract with the Authority for Coordination of Structural Instruments (ACIS).

The views expressed are the consortium's and do not necessarily reflect those of the Contracting Authority, the Ministry of Public Finance (MoPF) or the Evaluation Central Unit (ECU)[1] within ACIS.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AA	Audit Authority
ACIS	Authority for the Coordination of Structural Instruments
AID	Agency for Inter-community Development
AIR	Annual Implementation Report
APPP	Annual Public Procurement Plan
CBA WG	Cost-Benefit Analysis Working Group
CP	Communication Plan
CPA	Certifying and Paying Authority
CWG	Communication Working Group
DAP	Directorate for Analysis and Programming
DEA	Department for European Affairs
DTA	Directorate for Technical Assistance
EC	European Commission
ECU	Evaluation Central Unit
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESPP	Electronic System for Public Procurement
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
EWG	Evaluation Working Group
FDI	Framework Document for Implementation
FMS	Financial Management Service
GD	Government Decision
GSG	General Secretariat of the Government
IB	Intermediate Body
IC	Information Centre for Structural Instruments
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
IS	Implementation Service
ICT	Information & Communication Technology
KAI	Key Area of Intervention
LPA	Local Public Authority
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MCC	Management Coordination Committee
MD	Monitoring Directorate
MEUR	Million Euros
MoPF	Ministry of Public Finance
MS	Monitoring Service
MWG	Monitoring Working Group
NARMPP	National Authority for Regulating and Monitoring Public Procurement
NCC	National Coordination Committee for the process of preparation for the management of

	Structural Instruments
NDP	National Development Plan
NES	National Evaluation Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSRF	National Strategic Reference Framework
OP DAC	Operational Programme for Administrative Capacity Development
OPTA	Operational Programme Technical Assistance
OPTA IE	Operational Programme Technical Assistance Interim Evaluation
OPTA MA	Operational Programme Technical Assistance Managing Authority
PA	Priority Axis
PIU	Programme Implementation Unit
PPAP	Public Procurement Annual Plan
RDA	Regional Development Agency
ROP	Regional Operational Programme
SCD	System Coordination Directorate
SCF	Structural and Cohesion Funds
SI	Structural Instruments
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SMIS	Single Management Information System
SMIS CU	SMIS Central Unit
SMIS WG	SMIS Working Group
SOP	Sectoral Operational Programme
SOP HRD	Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development
SOP IEC	Sectoral Operational Programme Increasing Economic Competitiveness
TA	Technical Assistance
TACC	Technical Assistance Coordination Committee
TAF	Technical Assistance Facility
TDCU	Training Development and Coordination Unit
ToR	Terms of Reference
TWG	Training Working Group
UCVPP	Unit for Coordination and Verification of Public Procurement
WG	Working Group

Executive Summary

ToR and Methodology

The Evaluation Central Unit (ECU) of the Authority for the Coordination of Structural Instruments (ACIS), engaged a consortium of KPMG Romania, GEA S&C and Pluriconsult for the project *Conducting Evaluations for the Period 2009-10* under a contract with number 13/02.10.2009 and entitled *Carrying out Evaluations during the Implementation of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) and the Operational Programme Technical Assistance (OPTA)*. The contract period is 13 October 2009 – 12 April 2011.

The NSRF project has two main components: (i) a Formative Evaluation of Structural Instruments in Romania; and (ii) four other evaluations, including an interim evaluation (IE) of the OPTA, the preparation of a Synthesis Report of all IEs carried out in 2009-10, as well as two *ad hoc* evaluations on thematic or cross-cutting issues. The present report covers the IE of the OPTA under the second component.

The ToR for the IE state as its overall objective: *to contribute to the successful implementation of the OPTA.* To achieve this objective, the ToR require answers to 15 evaluation questions. These questions are grouped under five main categories: 'relevance', 'consistency', 'efficiency', 'effectiveness' and 'impact'. The ToR also expect answers to a seven further questions on particular key areas of interventions (KAI).

The project team used a wide variety of methods to formulate the required answers, such as desk research, use of diagrams, interviews, focus groups, in-depth assessment, and indicators analysis. OPTA stakeholders include ACIS, the beneficiaries (all ACIS Directorates, the Audit Authority, the Certifying and Paying Authority, and other MA and IBs), as well as service providers and individual beneficiaries of OPTA projects. The evaluation involved consultations with media and PR experts, and representatives of the evaluation community.

The interim evaluation was carried out in the period October 2009 and August 2010. The cut-off date for the evaluation is 31 December 2009, unless otherwise indicated.[2]

Conclusions and Recommendations

Q1: The analysis in the OP is based on indicators related to 2004-07 period. What are the important changes that occurred between the programming phase and which are expected? **Q2**: To what extent do the changes in the context affect OPTA relevance? **Q3**: Are the operations under the Priority Axes and subsequent Key Areas of Intervention still relevant? **Q19**: Which are the long-term needs that must be addressed through OPTA in terms of SMIS development and functioning?

Relevance (Q1-Q3 + Q19)[3]

Main Conclusions

The economic recession has invalidated the macro-economic assumptions and indicators foreseen at the time of OPTA programming (2007). However, OPTA remains largely relevant for all beneficiaries and ample for addressing their current needs. It is therefore not necessary to adjust the OP for reason of uncovered needs.

The overhang of pre-accession assistance from the period 2007-08 diminished demand for OPTA resources. At the end of 2009, a series of problems that OPTA had been designed to address had already been partially solved through the deployment of pre-accession assistance and other external support. This applies *inter alia* to coordination issues, basic training related to SI, development of an evaluation culture, general information on SI, as well as the institutional capacity of, respectively, ACIS, the AA and the CPA.

[2] *Where relevant, the data used in the report were updated to end-March 2010.*

[3] *Questions 15-21 are specific questions, with Q19 is related to 'relevance', and the remainder to effectiveness.*

Horizontal policies and regulations cannot be clarified and improved through OPTA without proper support by regulatory stakeholders. This implies that TA to improve public procurement or manage state aid schemes cannot be successful without validation by and the long-term involvement of institutions such as UCVPP, NARMPP and the Competition Council.

The support for Pole Coordinators seems a relevant way to push for horizontal coordination at local level. However, the coordination activity can only be implemented with the involvement and commitment of local structures managing integrated projects, such as Intercommunity Development Agencies.

Supporting staff wages through the 75% bonus is relevant for ensuring a critical level of expertise and motivation for efficient structural instruments implementation.

OPTA support for enhancing evaluation of publicly funded interventions remains relevant. The initial programming relied though on the implementation of the NES, which is lagging behind schedule because of insufficient action from national policy stakeholders, outside the control of ECU/ACIS. As a result, ECU/ACIS has remained the sole protagonist of developing an evaluation culture, focused on SI.

The training activities within OPTA, as originally conceived, were based on a thorough needs assessment. However, the gap between planning and the start of training sessions was considerable and a new assessment would be advisable. As the specialisation of the MA and IB staff increases and staff turnover remains low, the envisaged training is considered too basic. The change from basic to specific training will require the adoption of new training tools, tailored to smaller groups of experts. There has been virtually no training for beneficiaries, although most implementation problems are at beneficiary level.

There are four main needs in respect of long-term SMIS development: (i) ensuring full compatibility with third party applications; (ii) enhancing date security; (iii) enabling the customisation of system menus for final users; and (iv) providing training on a continuous basis.

The coordination network is critical for the functioning of SMIS and requires OPTA support. The same applies to the SMIS help-desk function. The recruitment of staff on a contract basis, although welcomed in principle, is hampered by existing regulations. SMIS-related training and user-friendly manual preparation are important for reducing the number of errors in the system and would benefit from OPTA support. Demand for SMIS-related equipment was overestimated at the time of programming, at least for the period 2007-11, because available pre-accession support was insufficiently taken into account.

Although three years after Romania's accession to the EU one would expect a reasonable level of public awareness of SI, available data still suggest a low level of awareness on the part of the public. The original programming, based on a 2007 needs assessment, remains valid in 2010. The IC for SI is the backbone of the OPTA Communication Plan and there remains a critical need for it to be set up. The lack of action to date in establishing the national information network demands immediate steps for soliciting the active involvement of stakeholders at local level.

Main Recommendations

OPTA MA should include as beneficiaries the public authorities managing the public procurement horizontal theme (NARMPP, UCVPP) in order to improve procedures in this field.

OPTA MA is recommended to support local structures managing integrated development plans, such as IDAs, by expanding eligibility for OPTA support to IDAs and their members. The immediate instrument for this action would be a set of additional provisions to projects for pole coordinators, allowing a top-up on existing content that may be used for customized support provided to IDAs and IDA members.

Coherence and Consistency (Q4-Q5)

Q4: To what extent there is coherence between the other Operational Programmes' technical assistance priority axes and OPTA? **Q5**: Are the operations under the Priority Axes and subsequent KAIs consistent with the European and national developments in the field?

Main Conclusions

OPTA is well designed and equipped with proper mechanisms to ensure coherence with the other OPs and relevant European and national policies. Coherent principles and instruments guide the implementation of TA overall. There is nonetheless much difference between the TA activities conducted by each coordination structure and performance is variable. The coordination mechanism, guided by DTA/ACIS, provides a platform for sharing concerns and identifying adequate, agreed upon solutions for problems in efficient TA implementation.

CCTA influence on the decisions by TA units for other OPs is still limited and varies from one OP to another, mainly because of differences in institutional positioning of those units within their host entities. A number of thematic WGs may act inter alia as the CCTA's 'early-warning system' for overlap between OPTA and TA under other OPs. The WGs that are most important for TA coordination are those for, respectively, evaluation, training, communication and SMIS.

The thematic WGs are not only relevant for coordinating TA and avoiding overlap, they also contribute to increased consistency of TA with wider policies for improving public administration. This applies also to the way in which OPTA interventions are correlated with OP DAC objectives and implementation. OPTA and OP DAC both deal with horizontal issues such as public procurement, evaluation, ICT, training and communication.

Main Recommendations

ACIS and OPTA MA should improve the existing coordination by ensuring that the representatives of each OP within CCTA and WGs report directly to their respective MA Directors, so that their coordination mandate could not be circumvented (clear leadership assignment).

ACIS and its directorates in charge of WG should expand the membership of thematic WGs by allowing other relevant stakeholders as observers and should reactivate the Financial Management and Control WG to help solve the increasing amount of activity in this horizontal area.

ACIS, OPTA MA and DAC MA are advised to improve the coordination between OPTA and OP DAC through organising quarterly joint meetings on the topic of monitoring the development of the public administration capacity overall. One common topic should be in the field of evaluation, as OPTA should reinforce coordination with OP DAC in support of the evaluation culture in the rest of Romania's public administration and prevail upon the Government to reassume the agenda put forward by the National Evaluation Strategy.

Efficiency (Q6-Q7)

Q6: Are the mechanisms and structures established for OPTA operating efficiently? **Q7**: Are the Priority Axes and subsequent KAIs implemented efficiently?

Main Conclusions

Its current organisational set up and procedures provide the basis for the proper functioning of the OPTA MA. An important factor hampering efficiency remains the lack of clear delineation between the DTA's OPTA-MA staff and its other, ACIS-related staff. Combined with understaffing, this mix and blurring of staff functions undermines DTA's capacity to manage the increasing number of projects to be selected, contracted and implemented in the remainder of the programme period.

There is a need for a more pro-active engagement of the OPTA MA with current and potential beneficiaries, to help them with problems in procurement and implementation and fill the project pipeline, for a more efficient and effective absorption of OPTA resources.

Efficient implementation of OPTA projects is affected by time-consuming approval and signing procedures at beneficiary level (especially in the case of ACIS, but also that of other OPTA beneficiaries). Much of the delay is due to the number of statutorily required approvals at State Secretary level.

The TAF project, intended to be the centrepiece of a new way to handle procurement (by means of framework contracts), was vaguely defined and significantly delayed.

Since the start of the programme period, it is noticeable that the entire coordination mechanism for training activities – i.e. TDCU and TWG – has matured. But the institutional system is not yet sufficiently structured to face current needs, leading to slow progress of KAI 1.3 and with likely negative impact on future training activities.

ACIS and the CPA have been active, providing it with a good and apposite range of projects. The AA has so far been less efficient in putting forward projects, as it is still at an early stage of establishing a PIU.

At the start of the programming period, the SMIS application was not fully able to accommodate the functionalities required by SI management and implementation. This has led to substantial delay in data upload and caused input of erroneous and incomplete data. The system is now functional and operational, although it cannot yet respond to all data management and reporting needs of all MAs and IBs, partly because those entities' relevant procedures have changed since the start of the SI.

The communication and information tools already developed have either not been used at all (media spots) or were not used to maximum efficiency (websites *www.fonduri-ue.ro* and *www.poat.ro*).

Main Recommendations

ACIS should ensure that DTA's functions related to the OPTA MA role are clearly separated from its ACIS-related functions, by reorganising the subordinated services (SS, IS, FMS), as follows:

- creating a separate OPTA Bureau within the FMS, dealing exclusively with MA-related functions;
- extracting the training coordination function from the IS, and create a proper positioning of TDCU in a separate HR Bureau under the direct supervision of the ACIS Director;
- moving the help-desk function from the IS to the SS.

OPTA MA is recommended to issue, as soon as possible, an Implementation Manual, detailing all obligations on the part of beneficiaries, as well as the steps included in every phase of project implementation. The manual should clarify the respective roles of beneficiaries and the IS within DAT in managing public procurement procedures and provide templates for all documents beneficiaries must submit.

ACIS should improve the targeting of framework agreements (such as the TAF) for implementing OPTA projects, through better focus, clearer prioritisation and judicious separation into lots. ACIS, as main OPTA beneficiary, should increase the efficiency of project approval by simplifying procedures or limiting delays at all stages of OPTA project implementation.

ACIS and OPTA MA are recommended to strengthen their cooperation with CPA and AA by supporting the institutional capacity for project implementation within these beneficiary entities.

ACIS and SMIS CU should improve the procedures for error correction by optimising the security system and access rights, through lowering the level of authority for sending and receiving correction requests, thus allowing SMIS coordinators to correct directly a series of common mistakes. As an alternative, ACIS could externalise error correction to a contractor, in parallel with the further development of SMIS.

ACIS should use the communication tools already developed broadcasting publicity spots without delay, building a user-friendly interface for www.fonduri-ue.ro for all target groups, including the general public, improving the www.poat.ro website to enhance transparency, by providing for each approved and contracted project a short description of objectives and planned results.

Effectiveness (Q8-Q11, Q15-Q18, Q20-Q21)

Q8: What is the actual implementation progress? **Q9**: What is the difference between the planned and actual performance? **Q10**: Which are the factors contributing to the difference between the planned and real performance? **Q11**: To what extend each Priority Axis and subsequent KAI is implemented effectively (is contributing to reaching OPTA objectives)? **Q15**: To what extent OPTA ensures common standards, instruments and the necessary information? **Q16**: To what extent OPTA contributes to develop a common evaluation culture within the administrative system for SI? **Q17**: To what extent training supported by OPTA is contributing to ensuring highly qualified personnel in the relevant structures? **Q18**: How good is the functioning of the relevant structures being ensured through OPTA support? **Q20**: To what extent training, communication and support activities provided through OPTA are contributing to a better use of the SMIS? **Q21**: How well are the general messages regarding the Structural Instruments disseminated at national level with OPTA support? Are there alternatives for reaching the objectives of PA3?

Main Conclusions

At the end of 2009, progress on OPTA implementation was still very weak. Although the institutional setting for managing the programme is in place, most of OPTA interventions still had not been launched, or had been stopped. Judging by the degree of attainment of output indicators, programme performance at the end of 2009 fell short of expectations, with the exception of the number coordination meetings at all levels and the training events provided. For several output indicators, there was no performance to monitor, as the planned activities had either been postponed or were still under implementation.

Both internal (understaffing, heavy workloads) and external (economic crisis, public procurement problems, public finances legislation, beneficiary capacity and approval procedures) factors prevented more effective OPTA implementation. Most of these factors were only partially foreseen at the programming stage. The OPTA MA has limited control over internal factors, as its institutional context does not provide many degrees of freedom. The OPTA MA does not have the competence to find solutions for many of the external factors. Some institutional problems can be solved at ACIS management level, while only the highest echelons of the MoPF can deal with most of the others (e.g. rescinding the need for approvals at State Secretary level).

At the end of 2009, OPTA had not significantly contributed to support on horizontal issues, especially in fields such as public procurement and state aid. This is a significant vulnerability, as public procurement issues are generally considered bottlenecks, not only for the implementation of OPTA, but also that of the other OPs. All MAs and IBs look to ACIS for solutions to arrive at an efficient public procurement process. The issue of state aid also requires horizontal support, but beneficiaries see this need as less acute.

The decision to finance the 75% bonus for staff with functions related to SI implementation was made in 2004, at the suggestion of the EC. In 2009, the Government agreed with the EC to reimburse the staff bonus through OPTA. The bonus is a useful instrument for motivating MA/IB staff to keep absorption of the EU funds at optimum levels. Nevertheless, the bonus may lead to decreasing the motivation of staff outside the formal MA/IB structures, which are not eligible for

receiving the bonus, while arguably having their own direct or indirect contribution to smooth SI absorption.

A key OPTA objective is to achieve a common evaluation culture in Romania within the Structural Instruments system, but the evaluation culture concept existing in Romania is not tailored for the field of Structural Instruments. There is no mechanism to monitor how OPTA contributes towards the achievement of this objective. There is a need for a monitoring mechanism that can assess the development of evaluation culture for Structural Instruments both qualitatively and quantitatively, and report periodically on the role played by OPTA support in reaching this objective.

The training mechanism, the TDCU and the TWG required improvement to provide a coherent framework and common tools for training needs in the field of SI. Their activity is known by all stakeholders involved, but the mechanisms to identify and prioritise training needs are still not updated, creating difficulties in collecting and consolidating the information, and risking reducing the activity efficiency of all structures involved.

The late start of the training courses for SMIS users caused operational delays and errors. The training sessions have been adjusted and now use real data sets, taken from the production system tests and demo runs, for greater practical relevance. Users have been regrouped, based on common areas and interest domains, improving targeting and impact.

The existing infrastructure at central and regional level ensures SMIS functioning within normal parameters. In the short to medium term, the number of supply contracts for equipment is likely to rise, because most SMIS equipment is nearing the end of its economic or technical lifespan.

The parallel database application operated by the SOP HRD MA (i.e. ActionWeb) cannot be easily linked to SMIS, as differences exist between the data required by SMIS and ActionWeb. A single integrated information management system is bound to enhance for SI management and implementation. It is expected that further development of SMIS, funded by OPTA, will create that integrated system.

Communication and information objectives are far from being accomplished, with implementation progress very poor at the evaluation cut-off date. The reasons for not achieving the goals are related to internal issues (DSC functioning) and to external issues (inadequate staffing and complicate procurement procedures).

Even though the IC should be considered the key actor in the communication process related to SI, up to end-2009 no steps had been taken to create the Centre.

Main Recommendations

OPTA MA is recommended to develop monitoring criteria and tools (regular thematic evaluations) for the interventions that are hard to quantify, including support for the activities of pole coordinators and for estimating progress in achieving the 'evaluation culture'. On the latter topic, ECU is advised to design and implement, with OPTA support, an annual assessment concerning the development of the evaluation culture for structural instruments.

Regarding the bonus of 75% to staff involved in the management of SI, MoPF, ACIS and the OPTA MA should clarify the difference between potential beneficiaries under GD Nº 595/2009 and OPTA eligible beneficiaries (e.g. legal staff outside MA/IB). In order to avoid staff tensions regarding the 75% bonus, a solution would be to create an equivalent bonus system from national resources.

ACIS is advised to increase the quality of expertise regarding public procurement within the OPTA MA and beneficiary entities, through:

- more specific training on public procurement for staff of the OPTA MA, ACIS, CPA, AA and other beneficiaries in respect of writing the technical part of ToR, drawing up

budget estimates and drafting descriptions of specific requirements without restricting competition;

- enhancing IS/DTA capacity to deal with public procurement issues by enhancing the capacity of the Bureau for Project and Public Procurement Assistance in respect of full support for the elaboration of the administrative part of ToR, the evaluation procedure and grid, the adaptation of contract templates, and contracting and selection procedures; and
- engaging external expertise through the TAF.

ACIS is recommended to initiate regular discussions with NARMPP and UCVPP to find solutions for the blockages in the course of contracting and to promote and pursue more flexibility in public procurement; including the possibility to split up interventions, the use of swifter procurement methods (such as calls for offers, direct negotiation and direct contracting), and strategic measures such as the adoption of framework contracts.

ACIS is recommended to enhance cooperation in the field of public procurement by facilitating closer collaboration between ACIS, the MAs and IBs, as well as the national institutions in the field of public procurement.

OPTA MA and ACIS are recommended to improve operational arrangements by expanding TWG membership, so as to involve IBs in the process of training needs identification, as observers, by increasing TDCU/TWG transparency, through activating as soon as possible the official ACIS web page dedicated to training activities: *www.formarestructurale.ro*.

ACIS and SCD are recommended that SMIS coordination be improved and the roles of the SMIS CU and SMIS coordinators be strengthened, through:

- integrating as much as possible the functionalities for SOP HRD's ActionWeb into future versions of the SMIS application. As an interim solution, and without prejudice to the development of a single ICT system for SI management and implementation, it is advisable to create an interface that will automatically feed ActionWeb data into SMIS. This should be a two-way process. SMIS development should allow feeding data from ActionWeb, and the MA for SOP HRD should ensure that all data required by SMIS is duly provided;
- continuing the development of SMIS add-ons, including the prioritised implementation of the MySMIS application;
- translating manuals into Romanian, in parallel with the translation of the labels of SMIS application fields;
- organising on-line conference sessions or systematic meetings between the SMIS CU with the SMIS regional coordinators, assisted by procedures manuals in Romanian language, e-learning sessions, video tutorials, procedures for correlating SMIS with the format of application forms, reimbursements documents and technical progress reports.

ACIS and SCD should integrate the SMIS help-desk function in a larger framework for the organisation of the community of users. It is recommended that a portal be created containing all the necessary information connected to the SMIS application: procedures, manuals, instructions, newsletters, a forum for SMIS users community; and a de-centralised help desk on at least 2 levels: one for all users, and another for OP-related questions.

ACIS, OPTA MA and SMIS CU should encourage SMIS users at all levels to acquire/update their ICT equipment through OPTA, by accessing the dedicated funds available for this purpose. If demand would still be low, then resources may be reallocated to more active KAIs.

ACIS and OPTA MA should establish the IC by using the current information centre managed by the DEA. To this end, ACIS management might well open discussions with DEA management with a view to concluding an inter-institutional agreement to transform the existing *Infoeuropa*

Centre into the IC for SI. Related initiatives should involve a branding strategy, in order to find the best solution for the visual identity of the Centre (logo, message, name) and the development of instruments to support the IC including:

- the transformation of the *www.fonduri-ue.ro* portal into a platform that can be used by all targets groups;
- the establishment of a call centre to record specific information requests that need a longer period of time to be answered by IC staff;
- the set-up of a network of regional points of information, by developing relations with reliable partners recognised at regional or local level as promoters of local initiatives.

Impact (Q12-Q14)

Q12: What contribution has OPTA made to date towards: implementing the objectives of cohesion policy as established by the Treaty; fulfilling the tasks of the funds as set out in the Council Regulation (EC) № 1083/2006; implementing the priorities detailed in the Community strategic guidelines on cohesion and specified in the priorities set by the National Strategic Reference Framework; achieving the objective of promoting competitiveness and job creation and working towards meeting the objectives of the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005 to 2008). **Q13**: What are the achievements, challenges and future prospects in relation to implementation of the OPTA strategy? **Q14**: Could examples of good practice be identified? Which are they and their added value?

Main Conclusions

Starting from the key aims of the NSRF 2007-13, namely to strengthen the strategic focus of Romania's Economic and Social Cohesion Policies and make appropriate linkages to the EU policy, OPTA indirectly contributes to the achievement of Cohesion Policy by assisting efficient implementation of SI interventions.

Increasing the capacity of public and central authorities in relation to the management and control of SI is a priority identified in the NSRF. This priority is being addressed in the present programming period and is likely to have positive impact on job creation and fostering economic growth, thus contributing to the objectives of the Lisbon Agenda.

OPTA supports multi-level participative coordination, encompassing a large number of entities involved in SI implementation. This provides the necessary conditions for an effective, efficient and transparent implementation of SI, as well as the resources for the permanent monitoring, coordination, best practice exchange and improvement of the general impact of TA under OPTA and the TA axes in the other OPs.

Main Recommendations

ACIS and OPTA MA should continue to support the development of its complex coordination institutional architecture composed of several Committees and WGs, in order to ensure even better hierarchical and thematic coordination of SI.

PREAMBLE

The present document is the second draft of the Operational Programme Technical Assistance (OPTA) Interim Evaluation (IE) Report, which is the deliverable of Component 2.1 of the technical assistance (TA) project Conducting Evaluations for the period 2009-2010, implemented under contract 13/02.10.2009 – Carrying out Evaluations during the Implementation of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) and the OPTA concluded between the Authority for Coordination of Structural Instruments (ACIS) of the Ministry of Public Finance (the 'Contracting Authority') and a consortium composed of KMPG Romania SRL (leader), GEA Strategy & Consulting and Pluriconsult (the 'Consortium').

This Evaluation Report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations emanating from research and analysis designed to answer salient questions with regard to the relevance, coordination and coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of OPTA.

The cut-off date for the data used in the evaluation is 31 December 2009, unless otherwise indicated.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context of the Evaluation Contract

1. The contract [ref: **Table 1**] operates within the context of Romania's NSRF for the period 2007-13, which provides medium-term planning for Romania's use of the resources provided under the Structural and Cohesion Funds, together referred to as Structural Instruments (SI).

Table 1: Contract Summary

Contract Title	Carrying out Evaluations during the Implementation of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) and the Operational Programme Technical Assistance (OPTA)
Contract Number	13/02.10.2009
Beneficiary	Evaluation Central Unit, Authority for the Coordination of Structural Instruments (ACIS)
Contracting Authority	ACIS, Ministry of Public Finance (MoPF), Romania
Contract Starting Date/Duration	13 October 2009/18 months

2. The contract's terms of reference (ToR) identify as the general aim of the project to contribute to strengthening the overall coordination capacity of SI implementation in Romania and to the development of an appropriate administrative system aiming at providing a mutual level of knowledge and experience among different actors involved. In this context, the ToR require the project to carry out evaluations in the course of the implementation of the NSRF, including an IE of OPTA.

3. The contract has two main components:

- Component 1 – NSRF Evaluation
- Component 2 – Other Evaluations, which encompasses:
  - Component 2.1: Interim evaluation of OPTA (the subject of the present report);
  - Component 2.2: Synthesis Report of all interim evaluation reports on the Operational Programmes (OPs) in Romania prepared in the period 2009-10; and
  - Component 2.3: Ad hoc evaluations on thematic or cross-cutting issues, required by the National Coordination Committee (NCC), the Monitoring Committee of OPTA (OPTA MC) or ACIS.

1.2 Terms of Reference

4. The ToR were established by ECU/ACIS in order to lay out the general guidelines for the evaluation process.

5. **Table 2** summarises the objectives, purpose and expected results of the Component 2.1 – *Interim Evaluation of OPTA*.

Table 2: Summary of the OPTA IE ToR

Overall Objective	The overall objective of the interim evaluation of the Operational Programme Technical Assistance is to contribute to the successful implementation of this OP.
Project Purpose	The purpose of the project's OPTA component is to provide policy and decision makers, and programme managers with reliable information and sound analyse on the progress to date of OPTA, drawing out the main lessons learned during the first period of implementation and highlighting the best practice observed during this process at the level of the participants involved. The second purpose of this component is to offer an input to the strategic reporting under Article 29 of Regulation EC № 1083/2006.
Expected Results	The expected results of this evaluation are to build conclusions and recommendations, which should address the evaluation questions at the level of OPTA, presented in Table 3.

6. The expected results of the evaluation exercise consist of conclusions and recommendations on the following main evaluation questions:

Table 3: Evaluation Questions set in the ToR

№	Evaluation Question	Tag
Relevance		
Q1	Analysis in the OP is based on indicators related to 2004-2007 period. What are the important changes that have occurred between the programming phase and what are the expected ones?	**Important changes**
Q2	To what extent do the changes in the context affect OPTA relevance?	**Context**
Q3	Are the operations under the Priority Axes and subsequent KAIs still relevant?	**Relevance of PA/KAI**
Consistency and coherence		
Q4	To what extent there is coherence between the other Operational Programmes' technical assistance priority axes and OPTA?	**Coherence**
Q5	Are the operations under the Priority Axes and subsequent KAIs consistent with the European and national developments in the field?	**Consistency**
Efficiency		
Q6	Are the mechanisms and structures established for OPTA operating efficiently?	**Mechanisms & structures**
Q7	Are the Priority Axes and subsequent KAIs implemented efficiently?	**Efficiency of PA/KAI**
Effectiveness		
Q8	What is the actual implementation progress?	**Progress**
Q9	What is the difference between the planned and actual performance?	**Performance gap**
Q10	Which are the factors contributing to the difference between the planned and real performance?	**Factors**
Q11	To what extend each Priority Axis and subsequent KAI is implemented effectively (is contributing to reaching OPTA objectives)?	**Effectiveness of PA/KAI**
Impact (Strategic Questions under Article 29 of Regulation EC 1083/2006):		
Q12	What contribution has OPTA made to date towards: ❖ implementing the objectives of cohesion policy as established by the Treaty; ❖ fulfilling the tasks of the funds as set out in the Council Regulation	**Strategic contribution**

	(EC) № 1083/2006 ❖ implementing the priorities detailed in the Community strategic guidelines on cohesion and specified in the priorities set by the National Strategic Reference Framework ❖ achieving the objective of promoting competitiveness and job creation and working towards meeting the objectives of the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005 to 2008)	
Q13	What are the achievements, challenges and future prospects in relation to implementation of the OPTA strategy?	**Achievements & challenges**
Q14	Could examples of good practice be identified? Which are they and their added value?	**Good practice**
Specific questions		
Q15	To what extent OPTA ensures common standards, instruments and the necessary information?	**Common standards**
Q16	To what extent OPTA contributes to develop a common evaluation culture within the administrative system for SI?	**Evaluation culture**
Q17	To what extent training supported by OPTA is contributing to ensuring highly qualified personnel in the relevant structures?	**Training**
Q18	How good is the functioning of the relevant structures being ensured through OPTA support?	**Supporting relevant structures**
Q19	Which are the long-term needs that must be addressed through OPTA in terms of SMIS development and functioning?	**SMIS long term needs**
Q20	To what extent training, communication and support activities provided through OPTA are contributing to a better use of the SMIS?	**SMIS support**
Q21	How well are the general messages regarding the Structural Instruments disseminated at national level with OPTA support? Are there alternatives for reaching the objectives of PA3?	**SI Communication**

1.3 Methodology and approach

7. The evaluation of OPTA is part of a series of evaluation exercises undertaken since 2009 by ECU/ACIS. It is the first assessment of the implementation of the programme since its launch.

8. The evaluation activity is closely linked to the overall management of the OP and the implementation arrangements, serving as a tool for assessing the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the financial assistance deployed, as well as the impact and sustainability of the achieved results. The requirement to conduct systematic evaluation activities of the OPs and the general rules for those activities are provided for in the European Commission (EC) Regulations[4].

9. According to the provisions of the Multi-annual Evaluation Plan for OPTA[5], the evaluations pursue to improve the quality, effectiveness and consistency of the given assistance, as well as the strategy and implementation of OPTA.

10. The first IE mainly addresses the progress of the OP, including assessment of the project proposals prepared.

[4] *Council Regulation (EC) N° 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006, laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund (articles 37, 47 – 49).*

[5] *The Multi-annual Evaluation Plan for the Operational Programme Technical Assistance, pg 13.*

11. Based on the requirements and evaluation questions mentioned in the ToR, the team of evaluators developed a **Working Methodology**[6] aiming to define the tools for data collection and evaluation to be employed for the OPTA IE. In addition, details were provided on the evaluation questions, target groups and expected correlations, which eventually lead to conclusions and recommendations.

12. The main evaluation tools proposed within the Methodology to be employed are the following:

- Document analysis;
- Diagrams;
- Interviews;
- Focus groups;
- Inquiry / In-depth analysis;
- Indicators analysis.

13. The target groups for the interviews and focus groups includes the following:

- OPTA beneficiaries within ACIS [e.g. ECU, Monitoring Directorate (MD), Directorate for Analysis and Programming (DAP)];
- OPTA beneficiaries within the other Operational Programmes [e.g. Operational Programme Development of Administrative Capacity (OP DAC)];
- services providers in OPTA-financed contracts;
- potential beneficiaries (e.g. MAs);
- individual beneficiaries of OPTA-financed projects (trainees).

14. Special attention was given to the coordination mechanisms, i.e. the Working Groups (WG) in different areas, set up by ACIS with OPTA support.

15. The **approach** proposed by the evaluators follows the evaluation five main pillars: **relevance, consistency, efficiency, effectiveness** and **impact** structured on two levels of analysis: in terms of the programme overall and in terms of each priority axis (PA) and key area of intervention (KAI).

16. Specific evaluation questions were treated in "**Focus**" sub-sections, within the sections presenting the evaluation findings.

17. The evaluation covers the period between the launch of OPTA and 31 December 2009. In the case of progress, data by the end of first quarter of 2010 (31 March) was also assessed.

1.4 Operational Programme Technical Assistance

18. OPTA aims to ensure that the implementation of the SI in Romania meets the principles and rules on partnership, programming, evaluation, communication, management, including financial management, monitoring and control on the basis of responsibilities shared between the Member States and the Commission, in compliance with Council Regulation (EC) Nº 1083/2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund, together referred to as the SI. Since OPTA addresses needs identified for the whole

[6] *Please refer to Annex 2 – Methodology.*

system of management and implementation of SI, sometimes common for a range of entities, the programme is by its nature horizontal[7].

19. As a general rule, OPTA aims to ensure support for the SIs' implementation activities, which are common for at least two OPs. At the same time, OPTA supports the coordination process, through support for the ACIS and the financial control and audit system, through support for the AA and the CPA.

20. To achieve its objectives, OPTA has to ensure support for the coordination and the implementation of SI in Romania, to ensure a reliable management and monitoring system for these instruments and to ensure appropriate communication to the public about the financing opportunities and interventions benefiting of EU support. To this end, the following PA were formulated:

- PA 1 - Support to the implementation of SI and coordination of programmes;
- PA 2 - Further development and support for the functioning of the SMIS;
- PA 3 - Dissemination of information and promotion of SI.

21. The interventions planned under OPTA will be financed from the ERDF, with domestic co-financing. The ERDF contribution over the period 2007-13 is 170.24 MEUR, which accounts for 80% of the financing of OPTA. National co-financing for the same period amount to 42.56 MEUR or 20% of the total allocation.

22. The envisaged distribution of allocations by PA is:

- PA 1: 49%
- PA 2: 31%
- PA 3: 20%

23. Table 4 summarises the financial plan of OPTA, comprising both the Community and national contributions.

Table 4: OPTA Financial Plan (EUR)

OPTA Priority Axes	EU Funding	Co-financing	Totals
PA 1	82,792,695	20,698,174	103,490,869
PA 2	53,390,279	13,347,570	66,737,849
PA 3	34,054,816	8,513,704	42,568,520
Totals	170,237,790	42,559,448	212,797,238

Source: OPTA

[7] *OPTA, pg 6.*

2. Programme Relevance

2.1 Introduction

24. OPTA was designed as a horizontal support programme, to address needs identified as common to several categories of institutional stakeholders involved in the implementation and management of the SI in Romania.

25. The main purpose of OPTA is to ensure support for coordination and contribute to effective, efficient and transparent implementation and absorption of the SI in Romania[8]. The specific objectives of OPTA are to ensure efficient and effective coordination and implementation of the SI between 2007 and 2013, and to prepare the next programming period, as well as to ensure the coordination and implementation of ACIS' CP related to SI.

26. The analysis of the relevance of OPTA aimed to obtain information regarding the following:

- important changes that have occurred since the programming phase;
- expected changes that may alter OPTA context;
- the extent to which changes in the context affect OPTA relevance.

27. In order to understand the initial context and analyse present relevance, the evaluation team went through a mapping exercise, in the form of Problem and Objective Diagrams[9], drawn up at OP-level, as well as at PA-level. The Diagrams were based on thorough desk research, starting from the programming documents, including the *ex ante* evaluation and the Programming section of the Procedures Manual. The resulting Diagrams were validated through interviews with the Managing Authority (MA) and other ACIS stakeholders, and served as a framework for data gathering.

Past changes

28. The most significant context change is related to the acute recession in Romania since the end of 2008[10]. This development was not foreseen at the time of OPTA programming, as the implementation assumptions were based on the NSRF general forecast of continuous economic growth of 5% per year throughout 2007-2013.

29. The effects of the crisis emerged through several channels. Firstly, the strain on the national budget[11] determined the Government to use OPTA support for paying the 75% wage bonus for staff involved in the management and implementation of SI (previously aimed to be covered through national resources).

30. Secondly, all public institutions, including the OPTA Managing Authority (OPTA MA) and most of the beneficiaries of OPTA, were affected by the Government policy of cutting expenditure. One direct consequence was that of imposed hiring restrictions. Apart from the fact that staffing complements could not be expanded, restrictions also included vacancies, which could only be filled in one case of out seven. ACIS, as the main OPTA

[8] *OPTA, pg. 38.*

[9] *Please refer to Annex 2 – Methodology.*

[10] *Romania had a sharp reduction of GDP in 2009 (-7.1%)(source: National Institute of Statistics 2010).*

[11] *The 2008 budget deficit was -4.8%, while in 2009 it was -7.2% of GDP (source: MoPF 2009/2010).*

beneficiary, was also confronted with the staff freeze issues, which put a lot of pressure on existing personnel.

31. Thirdly, the economic crisis also affected the Government's availability to launch spending for certain niche-aspects of OPTA, although there were plenty of resources programmed. For instance, governmental spending for information and communication activities was restrained – at first discouraged informally (end-2009), and then also suspended formally[12]. Starting with the second quarter of 2010, there are no more formal restrictions, but this type of spending is still considered to be low priority considering the present budget constraints.

32. In context of the crisis, TA has been ambiguously perceived at government level. On the one hand it is considered as an important resource[13]. On the other hand, when it comes to approving of this type of spending, there is no sense of urgency or of prioritization, mainly due to the lack of experience in managing such funds[14].

Perspectives

33. The economic outlook of Romania does not look bright, as there are doubts that the country will resume growth even in 2011[15]. The national budget will still be under heavy pressure, which involves wage cuts[16] in the public sector, as well as restructuring and lay-offs.

34. Given the planned economic austerity measures, the Government is not likely to encourage spending on information and communication, notwithstanding the apparent de-blocking of such expenditure agreed in the second quarter of 2010.

2.2 Findings

35. At the time of programming, the most important OPTA intervention needs were grouped in four categories[17], based on the results of diagnostics exercise and SWOT analysis:

- need for coordination and inter-relation;
- need for staff training on the management of SI;
- need for continuing the development of the monitoring system;
- need for disseminating information.

36. The Problem-Objective Diagrams[18] show in a clear way that OPTA was adequately structured to respond these meta-level needs, as PA 1 addresses the first two, while PA 2 and PA 3 target the other two, respectively.

37. At the end of 2009, there still was a clear need for horizontal coordination and best-practice sharing. Although progress was visible in terms of programming, launching calls

[12] *Prime Minister's Order of January 2010, requesting the suspension of all information and communication public spending.*

[13] *The Prime Minister himself requested at the beginning of 2010 a report regarding the prioritisation of the use of technical assistance to ensure an efficient management and an increase of SI absorption.*

[14] *Another example is training expenditure – the interviews confirmed that although there are abundant unspent resources, there is a general ministerial reluctance towards sending staff to training sessions abroad, especially if these involve participation fees.*

[15] *2010 GDP growth estimate is -1.9%(IMF), while 2011 estimates vary from -2%(ING chief economist) to +2% (IMF).*

[16] *A 25% wage cut for all public servants, including the ones involved in SI management was introduced starting with the 2nd semester of 2010.*

[17] *OPTA, pg.38.*

[18] *Please refer to Annex 2 – Methodology.*

and evaluating the first rounds of applications, there is still lack of experience in the SI management system, especially on project monitoring or payment reimbursement, due to the fact that this is the first endeavour on the part of Romania to implement the Cohesion Policy, using post-accession funds.

38. As a result, there is a risk of ineffective and inefficient use of resources. The low level of absorption by the end of 2009, which questions the capacity to use the allocated funds, triggers the effectiveness risk. The efficiency risk may be determined by the current rush of the Government for quantitative absorption (focus on ensuring that all available EU financing is spent), which may distract the attention to the proper quality of absorption. Managing such risks properly implies investment in horizontal tools of coordination and management, which can only be achieved at horizontal level, through OPTA intervention.

39. Staff training is always critical for proper management of SI, and a minimum level of common skills for all personnel involved is required. Thus, training on horizontal issues is not only advisable, but also required.

40. Adequate monitoring is vital for proper management of the SI system. ACIS therefore needed and still needs both the technical and the qualitative expertise to have a permanent updated view on SI absorption. The monitoring system is by its nature horizontal, as technically requiring a common interface and database in order to operate efficiently.

41. Transparency being a key principle of the Cohesion Policy, an adequate information and communication policy is a clear requirement for SI management. Apart from OP level information and public relations, there is a need for a horizontal flow of information that can structure all separate data and communicate the national policy related to SI implementation in a coherent way.

42. The fact that OPTA maintains its relevance can be based on the interviews carried out during the evaluation[19]. The message most frequent communicated by interlocutors was that OPTA's ambit is ample for allowing all necessary horizontal interventions to support the implementation of SI.

43. The following breakdown at PA and KAI level provides additional details on the relevance of OPTA operations.

2.3.1 Priority Axis 1

44. The objective of this PA is to strengthen the coordination of SI implementation and to develop an appropriate administrative system by actions aimed at setting a common level of knowledge and experience among different entities.

45. The rationale of PA 1 resides in the fact that efficient and effective implementation of SI requires strengthening of the institutions responsible for ensuring the coordination of undertaken actions with the management, monitoring and control of OPs. Whereas the TA PAs in the other OPs support the management of the respective OP, OPTA ensures horizontal support, common standards and guidelines, allowing MAs to benefit from exchanges of experience and information regarding best practice in the domain.

46. Therefore, OPTA PA 1 – *Support for the implementation of SI and the coordination of programmes*, divided into four KAIs, aims to achieve the following:

- Ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the process of programming, monitoring, financial management, control and internal audit of the SI;

[19] *Please refer to Annex 4 – Interviews and focus groups.*

- Developing a common „culture of evaluation" among the structures involved in the management of SI over the whole programming period;
- Preparation of highly qualified staff, capable of efficient and effective implementation of SI;
- Ensuring successful (effective and efficient) implementation of OPTA and appropriate functioning of the structures involved in ensuring the coordination of SI implementation and organisation of NCC and WG meetings.

KAI 1.1 - Support to the management and implementation of the Structural Instruments

Initial programming

47. The interventions under this KAI focus on ensuring the common standards, tools and information necessary for effective management and implementation of the SI.

48. At the time of programming (2006-2007), this KAI was designed to support specific horizontal themes such as public procurement and state aid, in order to ensure compliance with EU and national regulations (OPTA pg 44, OPTA FDI pg 7, Applicant's Guide pg 7).

Financial allocation
2007-13: EUR 48,559,988
22.8% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-13
2007-09: EUR 16,238,604
23% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-09.

49. Furthermore, this KAI aims to support the completion of surveys, elaboration of studies and publication of good practice guides, as well as the organisation of events dealing with horizontal themes.

Relevance of original programming

50. **Public procurement** remains a topical issue for TA. Although it was anticipated correctly that support is needed to provide functional procurement rules and procedures, it was not estimated that this factor would reach such a critical level in the implementation of SI.

51. Due to the general lack of experience with public procurement, several contracts were delayed or cancelled because the contracting authorities inadequately prepared tender dossiers. In most cases, the eligibility or selection criteria were either too subjective, leaving the award decision at the whim of the selection committee, or too restrictive, potentially harming free competition. As a consequence, the practice of appealing tender decisions became widespread.

52. Guidelines were expected from the institutions responsible for public procurement regulations [the National Authority for Regulating and Monitoring Public Procurement (NARMPP), the Unit for Coordination and Verification of Public Procurement (UCVPP) and the National Council for Solving Complaints (NCSC)]. Although several versions of a procurement guide were provided by NARMPP, there is still no consensus on specific templates or good practices[20].

53. After several delayed or cancelled tenders for SI projects, ACIS has tried to cooperate with NARMPP and UCVPP, by organising a number of consultations, but this coordination has been *ad hoc* and lacked a dedicated institutional framework. There are no incentives for entities responsible for procurement to treat SI related tenders with higher priority.

54. Despite attempts to simplify public procurement legislation, the problems in this area persist, leading to serious delays in the implementation of all OPs. Another change in legislation is expected for the second trimester of 2010, allowing the start of contracting

[20] *Other than two Guides for concessions and utilities recently provided by UCVPP;*

procedures even in the case of appeals. This would unlock available resources and allow faster implementation.

55. Given the fact that public procurement is reported to be a hindrance for several OPs, there still is a clear need of horizontal support backed by OPTA for improving this process.

56. In the case of state aid, the situation was less critical, as the Competition Council (CC) had already approved most of the schemes. Also in this case the cooperation between ACIS/MAs and the CC lacked an institutional framework that could provide permanent and dedicated support for SI implementation in this field.

Subsequent programming amendments

57. OPTA proved its flexibility in the implementation period, when there was an opportunity to introduce new eligible expenditure and potential beneficiaries under KAI 1.1. From the time of programming until the second half of 2009, certain context changes required adjustment in terms of expanding the categories of beneficiaries and eligible expenditure under KAI 1.1.

58. The first adjustment was suggested by the EC and aimed at adding the National Growth Pole coordinators as potential beneficiaries under KAI 1.1. As a result, the OPTA FDI was amended at the beginning of 2009.

Box 1: Supporting the Coordination of SI Interventions within National Growth Poles

The last decades of European development suggest that economic, social and environmental issues in degraded urban areas can be efficiently addressed by adopting an integrated approach. Consequently, in 2007, Romania selected – by Government Decision (GD) N° 998/2007 – seven urban development and growth poles, which would have priority for investments through EU and national funds: Braşov, Cluj-Napoca, Constanţa, Craiova, Iaşi, Ploieşti and Timişoara.

The concentration of population, companies and infrastructure is the rationale for channelling investments for physical regeneration and improvement of the business climate, environment and social services in urban areas, providing them with support in carrying out their urban functions.

In the case of Growth Poles, the authorities are preparing an Integrated Development Plan (IDP), which is implemented through a series of individual projects aiming to ensure sustainable development. The projects in the IDP are partially financed through the ROP, PA 1 and KAI 1.1. In addition, the Government has decided to coordinate ROP interventions with the other OPs, in order to allow full development synergy.

Such coordination could not have been provided only by the MA/IBs within ROP, thus requiring horizontal support at NSRF level. Therefore, the Government has appointed Growth Pole coordinators, each backed by a small team, to ensure the functioning and management of the integrated approach on growth poles. Poles coordinators work closely with the respective Regional Development Agency (RDA). It was decided to support the activity of Growth Pole coordinators through OPTA, by adjusting the scope of KAI 1.1.

59. The resources provided are meant to cover minimal expenditure[21] involved by the coordination activity within Growth Poles. However, based on desk research concerning the governance of Growth Poles and also based on interviews with Poles Coordinators and RDA Directors, the only way in which proper coordination of Growth Poles can be ensured is by involving the local structures that are managing the IDPs. Poles coordinators can advise local structures, but such advice is far from being mandatory. Therefore, the managing capacity of local structures is vital for proper coordination, and can facilitate the tasks of Poles coordinators.

60. The second adjustment, adopted in the second semester of 2009, as agreed by EC representatives, focused on the financing of the additional 75% staff bonus for the HR involved in the management and coordination of SI. As mentioned earlier, this need

[21] *Such as the wages of pole coordinators, backstopping, travel and training.*

emerged in the context of economic crisis and related budgetary constraints in Romania, as Government resources became scarce.

61. Interviews with ACIS/MA staff confirmed that the 75% bonus is one of the main incentives for remaining within the public administration and resisting the temptation of high wages in the private consulting business.

62. The fact that both adjustments led to expenditure that would be provided continuously for the remainder of the financial perspective creates a positive outlook in terms of absorption for KAI 1.1, which represents over one fifth of the OPTA financial allocation. In terms of available budget, it may be argued that the introduction of this new significant type of expenditure reduces the funding available for the initially planned interventions. According to OPTA MA financial programming[22] the 75% bonus is expected to require funding up to MEUR 54, and the support for pole coordinators another MEUR 7. As a result, the two above-mentioned operations are likely to account up to 74% of the total (revised) estimated expenditure of KAI 1.1 and one fifth of the entire estimated OPTA expenditure. It is noteworthy that the initial allocation of KAI 1.1 was EUR 48,559,988. This implies that the operation related to the 75% bonus would be enough to exhaust the initial allocation.

63. In terms of relevance, since the initial programming was rather general and lacked detailed allocations for specific types of interventions under KAI 1.1, there is no evidence that the new adjustments have undermined the relevance of initially programmed operations. It just provides a significant shift in the focus of KAI 1.1.

KAI 1.2- Evaluation

Initial programming

Financial allocation
2007-13: EUR 10,352,164
4.9% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-13
2007-09: EUR 3,389,763
4.8% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-09.

64. KAI 1.2 has as main objective the development of a common 'evaluation culture' in the system of EU funds management. This objective is to be achieved by training staff in charge of evaluation in each institution responsible for SI management and implementation, by creating evaluation networks, by publishing evaluation results and by constantly improving the quality of evaluation reports (OPTA pg 45, FDI pg 13-14).

65. For this purpose, KAI 1.2 finances intervention such as[23]:

- the ex ante evaluation for the next programming period;
- ongoing evaluations of OPTA, NSRF and NDP;
- ad hoc strategic evaluations proposed by ECU and approved by the NCC or, as the case may be, by the OPTA MC; and
- the development of evaluation capacity.

Relevance of original programming

66. Given the fact that evaluation is required by SI Regulations, there is no doubt about the relevance of this KAI. Although assistance under the Phare programme was also used

[22] *Indicative Plan of OPTA financed and proposed projects 2011-2015, August 2010;*

[23] *FDI OPTA, pg 14.*

during 2007-08, the need of OPTA support for evaluation continues to be acknowledged by stakeholders[24].

67. In terms of context change, it is to be noted that, at the time of programming, the intention was to support SI evaluation through OPTA and national policy evaluation through OP DAC. This approach was the cornerstone of the National Evaluation Strategy 2007-13 (NES). Institutional changes and political instability have prevented the Government from developing an evaluation culture outside the SI context.

68. Thus, ECU/ACIS was the only active institution that remained to promote the ambitious goal of establishing an evaluation culture within the Romanian administration. As set within its mandate, ECU has since focused on promoting evaluation practices related to SI management and implementation only.

KAI 1.3 - Horizontal training in the field of the management of programmes/projects

Initial programming

69. The objective of KAI 1.3 is to support the TDCU within DTA/ACIS, in order to offer training on horizontal issues for the staff involved in SI management and implementation. Furthermore, this KAI helps TDCU in its planning activities (Training Plan), WG coordination and specific training activities for the coordination level within ACIS. (OPTA pg. 46, FDI pg 18-19, Applicant's Guide, pg 8).

Financial allocation
2007-13: EUR 21,954,415
10.3% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-13
2007-09: EUR 7,449,416
10.6% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-09.

Relevance of original programming

70. In terms of a general need assessment, both data[25] and the experience of other EU Member States suggest that proper training of HR is critical to a successful implementation of SI. Therefore, the overall relevance of this KAI is obvious.

71. In terms of specific training needs, two important developments should be noted. Firstly, in the period 2007-2008, a need-assessment exercise was carried out with pre-accession assistance. Also several training sessions were provided with Phare support, which reduced the demand for OPTA intervention.

72. Secondly, as possibilities to hire additional staff were limited [ref: **Section 2.1**] personnel turnover remained very low, under 10%[26], from the launch of the NSRF/OPs until the end of 2009. As most of the staff involved in managing SI already received basic training through Phare support, and there was only a very limited number of newly hired personnel, the need for basic training has diminished considerably, from the moment of initial programming onwards. This tendency was confirmed through stakeholder interviews and suggests that for this KAI although training needs still exist, and are important to be addressed by OPTA, there is a clear shift towards the need for more sophisticated and specialized training, as basic training needs have already been fulfilled.

73. Although beneficiaries were considered an important target group during the programming phase, there was no actual training directed to them until end 2009.

[24] *Confirmed through the interviews with ECU, ACIS management and independent evaluation experts.*

[25] *All interviews with representatives of institutions involved in SI management confirmed the importance of training for establishing a functional system.*

[26] *Estimate based on interviews with ACIS, CPA and AA staff.*

KAI 1.4 - Functioning of OPTA MA, ACIS, the CPA and the AA

Initial programming

Financial allocation
2007-13: EUR 22,624,302
10.6% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-13
2007-09: EUR 8,119,303
3.8% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-09.

74. KAI 1.4 is ensuring the necessary support for the functioning of the institutions involved in SI management, implementation and control that are not receiving support from other TA sources (ACIS, CPA and AA).

75. This KAI aims at supporting the employment of contractual staff, covering eligible administrative expenditures and also ensuring the necessary logistics in organising the NCC and MCC and all other coordination related committees and groups meetings.

Relevance of original programming

76. The relevance of this KAI is explained by the importance of ensuring adequate logistics for institutional coordination. All three eligible institutions have benefitted in the period 2007-2008 from Phare assistance, which has temporary reduced the demand for OPTA support. After the end of pre-accession assistance, there was a constant need of tapping the resources of this KAI.

77. Although hiring temporary staff can be highly useful during activity peaks, the legislation is restrictive regarding such contracts, especially during the economic crisis.

2.3.2 Priority Axis 2

78. According to the Commission Regulation Nº 1828/2006, the communication between Member States and the EC regarding SI implementation requires a stable ICT system allowing a secure transfer of data. Each Member State has therefore the responsibility to build such an ICT system.

79. Through GD Nº 497/2004, the Ministry of Public Finance[27] (MoPF) received the mandate to ensure the development and the functioning of the single ICT system for the technical and financial management of the European funds.

80. The implementation of the system, called the Single Management Information System (SMIS), started in 2004, aiming at a gradual development until reaching eventually full functionality.

81. In this context, the OPTA PA 2 has as main objective to 'ensure SMIS smooth operation and functional development and the ongoing expansion of the system so as to allow prompt access to data in all institutions involved in the process of SI and to contribute to a sound and effective management of the Operational Programmes'[28].

82. Four KAIs were designed in order to secure SMIS efficiency and effectiveness for the whole programming period, to ensure coordination and the necessary HR for the deployment and implementation of the ICT system and its digital network and to provide the necessary equipment for the correct and timely operation of the system.

83. Excepting the KAI 2.4 (Supply of ICT goods and services), the PA 3 has as its sole beneficiary the System Coordination Directorate (SCD) within ACIS.

[27] *In 2004 the institution was named the Ministry of Economy and Finance.*

[28] *OPTA, pg. 43.*

KAI 2.1 - Development and maintenance of the SMIS and its digital network

Initial programming

84. KAI 2.1 is designed to provide assistance, under the coordination of SMIS CU within DSC/ACIS, for developing the ICT system SMIS, including support for the development and update of the users and procedures manuals. Furthermore, the SMIS maintenance is supported under KAI 2.1 for all the implementation period of OPTA (please refer to OPTA, pg 51-52, FDI pg 29, Applicant's Guide pg 9).

Financial allocation
2007-13: EUR 17,693,476
8.3% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-13
2007-09: EUR 6,089,476
8.6% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-09.

Relevance of original programming

85. The SMIS was developed with the support of Phare assistance, and was designed to follow the lines of the OPs as they were initially defined in the programming exercise of 2005-2006. As the SI system has its own development and dynamics, it is mandatory to have resources to adapt the ICT system to reflect better the amendments brought to the OPs during 2007-09. The SMIS is already functional, but its functionality can be further improved, by providing the institutions in charge with SI management (ACIS and MAs) the optimum set of tools.

86. OPTA support for developing SMIS remains crucial in order to increase user satisfaction, improve data processing and acknowledge the amendments brought to initial programming.

KAI 2.2 - Functioning of SMIS Central Unit and its coordination network

Initial programming

87. KAI 2.2 is designed to offer support for the functioning of the SMIS CU and its coordination network, including support for hiring and training specialised contractual staff, as well as for ensuring the functioning of a help-desk within the SMIS CU (OPTA, pg 52, FDI pg 33, Applicant's Guide pg 9).

Financial allocation
2007-13: EUR 9,861,651
4,6% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-13
2007-09: EUR 4,059,651
7.8% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-09.

Relevance of original programming

88. The coordination network is critical for the good management of SMIS. As planned in the programming phase, special attention still needs to be paid to SMIS coordinators, in respect of both the selection of qualified personnel and the training and career development of this network, which has an important role in the optimum functioning of the larger community of SMIS users.

89. Hiring contractual staff could prove to be useful at both ACIS and MA/IB level during peak periods. At ACIS level, as inferred from the discussions with the SMIS CU, specialised assistance provided by top external experts may be needed in the process of designing the technical requirements and the ToR for launching tenders. The most relevant situation at MA/IB level is related to the data uploading requirements, which currently require significant effort, especially in the case of call for proposals with fixed deadlines[29]. When MySMIS application will become functional, it will allow switching the effort of primary data introduction from the MA/ IBs staff to the beneficiaries and hiring the contractual personnel at a local level may no longer be necessary.

[29] *All applications need to be then processed in the SMIS in a very short time – even the unsuccessful ones.*

90. The SMIS help desk application can be considered functional, but it does not have an optimal shape and functionality. Interviewed users pointed to the fact that they tend to avoid using this function, due to the high response times and the increased complexity of the help desk application itself. Therefore, OPTA support in increasing the efficiency of the help desk would still be needed.

KAI 2.3 - Training of the users, distribution of procedural guides and user manuals and information activities related to SMIS

Initial programming

91. KAI 2.3 finances operations aimed at training the SMIS users and at distributing manuals and other guides. A series of communication events are also supported under KAI 2.3 (OPTA, pg. 52-53, FDI pg. 36-37, Applicant's Guide pg 10).

Financial allocation
2007-13: EUR 10,007,137
4.7% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-13
2007-09: EUR 3,004,738
4.3% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-09.

Relevance of original programming

92. SMIS is benefiting from a dedicated KAI for training users, which goes beyond the overall training provisions under KAI 1.3. Training SMIS users is key to increasing the efficiency of SMIS, as this not only reduces the potential input errors in the system, but also increases the capability of using the system as a true management instrument.

93. Manuals and guides have already been distributed to users with OPTA back-up. However, interventions are still required in order to create versions of the manuals that are more user-friendly.

KAI 2.4 - Supply of IT&C goods and services

Initial programming

94. The KAI 2.4 supports the procurement and the implementation of ICT services and equipment necessary for the correct SMIS functioning (OPTA pg 53-54, FDI pg 40-41, Applicant's Guide pg 10).

95. The financial allocation for this area is the most generous out of all of the areas gathered under PA 2 of OPTA, having as intended beneficiaries the SCD, CPA and AA, as well as the MAs and the IBs. Out of this allocation, EUR 6,235,553 is represented by the EU contribution (ERDF).

Financial allocation
2007-13: EUR 29,175,585
13.7% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-13
2007-09: EUR 7,794,442
11.1% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-09.

Relevance of original programming

96. Most of the institutions managing SI have benefitted in the period 2005-08 from pre-accession assistance for acquiring ICT equipment As SMIS functionality relies on a network of ordinary PCs, there was no significant need to acquire new equipment.

97. The recommended life-span of PCs is around 3-5 years, which would suggest that most of the MAs/IBs would need to upgrade their ICT equipment from 2010 onwards. Therefore, the KAI would increase in relevance over the second half of the financial perspective. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the ICT equipment upgrading cost would be as high as the overall allocated budget for this KAI. Even a 50% of the total allocation would probably be generous enough to cover all required new and upgraded equipment, including network specific equipment.

Focus: long-term needs of SMIS development[30]

Ensure full compatibility between SMIS and third party applications

98. A special situation of applications developed separately, but in a way connected to SMIS, is represented by the HRD OP own ICT system – ActionWeb, functioning in parallel with SMIS application, without an automatic interface between them, thus requiring a double effort to upload data. ActionWeb was designed to collect data from beneficiaries, but is not fully addressing the SMIS data requirements, making an automatic link to SMIS difficult. ESF projects have some characteristics that are not totally covered by SMIS, in the opinion of HRD OP MA. The local application ActionWeb was developed in 2008 to meet specific SOP HRD needs and it is used to manage the projects under that OP.

Securing 100% and reliable upload of data

99. One important short-term need in 2009 and at the beginning of 2010 was to accelerate the uploading of beneficiary, respectively, contractor identification data. For this purpose, two SMIS connected applications were developed, allowing registering such data at MAs and IBs level and supporting migration to SMIS after ACIS validation. The two applications are web-based and were created 'in-house', with SMIS CU resources.

100. However, the current solution is unsustainable, as the number of projects and beneficiaries filing progress reports and reimbursement claims will grow. There is not enough staff to go over all small details of a project.

101. To address this issue, an application with a high impact on the SMIS user community needs to be developed with OPTA support, i.e. MySMIS. This application could externalise the process of data upload to beneficiaries during a project's life, covering submission, implementation and reporting. Beneficiaries may have then free access to a web-based application, where they can upload data from the Financing Application, reimbursement documents and progress reports. This way, an important workload can be transferred from MAs/IBs staff to beneficiaries that will have to manually upload themselves all primary data regarding the projects submitted for both the pre- and post-contracting periods. Data from MySMIS will be uploaded to SMIS only after a validation phase managed by authorised MA/IB staff (the back-end function), which would cross check the electronic data with the hard copies of documents submitted by the beneficiaries (front-end function).

102. Even if, at first look, the main purpose of MySMIS is to reduce the workload of the MA and IB staff MAs/IBs, the advantages of using such an application are important. Beneficiaries would become more accountable in relation with the data transmitted and, as a consequence, the quality of documents could be improved, leading in the medium term to improving projects proposals, with intermediate impact on absorption capacity.

103. MySMIS is not only a tool for uploading data, but aims to be interactive and dynamic, registering the beneficiaries reactions related to the ICT system's changes. Therefore, MySMIS may be very useful, with a positive impact in the short term, but also in the long term.

Opening SMIS customization for stakeholders

104. Another need is to generate customized reporting for stakeholders (ACIS, MAs and IBs). A temporary solution has been developed in the form of a Business Intelligence component, which was generated internally by SCD staff. Ideally, this needs to be replaced by a full Business Intelligence Application for SMIS (BIAS application),

[30] *This section is answering a specific evaluation question, namely Q19. Please refer to Table 3.*

delivering flexible reporting, including data exports[31], accessing databases in real time, and providing high level security and activity audit.

105. For the next version of SMIS that may be developed under OPTA, the reporting component should cover all types of standard reports, compulsory for the official documents flow, and BIAS application would ensure the flexible data access, according to the specific needs of each stakeholder managing SI.

Continuous training

106. In addition to SMIS development, another need outlined during interviews by SMIS CU staff is related to specific training sessions on issues such as public procurement. Additional training on project monitoring and financial procedure would also be useful for SMIS CU staff in order to understand better the needs of the users.

2.3.3 Priority Axis 3

107. In compliance with Council Regulation (EC) Nº 1828/2006, each Member State must develop a Communication Plan (CP), detailing the communication and information tools to be used in order to ensure visibility and to increase the awareness level regarding the OPs and the Community role.

108. The communication need has its roots in the EC experience regarding the low level of information concerning the role and impact of structural instruments. Therefore, Member States are responsible to develop a single CP for all OPs or a CP for each OP.

109. Romania decided on detailing a CP for each OP, based on ACIS' National Communication Strategy for SI (NCS). The NCS aims to promote the EU interventions, in a coordinated manner as to avoid overlaps and to ensure synergy.

110. In this context, ACIS, as coordinator of SI in Romania and also as OPTA coordinator (with its DTA acting as MA) developed the CP for 2007-13, financed by OPTA and with two major components: SI-related communication and OPTA-related communication.

111. The general objectives of the two components are complementary, aiming not only to reveal the EU contribution to Romania's modernisation process, but also to consolidate the SI management system, as well as the role and the results achieved by using SI and OPTA financing. Moreover, the goal of the information, communication and publicity activities detailed in the CP is to inform the target groups constantly and correctly about the financing opportunities offered by the SI and OPTA, including the objectives and benefits of SI and OPTA implementation. In addition, the communication process is intended to ensure transparency and support for SI absorption.

112. Taking into account the complex dimension of the communication and information process related to the SI, the PA 3 is entirely dedicated to activities of information dissemination and promotion of the SI.

113. Therefore, the objective of PA 3 is to '*ensure coordinated delivery of general messages related to Structural Instruments at national level*'[32]. For achieving the horizontal communication and information dissemination objectives, PA 3 has two KAI: the first KAI aims to disseminate general information and carry out publicity activities related to SI, whilst the second KAI plans to support the establishment and functioning of an Information Centre for SI (IC).

[31] *In .csv format.*

[32] *OPTA, pg 54.*

114. The specificity of these activities led to assigning the SCD as sole beneficiary for PA 3, having the possibility to submit projects on a continuous basis over the whole period 2007-13.

KAI 3.1 - Dissemination of general information and publicity activities regarding the Structural Instruments allocated to Romania

Initial programming

115. The objective of KAI 3.1 is to offer assistance for the implementation of the Communication Action Plan, elaborated by ACIS. This assistance includes information campaigns, public opinion surveys, publicity activities, events organisation, information materials, impact evaluation and analysis of the best promotion and publicity tools. (OPTA pg 56, FDI pg 45, Applicant's Guide pg 11).

Financial allocation
2007-13: EUR 29,115,819
13.7% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-13
2007-09: EUR 9,512,670
13.5% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-09.

Relevance of original programming

116. The activities of this KAI continue the information effort supported from 2007-08 pre-accession funds (brochures, information campaigns, regional seminars, conferences and debates).

117. A general characteristic of the programming period was that the level of awareness regarding the SI was very low, with the programmes perceived as difficult to access and obtain, mainly because of bureaucracy and corruption.

118. As the general information needs on SI were broadly covered either through Phare support or by third parties (mass-media coverage, consultancies and NGOs), one would expect a shift from the need for basic information to a more specific and sophisticated need for targeted information. Such a situation would imply a slight adjustment of the initial programming.

119. However, a Survey commissioned by ACIS and launched in June 2010[33] proves that only one third of Romanians have ever heard of SI, out of which only 14% consider themselves adequately informed. Only 28% of people up to 35 years old have heard about SI. Interestingly, only 26% of respondents are interested to know anything about SI.

120. This suggests that the information campaigns so far were ineffective in increasing general awareness about SI and that to a large extent only the people that were knowledgeable and interested to learn more about SI became familiar with Structural and Cohesion Funds.

121. Based on the above, it can be argued that the assessment made at the time of programming is to a large extent still valid and that the interventions within KAI 3.1 remain relevant.

KAI 3.2 - Operation of the Structural Instruments Information Centre

Initial programming

122. KAI 3.2 offers resources for the development and the functioning of an IC for SI, resources for developing a dedicated webpage, a call centre and a regional and local network of information points.

Financial allocation
2007-13: EUR 13,452,701
6.3% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-13
2007-09: EUR 4,749,701
6.7% of the OPTA allocation for 2007-09.

Relevance of original programming

123. Beyond the EC general requirements related to SI

[33] *Analysis Report – The information degree of the public on SI in Romania, produced by TNS CSOP Romania, June 2010.*

information, the Government adopted the National Communication Strategy (NCS), as the main planning instrument for the communication and information process. The need for developing an IC was included in the NCS.

124. The IC for SI was seen, at the programming time, as the 'central point that all interested persons can contact following the campaigns and where they can find answers to general questions or be directed toward other specialized organisations in accordance with their specific interest' (FDI, pg 49).

125. The related tool-mix envisaged by OPTA includes the development of a website, a call centre and a regional network of information points, in order to deliver uniform and correct messages and information. Apart from the website, no other information tool has been put into practice. This is due to external factors (ACIS headquarters was inadequate for the initially anticipated needs), but also to internal factors (capacity of SCD to coordinate information and communication instruments).

126. All such instruments, and especially the IC, are still needed in order to provide the right infrastructure for disseminating information related to SI. Without these tools, the goal of the entire PA3 would be jeopardized. At the time of the programming, there was no anticipation of such a substantial delay in the implementation of the IC. However, the creation of the IC is still both needed and relevant.

3. Programme Coherence and Consistency

3.1 Introduction

127. This section investigates the coherence and the consistency of OPTA. Coherence relates to the quality of the coordination between OPTA interventions and the technical assistance interventions available under and specific to each of the other OPs. Consistency refers to a programme not having logical, internal or external, contradictions. In the case of OPTA attention is focused on of the degree to which there is contradiction with the EU cohesion policy or the NSRF overall.

128. The analysis of the consistency and coherence of OPTA involved obtaining information on the following:

- OPTA's empowerment to supply TA and the degree of matching or overlap, with regard to the mandate of the TA-related axes under other POs;
- the actual implementation so far of OPTA support in terms of TA delivery and the degree of overlap in TA implementation with relevant components of all OPs;
- OPTA consistency with Cohesion Policy and NSRF, with regard to implementation.

3.2 Findings

129. OPTA is intended to help ACIS in two major ways. On the one hand, OPTA provides ACIS and its directorates with the necessary resources for improving their day-to-day functioning. On the other hand, it enables ACIS to coordinate SI interventions by supporting all coordination instruments at horizontal level for SI, such as Committees or Working Groups. This inherently implies the need to correlate OPTA interventions with vertical TA from other OPs, both horizontally and vertically.

130. Details on the main existing coordination mechanisms are provided in **Annex 7**. For all WGs, the Statute and the Functioning and Organisation Regulations were taking into account during the analysis. Documentation review was validated through interviews for most of the WGs.

3.2.1 Coherence

131. The complementarity between OPTA and the TA axis of each OP starts from the programming mandate of the envisaged interventions. While OPTA offers horizontal support for problems common to at least two OPs, at OP-level the mandate of TA is to focus on solving problems specific to the respective programmes.

132. This distinction did not imply a complete separation of each type of TA. On the contrary, this option was chosen to create synergy between horizontal coordination measures at NSRF level, and vertical resources at OP level for efficient programme implementation, based on each programme's specificity.

133. Whilst there are obvious benefits attaching to this choice, there are nevertheless risks of duplication of effort or double funding. To manage this risk, ACIS created the CCTA,

which was mandated with providing the general coordination for the implementation of the TA. The CCTA was given three main responsibilities[34]:

- providing good cooperation between all the TA responsible units (among all MAs) with regard to the experience exchanges and best practice in the field of TA implementation;
- providing a strategic general guidance for all the directorates and units owning responsibilities in the TA field (within all MAs);
- Coordinating TA interventions in order to formulate action plans and proposals for improving the managing and implementation of TA and to submit them to the Management Coordination Committee (MCC).

134. The CCTA includes representatives of the entire MA responsible for implementing specific TA, as well as representatives of the OPTA MA and ACIS directorates. CCTA meetings take place every 3 months. CCTA decisions are taken by consensus or by qualified majority. Representatives of the AA, PCA and EU take part of the CCTA meetings, as observers. In order to facilitate the permanent operational activity of the CCTA a permanent Secretariat was created, provided by the OPTA MA – Strategies Service – and coordinated by the CCTA President (OPTA MA director).

135. Beyond the coordination role of CCTA, the thematic WGs set up by ACIS [ref: **Annex 7**] also have influence on how well horizontal and vertical TA is correlated. This is particularly evident in the case of the Evaluation, Training and Communication WGs. For instance, the Training Working Group (TWG) determines how TA should cover training needs, decides which general training courses should be funded through OPTA, and leaves specific OP related training to be contracted under vertical, OP-level, TA.

136. Considering the importance of the WGs in coordinating the TA in their thematic domains, there is an obvious need for cooperation between the CCTA and the WGs. CCTA meetings, after reviewing the general aspects concerning the TA on NSRF/OP level, customarily discuss the activity of the WGs, for pin-pointing specific coordination problems, should they arise.

137. All WGs share the goal of ensuring crosscutting coordination of thematic activities with TA elements. Hence, it is only natural that their activity should be directly supported through OPTA-financed projects. Already at the end of 2009, there were a number of projects in implementation or ready to be launched. For example, OPTA PA 1 and PA2 manage the following projects:

- KAI 1.2 supports the Evaluation Working Group (EWG) through the project Improving the evaluation capacity of the Evaluation Units in MAs and ACIS, which was recently approved for financing;
- KAI 1.3 supports the activity of the TWG through the project Continuous training in managing and coordinating the Structural and Cohesion Funds in Romania, currently under implementation;
- KAI 1.4 supports the SI and some WG coordination activity. The project Support for the functioning of ACIS and the OPTA MA, which provides both logistical and content-based support for the MCC, the CCTA and the CWG is already under implementation;
- KAI 2.3 supports the activity of the SMIS WG through the project Support for CSD for managing SMIS-NSRF, (in project phase).

138. The existing coordination architecture therefore ensures appropriate institutional arrangements for reaching optimum complementarily between OPTA and TA axis of OPs.

[34] *According to the CCTA statute.*

139. By the end of 2009, the CCTA activity had several outcomes. Firstly, a set of procedures were agreed and implemented to better coordinate TA horizontally and vertically. These procedures include the following:

- broad agreement on dividing TA at OP level into two KAIs for better monitoring: support for management and support for promotion and communication*35*;
- agreement on splitting TA eligible activities in five categories: support for management capacity of MAs/IBs, support for SI beneficiaries, support for studies and evaluations of OPs, support for ICT systems, support for information and publicity;
- agreement on standardized reporting on TA both for OPTA and the other OPs, during CCTA meetings;
- agreement on permanent review and consultation of AT ToRs for intended tenders in order to avoid overlapping;
- agreement on WG debriefing during CCTA meetings on thematic WG activity, including a mandatory WG assessment of envisaged TA contracts in the respective thematic field.

140. Secondly, CCTA meetings have become a platform for debate on problems encountered during TA implementation and for finding solutions for the procedure of designing, selecting, approving and contracting TA projects.

141. Thirdly, the CCTA has urged its members to move beyond quantitative reporting towards a qualitative assessment of the role and impact of existing and planned TA, both horizontally and vertically.

142. As a result of these achievements and set procedures, the CCTA was able to avoid potential overlap between OPTA and vertical TA. For instance, OP Transport was discouraged to fund its own ICT system, which would have contradicted the horizontal logic of SMIS, supported through PA 2 from OPTA. Similarly, several OP level ToRs for planned TA contracts were amended or cancelled, in order not to overlap with OPTA interventions through KAI 1.1.

143. However, not all coordination procedures went smoothly. There were cases of TA tenders still being launched at OP level, without prior consultation within the CCTA. Some of these tenders proved to have considerable potential for overlap with horizontal OPTA interventions. The reasons for such errors included:

- There are notable differences among the WGs in terms of efficient screening of possible TA overlapping and providing a proper debrief during CCTA meetings. The performance of a WG shows a high degree of correlation with the existence of a permanent team within ACIS and its level of engagement and representation;
- There are situations were, at OP level, the TA representative does not have enough power to prevent higher level decision makers to launch TA projects without proper consultation within CCTA. The relative power of TA representatives at OP level depends on the institutional setting of the TA effort within the respective OP, on the quality of the formal and informal contacts at level with MA management and also on the personal skills of arguing the case of coordinating TA with ACIS. Especially the first one of these factors is quite significant, as the institutional structures responsible for TA at OP level vary a lot from one OP to another.

[35] *There are still several differences from one OP to another in terms of dividing the two KAI on detailed TA activities – for instance, SOP IEC includes evaluation and ICT support in the second KAI, together with communication support, whereas in other OPs, such as SOP HRD, evaluation and ICT support are bundled together within the first KAI, which focuses on management support.*

Box 2: Comparative analysis of the most relevant Working Groups for the coordination of TA

The **EWG** is one of the most active coordination structures, especially through the professional culture that it created among its members. EWG meetings tend to exceed statutory formalism and address the promotion of technical instruments, as well as the development of the necessary mentality and paradigm for improved SI evaluation as a means of improving absorption. EWG benefits from its solid structure within ACIS, allowing direct reporting to ACIS Director, and thus more relative power over counterparts at OP level.

The **SMIS WG** had a difficult mission in 2009, especially due to the blockage of the contracting phase for assistance in developing the ICT-platform. Basically, under the System Coordination Directorate (DSC) within ACIS, the WG tried to offer internal optimization solutions to overcome some of the system barriers. The amount of effort was considerable and, although a compromise solution, it allowed for progress in the much needed data provisioning of the system and the use of the system overall. In addition to addressing the strictly technical problems, the SMIS WG meetings aimed at a proper training of the SMIS coordinators layer, based on OPTA support for that specific issue. Although at the end of 2009, there were still a number of serious issues related to the use of SMIS, the SMIS WG activity had practically saved the day by avoiding a situation of complete blockage, which would have had much more serious consequences. SMIS WG had more success in dealing with technical issues than with strategic agreement between OPTA and the other OPs on how SMIS should function. The fact that SMIS development was raised by the EC as a top systemic priority led to a closer connection with the top management of ACIS.

The **TWG** manages the Training Mechanism that allows the centralized gathering of all training needs at MAs and IBs level, which are then discussed to ensure a correlation between the training needs assessment and the best solutions to address those needs. Although they would have wanted to install software platform to facilitate this process, this improvement had not been implemented by end-2009, and remains to be completed in 2010. The TWG had an intense activity in the last period also because it had a large OPTA support, more exactly 2 external training contracts. The discussions within the TWG allowed for a better understanding of the adjustment of the training modules, in the direction of letting go of the general training on the SI, as it is no longer of great interest for the MA/IB representatives, and to focus more on the other modules, such as financial management or public procurements. TWG is headed by the OPTA MA Director, which provides adequate representation, but in terms of permanent structure, it is understaffed and poorly placed in the organizational chart in terms of direct link to ACIS top management.

The **CWG** pursued the elaboration and update of the CPs, as well as coordinating them. Moreover, with OPTA support the first communication products at ACIS level were developed and approved. The last period however was under elections and crisis-related budgetary constraints; consequently the promotion and communication activities were more difficult to manage, as they were considered to be low-priority expenses. CWG is led by the Director of the SCD within ACIS, which does not have direct professional experience on communication related issues. The structure ensuring the executive functioning of the CWG is the Communication Unit within SCD, which is understaffed and poorly placed in the organizational chart in terms of direct link to ACIS top management.

3.2.2 Consistency

Consistency with EU policy

144. The successful implementation of the EU Cohesion Policy implies the existence of a well-functioning public administration, with appropriate resources. The importance of administrative capacity is recognised by most European policy documents, both the strategic (Lisbon Strategy, EU 2020) and the operational ones (the EU regulations regarding SI).

145. This prioritisation can also be seen from the fact that operational changes have been made for the current 2007-13 financial perspective to allow for the development of administrative capacity. For example, Annex IV of the Council Regulation (EC) Nº 1083/2006 supplemented the list of eligible expenditure by including those specifically related to the strengthening of the administrative capacity.

146. Romania has opted for two OPs for the purpose of enhancing administrative capacity: OP DAC for supporting the capacity to develop national policies and OPTA for boosting the capacity to manage SI. Therefore, OPTA's objective may be considered consistent with the new EC perspective regarding the support offered through TA for a better management of the Cohesion Policy[36].

147. An important aspect when analysing consistency is the fact that the Cohesion Policy is in a process of constant review and reform. One of the main pillars of reform was the objective of policy simplification, clearly stipulated in Agenda 2000. The results were seen first in the 1999 reforms of Cohesion policy, which covered: procedures for revising the programmes; procedures for audit and control; mid-term evaluations and reviews; reporting activities; monitoring indicators; Performance Reserve allocation; annual meetings with the Commission; the Commission's role in monitoring committees; and financial management and automatic decommitment procedures.

148. Some of the measures had positive impacts on programme management, while several Member States have criticised the limited scope of the reform. This led to a new generation of reforms, incorporated into the 2006 reform of Cohesion policy. For the 2007-13 period, the Programme Complement was eliminated, and programmes became more streamlined with simpler financial tables. Evaluation requirements are more flexible, with responsibility for the content and timing of evaluations devolved to the Member States, and the Performance Reserve is voluntary. The key principle underlying the contract of confidence was built into the regulations, although the new compliance assessment exercise has not been without difficulties and has increased workloads at the start of the current period.

149. The launch of the 2007-2013 programmes has been followed by another simplification package. However, the main impetus this time was the economic crisis. The Commission's response was provided through two Communications setting out *A European framework for action* and *A European economic recovery plan* approved by the December 2008 European Council (European Commission, 2008b). The specific response of Cohesion policy was set out in the Communication *Cohesion Policy: investing in the real economy of October 2008* (European Commission, 2008a). It put forward a series of Commission recommendations for speeding up programme implementation and was promptly followed by supporting legislative proposals, including a range of simplification measures such as the frontloading of Community financing in 2009, enabling reprogramming of funds to accelerate spending, increasing the leverage of JEREMIE and JESSICA, accelerate reimbursement of expenditure incurred under major projects, increase State aid advances up to 100%, facilitate the launch of financial engineering instruments, broadening the eligible use of flat rates and lump-sum costs for some overheads.

150. The agenda for the future of Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 pushes for even further simplification. The main focus of attention is on how the current, administratively complex management and control system can be simplified while maintaining assurance on the regularity of spending. The agenda for reform encompasses a range of possible changes, including: the use of a different management and control system; differentiation of procedures; a higher tolerable risk of error; the harmonisation of eligibility rules; and adjustments to decommitment rules[37].

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[36] *More about the way in which OPTA is aligned with EU policy, as required by Art 29 of Council Regulation (EC) N° 1083/2006, will be explored in Section 6.2 discussing programme impact.*

[37] *"Review and assessment of simplification measures in Cohesion Policy 2007-2013", John Bachtler and Carlos Mendez, commissioned by the European Parliament, September 2010.*

151. The entire simplification reform needs to be put in the wider context of reform at EU level which focuses on balancing the reduction of administrative costs with the needs for ensuring that the EU budget is being effectively and properly spent.

152. Recent research has suggested that the administrative costs of Cohesion policy may not be excessive compared to other policy fields and that, in some cases, high administrative costs are attributable to national 'gold plating' – whereby national interpretation of EU regulations goes beyond what is necessary[38].

153. As a stakeholder and important beneficiary of the Cohesion policy, Romania currently is directly connected and concerned about the past and current reform. Through ACIS, the MAs and other relevant institutions, Romania is expected not only to implement the agreed reforms, but also to contribute actively to the reform process.

154. The OPTA is the first resource that Romanian institutions can use to prepare for the future and to engage in the wider European debate. In terms of structure and content, OPTA is fully consistent with this need, allowing full support for ACIS.

Consistency with the approach of other Member States

155. Romania's choice of having a separate OP for TA is not singular among new Member States. Several other countries eligible for support under the Cohesion Policy opted for the same. In terms of structure, the OPTA is similar to other TA OPs in other Member States, as most of them provide support to the institutions managing SI, support for training, support for ICT monitoring system and for information and communication.

156. However, there are also country specific choices in terms of TA content. In Poland, the TA OP has an entire PA dedicated to supporting only HR related to SI. In Bulgaria, the parallel OP contains direct provisions of support for developing public-private-partnerships in the context of SI interventions (PA 1), and for support to developing statistical and econometrical models related to the impact of SI (PA 3). In Hungary, the equivalent OP is named Implementation Operational Programme (IOP) with as second its PA (Tools required for the high-standard utilisation of support), which contains a dedicated KAI entitled Operation of a locally accessible network of advisers assisting (potential) beneficiaries in their efforts to generate and implement quality projects. In Portugal, there are two TA OPs, one for ERDF and one for ESF.

157. Given that similarities are clearly stronger than differences, it can be argued that the Romanian OPTA is consistent with the approaches of other Member States, while the specific differences may suggest topics of interest for TA projects, which are by and large eligible for support under the current OPTA structure.

Consistency with national policy

158. As far as national policies are concerned, the goal is to test the consistency of OPTA's objectives with NSRF objectives. There are two ways in which OPTA consistency with NSRF can be interpreted.

159. First, the NSRF postulates the need for efficient management and coordination of SI, which is exactly the main mandate of OPTA. There is no need for additional elaboration on this part, as all OPTA interventions are aimed at enhancing the SI management and coordination capacity. All the analysis that focused on the implementation mechanisms related to SI is relevant for proving the existing consistency.

[38] *"Regional governance in the context of globalisation: reviewing governance mechanisms and administrative costs", Final Report to the European Commission (DG Regio), SWECO International, Stockholm, 2010.*

160. Second, within the NSRF there is an explicit priority with regard to Building an Effective Administrative Capacity within the Romanian Public Administration. Here OPTA's contribution is also critical, as the staff responsible for SI implementation is expected to gain a high level of expertise and skill through OPTA's support. Indirectly, best practice and expertise gained as a result of OPTA support are expected to have a positive spill-over effect on the rest of the public administration. It is true that enhancing the administrative capacity outside the framework of SI is the main objective of a different OP, i.e. OP DAC. It is therefore crucial that there is a need of consistency on this point between OPTA and OP DAC.

161. As a matter of fact, the OPTA ex ante evaluation highlighted explicitly the need for OPTA and OP DAC to cooperate[39]. The focal point of such cooperation should be that of transferring good practices from SI management towards the management of the rest of the public policies in Romania.

162. There are several areas with the potential for enhanced cooperation between the two OPs that can be split at PA/KAI level, as seen below.

Priority Axis 1

163. Difficulties in dealing with public procurement or state aid (KAI 1.1) are not SI specific. Procurement is not a hindrance only in implementing TA contracts within OPTA or other within other OPs. In fact, procurement problems are also frequent in the case of spending national funds. The regulatory framework is the same, regardless the funds are coming from the EU or from the national budget. This means OP DAC can also help improve the capacity of public institutions regulating procurement or state aid.

164. The use of evaluation (KAI 1.2), as a means to improve public policy design and implementation, is not only related to SI. In addition to OPTA's interventions, OP DAC provides a dedicated KAI[40] intended to support policy evaluation. In spite of OP DAC's efforts, the implementation of projects supporting the use of evaluation was very low. This led to the relative isolation of the ECU and the EWG, supported by OPTA[41]. This happened in spite of having adopted in 2006 the NES.

165. Training (KAI 1.3) is common to both OPTA and OP DAC interventions as well. Beyond the competencies, which are specific to SI, there are a lot of core competencies which are trained in both OPs. An example can be training in *Project management* which is key for any public servant, regardless the nature or the source of funding she may manage. This provides more scope for a national training strategy.

Priority Axis 2

166. Setting-up SMIS as a monitoring system required by the EC only for SI (KAI 2.1-2.2-2.3) does not imply that the rest of the Romanian public administration could not use an IT instrument for better transparency in public spending and easier audit track. There are quite a few OP DAC projects related to IT solutions for public administration

167. The IT endowment required by SMIS (KAI 2.4) is to a large extent a standard IT prerequisite for all public administration (functional PC, not older that 3-5 years). Why

[39] *Ex ante Evaluation OPTA, Tamas Lunk, Jan 2007, pg. 23.*

[40] *OPDAC - KAI 2.1 – Increasing the responsibility of the public administration;*

[41] *This is not completely OP DAC's fault, as one possible reason for the stalemate may be the lack of capacity on the part of potential beneficiaries to come up with eligible projects supporting the development of evaluation to help improve national public policies.*

should OPTA fund PCs when such equipment should be part of a national plan to ensure computer literacy and endowment?

Priority Axis 3

168. Similarly, providing proper information and ensuring adequate communication (KAI 3.1-3.2) are not bound to SI. These are general principles and standards that any public institution should respect.

4. Programme Efficiency

4.1 Introduction

169. This section aims to investigate the efficiency of OPTA implementation. Because at the time of the evaluation there were hardly any results of programme implementation, the best possible proxy for assessing OPTA efficiency is a combination of programme theory and process analysis.

170. Programme theory in the case of OPTA starts from the programme's concept and design, examines how it is organized and how that particular way of organizing it will lead to the desired outcomes. This method will be used to assess if the current institutional structure is adequate for reaching OPTA objectives.

171. Process analysis looks beyond the theory of what the programme is supposed to do and assesses how the programme is being implemented. The evaluation determines whether the implementation system is functional, whether target beneficiaries are being reached, as well as whether projects were generated, and contracts signed.

172. In order to analyse OPTA efficiency and answer the specific evaluation questions, several interviews were organised with ACIS and the OPTA MA management and staff.

173. The interviews provided information regarding the OPTA institutional structure, the OPTA management and implementation system. Desk research was carried out in parallel to evaluate internal procedures on issues such as monitoring and coordination.

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 Overview

Institutional assessment – OPTA MA

174. OPTA does not have any IBs. It just has one MA, and one Manual of Procedures that reflects a single institutional set-up for the entire OP.

175. The OPTA MA is part of the DTA within ACIS. Two of the three services of the DTA have mainly OPTA MA-related functions. The third service has only a help-desk function, according to the existing procedures. However, the two dedicated services that constitute the MA have other significant tasks, not related to its OPTA management role. The finding is backed by survey data[42], which show that 37% of MA staff is responsible for support functions. This compares to a maximum of 17% in other OPs.

176. A structural and HR analysis of DTA may serve as a first step in analysing OPTA efficiency [ref: **Box 3**].

Box 3: In-depth Analysis – DTA institutional functions and HR allocation

The **Strategies Service (SS)** has all 7+1 positions filled, but two persons are on maternity leave. A third person is fulfilling secretarial activities, acting as support staff. Even if the SS tasks are clearly stated by internal procedures, only 5 persons are actually fulfilling the attributions related to the MA role, a number insufficient to duly comply with procedures. Taking into account the fact that one of the persons benefiting

[42] *Survey carried out by ACIS in relation to the administrative capacity of OPs, January 2009.*

from the maternity leave is in charge of the irregularities detection, and that the procedure stipulates the 'four-eyes' principle[43], the relevant procedure cannot be complied with when an irregularity occurs.

The SS workload is on a growing trend, caused on the one hand by the more frequent ad hoc tasks (weekly and monthly reports for the Government regarding OPTA implementation progress) and on the other hand by the increased number of approved and contracted projects.

As an example, at the end on 2009 and the beginning of 2010, SS had to deal with all new projects from KAI 1.1 related to the 75% bonus for staff involved with SI, which put a lot of pressure on the limited staff resources. For the time being, the procedures have been observed, but more difficulties are expected to intervene during 2010, as a large number of projects are expected.

An additional pressure on SS staff comes from the fact that beside the tasks strictly related to OPTA, their job description includes other functions such as managing the HIPERB programme[44]. Even if these are 'transitory' tasks, they bring a significant supplementary workload (in 2009 HIPERB required 15-20% of the total activity of SS).

The **Financial Management Service (FMS)**, as of 15 March 2010 has all 9+1 positions filled. Nevertheless, only half of staff is fulfilling the OPTA MA related tasks. As an example, there are three officers in charge of financial verification, but only two of them are working on MA issues. The third officer has tasks concerning the implementation of the remaining pre-accession assistance (Phare). Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that by the end of 2009, the Phare related tasks were almost over. Similarly, there are two financial officers; one dealing with OPTA functions and the other working on other ACIS related tasks. FMS staff with no prerogatives on OPTA implementation also includes an accountant and a cashier, the latter acting as a 'travel agent' for the entire ACIS (making reservations and buying tickets).

From the point of view of the practical experience, the persons within FMS have 2 to 5 years of specific experience in the field, but there are also new comers (hired from the end of 2009 or from the beginning of 2010), which do not have a relevant experience and only 'on-the-job' training, leading to difficulties in executing their tasks.

With limited staff, and with significant functions outside OPTA, FMS has difficulties in observing its MA-related attributions. The AA recommended[45] supplementing the organizational chart with two more positions, but due to the current restrictions this issue was not yet solved.

Given OPTA current progress, it is expected that the OPTA-related workload for FMS will increase abruptly in 2010, as an increased number of reimbursement documents will be submitted for FMS check. This may overwhelm the FMS staff, under the current structure.

As regards the procedures, they arrived to reflect well the MA-related tasks. However, procedures could not be fully observed, due to a limited understanding and capacity of OPTA beneficiaries to provide the required documentation[46]. This implies a lot of tutoring work on behalf of FMS that hindered meeting procedural deadlines.

The Implementation Service (IS) has been restructured in the first half of 2010, reaching a 9+1 organisational chart. A new bureau was created for project and public procurement assistance. A remaining vacancy was finally filled, through transferring an expert from CFCU. Even if these adjustments were made after the end of 2009, they were taken into account for analysing the institutional efficiency.

The only task of IS related to OPTA MA concerns the help-desk function. In practice, SI is not that active in providing such help-desk, relying on the fact that most of the beneficiaries are 'in-house' (CPA/ACIS).

As regards its other roles, at least before 2010, IS has had a limited capacity in supporting CPA/ACIS beneficiaries with public procurement issues. The IS is supposed to elaborate tendering documentations for ACIS and to give support for all the other beneficiaries. Unfortunately, until now, the quality of this service was poor (as seen by the beneficiaries). The reduced experience of IS staff related to public procurement legislation often led to contradictory or inadequate answers to the beneficiaries questions.

[43] *The principle that requires at least two different persons to check a procedure, to reduce margin for error.*

[44] *Greek Government bilateral development assistance: the Hellenic Plan for the Economic Reconstruction of the Balkans (HiPERB).*

[45] *Audit Report 2009.*

[46] *Also due to the limited capacity of the IS to assist OPTA beneficiaries properly and in due time.*

177. The fact that the MA is not defined as a separate administrative structure, but is included within the DTA, combined with the fact that MA staff is required to perform functions outside the scope of OPTA, has the potential to limit efficiency of implementation.

178. Although job descriptions are well defined, formally reflecting the different tasks, the staff has to shift frequently from MA-related functions to non-OPTA related tasks, a fact that confirms understaffing problems.

179. There are two reasons why DTA/MA staff is given tasks outside the scope of OPTA. On the one hand, DTA/MA staff has good expertise in project and programme management. On the other hand, there are no other resources in ACIS who can do that work. This suggests an institutional problem affecting ACIS as a whole, which remains outside the scope of the present evaluation.

180. In spite of its additional functions, the DTA is performing its MA role in an adequate way. The department was accredited by the EC and considered to have the basic institutional and functional prerequisites in place for efficient functioning in its MA role.

181. Until April 2010, the Procedures Manual for OPTA was modified fourteen times, in a permanent effort to further improve the functioning of the MA.

182. All services within the DTA are understaffed and have difficulties in complying with procedures. The workload problem is most acute for the FMS, which in the event of more reimbursement activity will be unlikely to respect procedures.

183. Apart from understaffing, junior staff is confronted with a significant de-motivating factor in respect of professional development. Deserving staff members cannot be promoted, even if they meet all requirements for the higher position. This problem is likely to increase staff turnover rates if not solved properly and promptly.

184. Regarding the level of training**,** MA staff has attended several basic training sessions concerning the SI, financed from pre-accession support. However, there seems to be an increased need for more specific training courses, particularly at FMS level, related to financial management or public procurement details[47]. An additional hindrance is the limited staff capacity to attend training sessions, mainly because of the current workload does not allow the necessary training time.

185. It is to be noted that, of all OPs, OPTA is leading in terms of the percentage of experienced staff. An ACIS survey[48] shows that more than 70% of OPTA staff have experience of more than 5 years, which explains why basic training is no longer required.

186. Given the hiring restrictions imposed by the economic recession, staff turnover is very limited, and very few, if any, staff requires initiation into SI issues. This means that OPTA staff has an adequate level of basic training and mostly needs specialised training.

187. Another aspect is assessing if there were any irregularities of OPTA management affecting the programme efficiency. Overall, there were no major irregularities. At MA level, only two minor irregularities were detected. The CPA detected the first one following an event organisation. Travel and accommodation expenses were paid for 45 persons but only 40 persons attended the event. It was decided that the three DTA staff members involved should reimburse the amount concerned. This has led to a higher level of caution within DTA/ACIS. The second irregularity (detected by the AA) concerned double reimbursement for two flight tickets, following a mission to the EC. This irregularity was easily corrected by deducing the respective amount from the next reimbursement application. A positive aspect is that the mechanism for irregularities

[47] *Also confirmed in the FMS interviews.*

[48] *Survey carried out by ACIS in relation to the administrative capacity of OPs, January 2009.*

detection is functioning. A negative aspect is that the ambiguities related to the implementation details are persisting – the OPTA MA, the AA and the CPA are in a continuous learning process on a case-by-case basis.

188. By the end of 2009, beneficiaries had come to feel acutely the lack of a comprehensive implementation manual. During the interviews, beneficiaries expressed the need for clear and structured guidelines. Some guidelines were given by the IS, but in a rather erratic way[49].

189. The IS also encounters difficulties in fulfilling its role to support public procurement procedures for all ACIS directorates and CPA, along with its other functions, such as managing contracts for ACIS and CPA and coordinating NSRF horizontal training interventions.

190. A first step to solve the capacity problem of the IS was already taken by creating a distinct bureau for project and public procurement assistance. This solution may ease the problems faced by the beneficiaries (CPA & ACIS).

191. The institutional problems described above have impacted negatively on OPTA beneficiaries, particularly where the functions of the IS were concerned. Beneficiaries complain that they do not receive adequate support and timely remedies for their problems. In some cases, beneficiaries maintain that they have been misled by IS staff, who gave contradictory answers.

192. There are also problems related to implementation of contracts, most of them registering significant delays in disbursing the expenses. It is true that the 'guilt' is shared: on the one hand, the contractors are delaying the submission of reimbursement documentation but, on the other hand, the documentation is verified and processed at MA level for several months.

193. Additional hindrances relate to the approval and signing procedures. Most of these problems are not caused by MA staff, but by procedures on beneficiaries' side. The interviews outlined that from project idea to project approval and to contract awarding a very long period of time is elapsing[50]. The approval circuit is long and complex, involving approval at State Secretary level. Thus, the State Secretary has to approve the project idea, the ToR and tendering documentation, the evaluation commission, the contract and the possible addenda and, of course, the payments to contractors. Sometimes, this circuit is lasting much too long, rendering the projects almost irrelevant for solving pressing problems.

Role of Monitoring Committee

194. In order to ensure compliance with Art. 63-66 of Regulation EC № 1083/2006, OPTA has set up a MC to oversee, among other issues, the quality of the implementation of the operational programme. The MC is chaired by a State Secretary and meets at least twice a year.

195. The OPTA MC is respecting the partnership principle by including among its members OPTA MA representatives, ACIS and other OP representatives, along with civil society representatives (NGO and employer and trade union) and representatives of local public authorities. EC representatives are also invited as observers.

196. According to the programming documents, the role of OPTA MC is to:

- analyse and approve selection criteria;

[49] *Guidelines were sent by the IS in a series of informal e-mails. Oral instructions were also used frequently.*

[50] *Several months, up to more than half a year.*

- analyse OPTA progress towards fulfilling its objectives;
- examine the implementation results and the degree of reaching set targets;
- examine OPTA evaluations;
- analyze and approve annual and final implementation reports;
- be informed on annual control reports;
- approve any proposed amendment of OPTA for improving its management;
- suggest to the OPTA MA new amendments for improving the programme.

197. Because a Directorate within ACIS leads OPTA, and due to the existence of various coordination mechanisms [ref: **Annex 7]** most of the issues discussed at MC meetings is already well known to ACIS and other OP representatives.

198. The value added of the OPTA MC is the membership of civil society and local authorities, which may come with fresh ideas on how to make better use of OPTA resources.

199. The civil society representatives are active during the MC, but the high level of technicality and the relatively narrow scope of OPTA interventions are limiting their capacity to contribute to solutions for improving programme efficiency.

200. However, the MC had a positive role in terms of strategic planning, as it agreed the need for a bi-annual Action Plan[51]. Similarly, the amendment related to the eligibility of support for Growth Poles coordinators within OPTA was debated in the MC.

201. Previous MC experience suggests that EC representatives are quite active during meetings and put great value on using the MC for assessing OPTA implementation.

202. Overall, the MC provides valuable information for its members, creates a good opportunity for interaction, especially with EC representatives, allows general critical thinking from social partners, but so far has not provided spectacular new insights on how to improve OPTA efficiency.

Contracting and absorption

203. The rate of contracting and the level of payments can be considered proxies for OPTA efficiency.

204. The evaluation has covered projects approved for financing until end-2009, as well as at the contracts, corresponding to these projects, which have been formally signed before the same cut-off date.

205. For the 2007-09 timeframe, OPTA had a planned total allocation of EUR 70,447,762, out of which the EU contribution, through the ERDF, amounted to EUR 56,358,210.

206. At the end of 2009, the status of OPTA projects was the following:

- 31 projects had been submitted (for a total of EUR 50,461,546, i.e 71.6% of the 2007-09 allocation);
- 8 projects were rejected;
- 23 projects were approved for financing (with a total value of EUR 37,603,973);
- 19 projects had their financing decisions signed (total value of EUR 33,859,997, meaning 48.1% of the 2007-09 allocation), out of which:
  - 1 project does not imply any subsequent public procurement contract[52];

[51] *At the first MC meeting it was agreed, at the suggestion of the EC suggestion, to adopt a 2007-2008 Action Plan, which was monitored in subsequent MC meetings.*

[52] *The project* Support for the partial financing of the SI coordination, management and control personnel expenses of the Ministry of Public Finance *does not plan to have any subsequent contracts.*

- 1 project was withdrawn, and was re-launched in 2010[53];
- 3 projects had not yet launched any procurement contracts;
- 14 projects have launched and concluded a number of 40 public procurement contracts, worth a total of EUR 7,088,929[54].

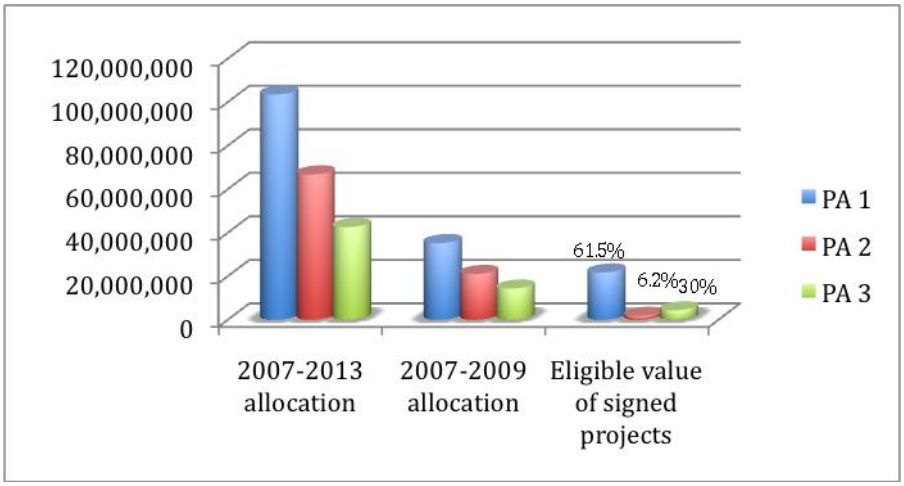
207. The 19 projects are distributed across PAs and KAIs as follows [ref: **Annex 1**]:

- 15 are financed out of PA1 (8 under KAI 1.1, 3 under KAI 1.2, 1 under KAI 1.3 and 3 under KAI 1.4);
- 3 are financed through PA 2 (1 projects from KAI 2.3 and 2 on KAI 2.4);
- Only 1 project is financed through PA3 (from KAI 3.1).

Table 5: Weight of Contracted Projects in total EU Allocation (31 December 2009), EUR

Priority axes	N° of projects	Eligible project value	OPTA allocation 2007-13	OPTA allocation 2007-09	% eligible projects out of the OPTA allocation[55] (2007-09)
PA 1	15	21,654,585	103,490,869	35,197,085	61.5
PA 2	3	1,719,358	66,737,849	20,988,306	6.2
PA 3	1	4,286,326	42,568,520	14,262,371	30
Totals	19	27,660,269	212,797,238	70,447,762	39

Figure 1: Contracted Projects: Financing Allocated per PA, % of financial allocation for 2007-09



Source: own calculation, based on OPTA FDI and on the ACIS reporting regarding the projects contracted up to 31 December 2009[56]

208. At the end of 2009, payments for contracted projects amounted to EUR 705,206, representing only 1.2% of the EU 2007-09 allocation. By end-April 2010, additional payments were made, worth EUR 682,034, i.e. another 1.17% of the 2007-09 allocation[57].

[53] *The project related to TA to develop the capacity for CBA.*

[54] *In addition to the contracts mentioned above, there is a case where a contract was signed, without the existence of a specific project (small contract on maintenance of the national digital network for SMIS).*

[55] *Figures are in EUR, at the InforEuro exchange rate for December 2008: EUR 1 = RON 4.2778.*

[56] http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/stadiul-absorbtiei-231.

[57] *Please refer to Annex 1 – Projects contracted up to 31 December 2009.*

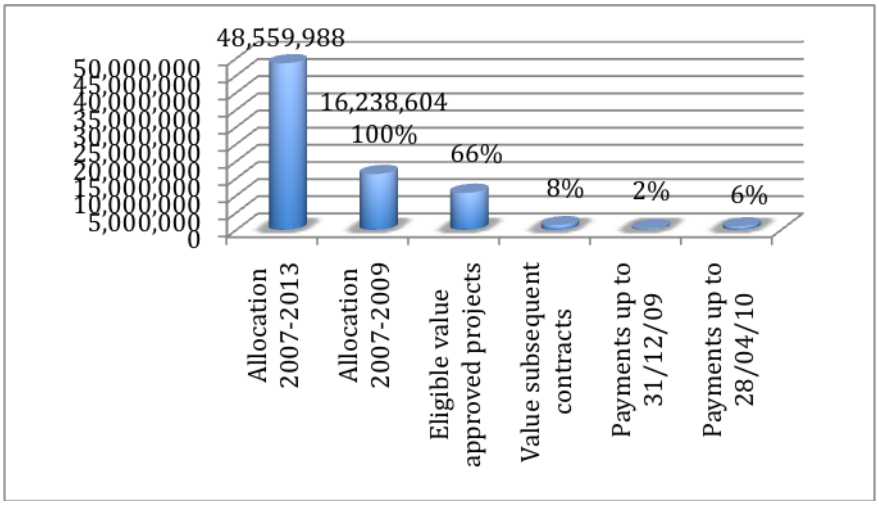
4.2.2 Priority Axis 1

***KAI 1.1* – Support to the management and implementation of the Structural Instruments**

Absorption progress

209. In terms of absorption by the end of 2009, the approved projects cover two thirds of the planned budget for 2007-09, as seen in the figure below.

Figure 2: Absorption Progress of KAI 1.1



Source: own calculations, based on data from the OPTA FDI and the ACIS Report regarding projects contracted until 31 December 2009.[58] **NB**: contract values are exclusive of VAT.

210. In terms of payments, only 2% of the 2007-09 financial allocation was paid by end 2009, and 6% by end-April 2010. The well-filled project pipeline augurs well for an acceleration of payments in the second half of 2010 and 2011.

Contracted projects

211. Until the date of the analysis (31 December 2009), eight projects have been contracted, with a total eligible value of EUR 10,776,130[59].

[58] http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/stadiul-absorbtiei-231.

[59] *Please refer to Annex 1 (figures are in EUR, at the InforEuro exchange rate for December 2009: EUR 1 = RON 4.2788).*

Table 6: Value of Contracted Projects at Cut-off Date - KAI 1.1

Nº	Projects Contracted by 31 December 2009	Eligible Value (EUR)
1	Technical Assistance Facility (TAF)	6,321,942
2	Study to identify the priority reform directions for the Cohesion Policy post 2013 from Romania's perspective	32,656
3	Improving the system of indicators used in NSRF and OPs monitoring and evaluation	490,791
4	Support for CPA staff to improve efficiency in SI implementation by encouraging the experience exchange	375,312
5	Support for partial financing of personnel expenditure of the MoPF for the personnel involved in SI coordination, management and control	1,661,460
6	Support for coordinating the implementation of the Integrated Plan for the development of the Brasov Growth Pole	568,895
7	Support for coordinating the implementation of the Integrated Plan for the development of the Iasi Growth Pole	560,425
8	Support for coordinating the implementation of the Integrated Plan for the development of the Ploiesti Growth Pole	764,649
	Total for KAI 1.1	**10,776,130**

212. **Table 6** shows that the most important approved (and partially contracted) project is the TAF, which aims to establish a framework agreement for horizontal TA support.

213. The TAF project is the most important endeavour under KAI 1.1, and focuses on:

- prompt solutions towards solving procedural and legal bottlenecks in the implementation of SI, of a horizontal nature;
- general improvement of system performance through a series of analyses and studies providing common recommendations and guidelines for several OPs;
- fostering exchanges of experience and 'good practice' within the SI system;
- support for beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries in preparing and reviewing of project and contracting documents.

214. The EC uses framework-agreements that function fairly smoothly, so it is quite normal that ACIS may introduce as business as usual such type of contracts. However, at the EC level, framework-agreements are divided into several lots, which are more clearly defined than the TAF, Lot 1 of which is quite vaguely delineated. Due to the loose and mixed definition of the lots, there is a risk that the contractors selected may not perform at the best level on the market (quality-efficiency). A consortium that gathers more than 10 different areas of expertise (as required in order to qualify for Lot 1 under the launched tender), without knowing exactly what the subsequent contracts will address in detail, may be less efficient than a niche contractor selected after a tender for a well defined and focused lot. This issue was raised during the annual TA conference, where NARMPP drew attention to Article 143 of GD 34/2006 on public procurement.[60] The way of tackling Lot 1 under the current tender may suggest that it is currently seen as a panacea for all the delayed OPTA needs. In the short term, it may seem a good solution, as it can simplify and speed-up OPTA implementation. All beneficiaries that were confronted with bottlenecks in launching and running their own procedures will resort to the TAF. In the long run, it does not provide the right set of incentives for solving the internal project management capacity problems of eligible beneficiaries, such as DAP or MD, to prepare and manage their own projects.

[60] *Art. 143 states:* The contracting authority must not make abusive or inappropriate use of framework-agreements so as to hinder, limit or distort competition.

215. The DAP submitted the project concerning the study to identify the priority reform directions for the Cohesion Policy post 2013 from Romania's perspective. The DAP was one of the two entities[61] within ACIS that submitted a project under KAI 1.1. The MD had also the intention to submit a project but failed to do so because of staff overload with pre-accession management. During the interviews, representatives of both of the above Directorates have expressed their concerns related to the capacity to manage such projects.

216. It further to be noted that half of the eight contracted projects focus on two eligible activities that were subsequently introduced under KAI 1.1, i.e. support towards covering the 75% staff bonus (project 5) and support for the coordination of SI interventions within Growth Poles (projects 6-8). These four projects were in fact just the beginning of a very dynamic contracting process that has clear potential for securing the absorption of SI on KAI 1.1, as the remaining four Growth Poles and all other Ministries that host IBs/MAs are eligible for applying.

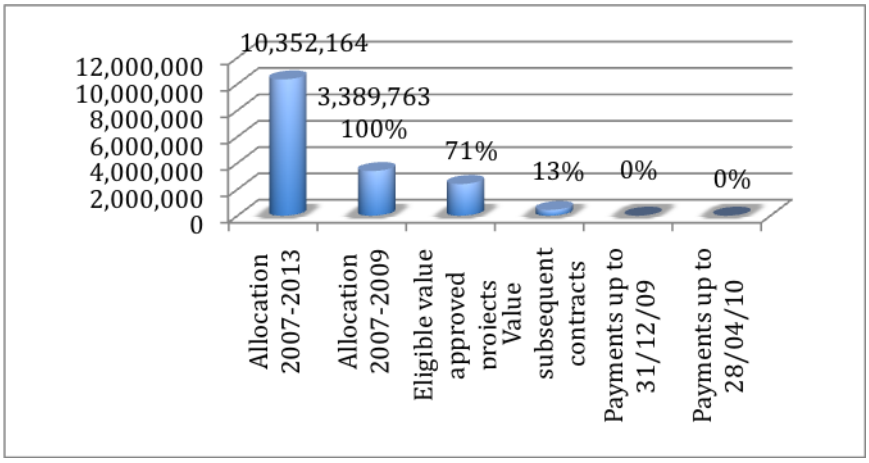
217. This tendency is illustrated by the fact that, between 1 January 2010 and end-March 2010, seven more projects were approved in respect of similar activities.

KAI 1.2 - Evaluation

Absorption progress

218. In terms of absorption by end-2009, the approved projects cover 71% of the planned budget for 2007-09, as seen in the figure below.

Figure 3: Absorption Progress of KAI 1.2



Source: own calculations, based on data from the OPTA FDI and the ACIS Report regarding projects contracted until 31 December 2009.[62] **NB**: contract values are exclusive of VAT.

219. Although this KAI is leading in terms of the value of approved and signed projects, only a small part of available resources was subsequently contracted (13%). Even less encouraging is that, by end-April 2010, no disbursements were made for the three contracted projects.

Contracted projects

220. By the evaluation cut-off date (31 December 2009), from the total allocation, three projects had been contracted[63], with a total eligible value of EUR 2,406,048 (71% of the 2007-09 allocation)[64], of which EUR 1,924,838 representing the ERDF contribution.

[61] *ECU within ACIS has also submitted a project under KAI 1.1.*

[62] http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/stadiul-absorbtiei-231.

[63] *Meaning approved to be financed by OPTA.*

Table 7: Value of Contracted Projects at Cut-off Date - KAI 1.2

N°	Contracted projects	Eligible Value (EUR)
1	Developing the evaluation capacity of the MAs and ACIS evaluation units	653,220
2	Conducting Evaluations for the Period 2009-10	560,905
3	Developing the methodological framework for cost-benefit analysis	1,191,923
	Total for KAI 1.2	**2,406,048**

221. Only one of the three projects was already externally contracted through a procurement procedure[65]. The tender procedure for the second project, focused on cost-benefit analysis, was put on hold temporarily during the first months of 2010, in order to clarify its content with the EC, and then launched in June 2010. The contract for this third project is supposed to be signed in the second half of 2010.

Box 4: In-depth Analysis – support instruments for increasing the efficiency of KAI 1.2

Developing a shared evaluation culture requires a change of mentality regarding higher accountability for public interventions, more transparency and more openness to take on board recommendations to improve existing policy. Such change is by definition difficult. OPTA's instruments for this purpose, as defined in the programming documents, are well chosen. Training, networking, publishing results and actively launching new evaluations, while unceasingly seeking better quality, are solid ways to move forward.

Training

Training sessions and experience exchanges are still the key instruments for ensuring horizontal improvement of NSRF and NDP evaluations. However, the implementation of this type of activities within OPTA is hampered by a number of factors:

- The long approval process and public procurement procedures severely limit the capacity of ECU to rapidly launch TA projects to cover urgent training needs;
- The relative rigidity in defining eligible expenditure (e.g. catering expenses during training events) and eligible beneficiaries (e.g. restrictions for staff outside IBs/MAs but which are relevant for NSRF/NDP evaluations – such as ministerial advisors or other core government staff);
- The small number of core evaluation staff creates vulnerability in the case of higher turnover (given that there are on average 2-3 persons in charge of evaluation at MA level, that are continuously receiving training; one or two experts leaving may create a serious capacity problem).

Also related to training, there is a need to differentiate between the specific, advanced training for core evaluation staff (EWG members) and other staff that needs to be initiated through basic training of the importance and instruments of evaluation. It was noted that a better understanding of the usefulness of evaluation may be achieved by expanding training outside evaluation units. Overall, the more staff from the MAs and the host ministries understands the significance of the evaluation activity and becomes stakeholder in the evaluation process, the higher chances of increasing the overall quality of SI interventions. One certain aspect about the evaluation culture is that it should not and cannot exist outside the day-to-day professional culture of ministries and MAs.

Networking

The EWG is well placed for developing SI-related evaluation. It has high professional standards and acts responsibly for promoting the importance of evaluation. OPTA support for this structure is therefore natural. However, networking is claimed from other stakeholders as well, which are not part of the EWG. Other IB, central and local government staff, researchers, professors, public accountability NGOs, consultancies, individual evaluators are important stakeholders for SI implementation and the improvement of evaluation quality.

[64] *Please refer to Annex 1 (Figures are in EUR, at InforEuro exchange rate for December 2009 RON/EUR=4.2788).*

[65] *The project Conducting Evaluations for the period 2009-10 was contracted in October 2009.*

Publishing

Publishing evaluation reports is a crucial way of increasing awareness about evaluation, and its importance for public policy. Currently the basic understanding of publishing is limited to printing and distributing the evaluation reports, and posting them on the public web-sites for consultation and future reference. Publishing should be seen in much closer correlation with PR related to SI. Until 2009, media coverage of evaluation activities related to SI was almost absent.

Improving evaluation quality

Overall, very few evaluations have as yet been launched under OPTA. The ones launched have put a serious pressure on ECU staff, in order to ensure proper administrative management.

ECU has only six staff, and all the MA level evaluation units are facing staff issues, given the current budgetary constraints. With the current number of staff, even excellently trained and proactive, it is difficult to cover all the evaluation needs requested by regulations and, at the same time, generate institutional commitment to evaluation as a management and policy improvement instrument.

Most evaluations are externalised, which is both normal and understandable from the point of view of developing an active local evaluation market.

Some evaluation units within MAs have tried to provide in-house evaluations (e.g. SOP IEC, ROP), but the above mentioned staff constraints are limiting the capacity of providing such activities.

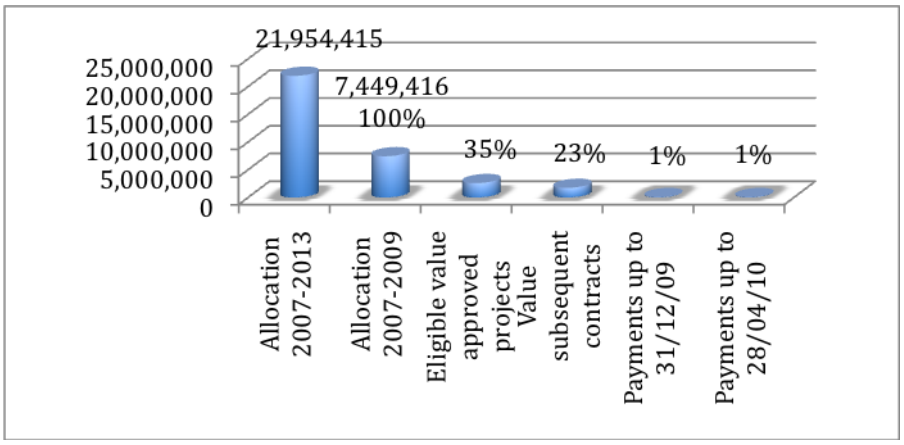
Generally, new evaluations are identified through a top-down approach. In the case of mandatory SI evaluations (e.g. Interim Evaluations), ECU implements them in accordance with EU regulations in force. In the case of other evaluations (e.g. *ad hoc* evaluations), in most cases ECU is drafting the ToR. The role of Programming and Monitoring Departments across the ACIS, MAs and IBs is still limited in providing topics and writing ToRs for horizontal evaluations, although the EWG hosts debates led by ECU on what other evaluations can be of use for improving SI absorption. But also EWG members have troubles in assessing evaluation needs in their host MAs, as in some cases they are not in direct connection to MA management.

KAI 1.3 – Horizontal training in the field of the management of programmes/projects

Absorption progress

222. In terms of absorption by end-2009, the contracted projects cover 35% of the planned budget for 2007-09, as seen in the figure below:

Figure 4: Absorption Progress for KAI 1.3



Source: own calculations, based on data from the OPTA FDI and the ACIS Report regarding projects contracted until 31 December 2009.[66] **NB**: contract values are exclusive of VAT.

223. In terms of payments, only 1% of the 2007-09 financial allocation was paid by end-2009, and no additional payment was made by end-April 2010.

[66] http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/stadiul-absorbtiei-231.

Contracted projects

224. By end 2009, only one project was contracted, with an eligible value of EUR 2,605,064 (35% of 2007-09 allocation), of which EUR 2,084,051 represents the ERDF contribution.

Table 8: Value of Contracted Projects at Cut-off Date KAI - 1.3

N°	Contracted projects by 31 December 2009	Eligible Value (EUR)
1	Continuous training in Structural and Cohesion Funds management in Romania	2,605,064

225. Besides the above project, at the end of 2009 (on 17 December 2009) a second project was approved for OPTA financing and it was contracted in February 2010. The project aims the continuous training of CPA's staff in the field of efficient management of the Cohesion and Structural Funds. The project has a value of EUR 573,427.

226. By end-March 2010, a third project was approved for financing. The project aims at training beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries in the field of implementation the SI financed projects.

227. A particular issue concerns the IS functions carried out by its Training Development and Coordination Unit (TDCU)**.** The Procedures Manual states that it is one of the roles of the IS to host and empower the TDCU. The organisational chart [ref: **Annex 3**] shows that the TDCU does not exist as a separate unit. Out of the 9+1 staff of the IS, there is only one person formally entitled as in charge of training. Oddly enough, that person belongs to the unit dealing with project and public procurement assistance.

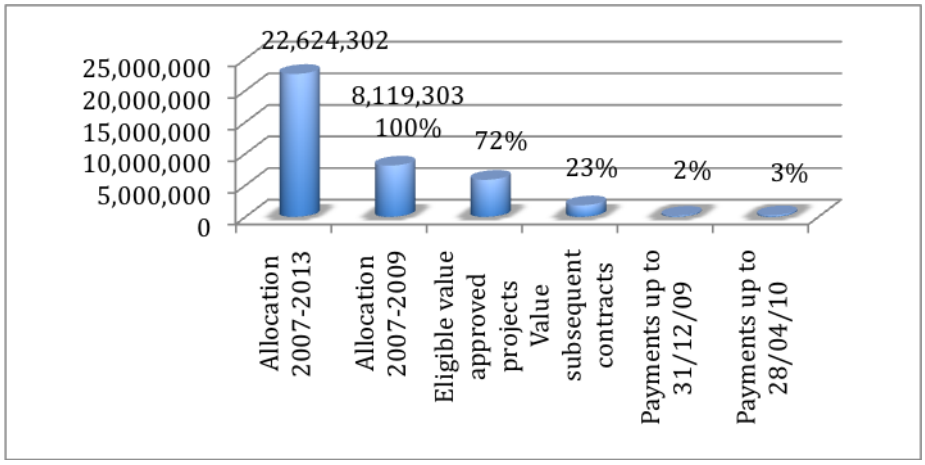
228. In addition, there is only a second person assigned to TDCU-functions within the IS, judging by the formal job description. This understaffing situation is severely limiting IS capacity for horizontal coordination of all SI training, including the TDCU mandate to provide the permanent secretariat of the TWG.

KAI 1.4 – Functioning of OPTA, ACIS, the CPA and the AA

Absorption progress

229. In terms of absorption by end-2009, the contracted projects cover 72% of the planned budget for 2007-09, as seen in the figure below:

Figure 5: Absorption Progress of KAI 1.4



Source: own calculations, based on data from the OPTA FDI and the ACIS Report regarding projects contracted until 31 December 2009.[67] **NB**: contract values are exclusive of VAT.

[67] http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/stadiul-absorbtiei-231.

230. The subsequent contracts signed by end 2009 amounted to 23% of the allocation for the same period. In terms of payments, only 2% of the 2007-09 financial allocation was paid by end-2009, reaching 3% by April 2010.

Contracted projects

231. During the evaluated period, 3 projects had been contracted[68], with an eligible value of EUR 5,867,343.

Table 9: Value of Contracted Projects at Cut-off Date KAI - 1.4

N°	Contracted projects by 31 December 2009	Eligible Value (EUR)
1	Support for ACIS functioning, including for OPTA MA	2,956,863
2	Development of CPA capacity for an efficient management of the SCF	2,076,789
3	Support for CPA functioning for on-the-spot verification process	833,691
	TOTAL	**5,867,343**

232. Besides ACIS, which it was expected to apply for this KAI support, the CPA was the only institution, among the potential beneficiaries, which seized the opportunity of using this support and it had 2 projects approved for financing, until the cut-off date. The AA was unable to prepare any projects for support under KAI 1.4. The interviews confirmed that both CPA and AA have institutional problems related to the preparation and implementation of projects under OPTA. CPA is more advanced, as they already organized a PIU-like structure, which, however, still lacks proper SI implementation experience. In the case of AA, due to the significant institutional reform which happened in 2008-2009, there is no structure equivalent or similar to a PIU that can deal with OPTA projects. The interview with AA confirmed nevertheless that the institution envisages progress in the creation of a fully-fledged PIU in the near future.

233. During the project *Support for the functioning of ACIS, including OPTA MA***,** there were direct purchases made for renting meeting rooms, promotional materials etc. and two contracts had been awarded: the purchase of consumables for the functioning of ACIS (launched in December 2008, cancelled and re-launched in July 2009) and the support for the functioning of ACIS and OPTA MA, which covers ACIS and OPTA MA travel costs, MCC, NCC and WG event costs and other consultancy services for ACIS, including the organisation of annual TA conferences and of other similar events.

234. For the project *Developing the CPA capacity for an efficient management of Structural and Cohesion Instruments*, the CPA envisaged the launch of procurement contracts, of which two of them were already signed: the purchase of equipment and the tendering of consulting services, in order to develop the CPA capacity for an efficient management of SI.

235. The purpose of the second project of CPA, which has not yet been launched for contracting, is to increase its own capacity to make field checks, this representing the one of the institution task in its role of a Certifying and Paying Authority.

4.2.3 Priority Axis 2

236. In order to assess the efficiency of PA2 implementation, an in-depth analysis is provided in the box below:

[68] *Projects approved for OPTA financing.*

Box 5: In-depth Analysis – Understanding SMIS Challenges and its Implementation Status

As any other IT application, SMIS must go through a series of development, testing and acceptance phases before reaching full functionality.

The SMIS application was developed with Phare technical assistance and it was designed – based on data and requirements available at that date – for Phare, ISPA and SI. The application has been implemented for SI from the start based on 2000-2006 regulations. In 2007 the application began to be adjusted according to 2007-2013 new framework for SI. However, after SMIS was launched for SI use, the OPs' procedures were frequently modified (or even created, if they not existed before), which was an additional challenge for the ICT system.

When the Phare programmes were closed, the technical development of the application remained frozen at 2007 level, due to the failure to contract new technical assistance for SMIS. As the OPs were becoming operational and new requirements surfaced after the development of the system, the data could not be uploaded in optimal fashion. Errors occurred and were perpetuated, inducing a surplus in workloads and data inconsistency (compared to an acceptable ICT benchmark, in terms of workload and error percentage).

Most of the errors reported by users are not due to the system structure, but are technical 'bugs', inherent to the life cycle of an ICT product. The errors were much escalated by two unfavourable and simultaneous factors. On the one hand, the identified errors could not be corrected in time, due to a lack of technical assistance and, on the other hand, the application was required to function to full capacity, by uploading real and concrete data following the calls launched beginning with 2008, while the application was developed, tested and accepted for the OPs as they were during their design phase in 2007.

Trying to standardise and integrate into a single application all the specific needs of all OPs represented a major challenge, due to the complexity of that approach and the time lag between the initial development of the system and the collection of data needed to achieve full functionality of the application.

The main problems affecting SMIS operations can be categorised as follows:

- **technical problems (bugs)** – These problems are not inducing critical errors and do not affect the functional integrity of the application. But not duly solving them may led to perpetuating errors and data inconsistency. The staff that uploads data into the system (i.e. 'final users') signalled quite a series of such problems (e.g. numerical fields not allowing decimals; and 'yes/no' buttons inconsistently alternated) as discouraging them to use the application. Engaging TA for SMIS development can easily solve this type of problem.
- **functional (business process) problems** – These problems are more complex and relate to the harmonisation of monitoring needs among all OPs. Some OPs have specific requirements that need to be dealt by further developing the application's functions.
- **procedural problems –** These result from not respecting the requirements for uploading data and are inherent for an ICT system with manual data input. Procedural errors are considered acceptable as long as the percentage of the induced errors is within normal thresholds. There are no error statistics at SMIS level, but the evaluation found that the system documentation and manuals detail well how to use the application, how to fill in each field, and what errors can be avoided. However SMIS users consider the manuals to be too 'technical' and not covering all specific functional situations. Furthermore, the manuals (as well as the labels, buttons and field names in SMIS) are in English slowing down users understanding of them.

Another problem identified by users concerns the procedure of correcting the errors once they are discovered. Usually, errors are noticed immediately by the user uploading data – a wrong value, or the wrong field used – but that user cannot fix them. Instead, all errors have to be notified to SMIS Central Unit (SMIS CU), requiring a relatively long time to correct them.

The interviews revealed that validation and access to different categories of data, in line with national data accuracy and security stipulations, are a major cause of problems. The caution implicit in the current procedures for correcting errors cannot be faulted. But the size of the SMIS CU team and the workload caused by its having to correcting input errors by final users, induce system down time and slow down the work of the final users.

An important element of the infrastructures needed for the functioning of SMIS is the network, which was created specifically for SMIS use. The network has two components – a local loop (servers, routers) managed by the SMIS CU and an external loop managed by the Special Telecommunication Service and its county network, linking the institutions at regional local level that are using the application.

At local level, final users of SMIS do not need specific hardware or software, because the application is web-based and can be accessed on any computer and with any internet browser. The user needs only a registered username and password to access the application.

KAI 2.1 – Development and maintenance of the SMIS and its digital network

Absorption progress

237. The absorption rate for this KAI is zero, as at the end of 2009 there were no projects or contracts in implementation phase.

Contracted projects

238. Until the cut-off date of the analysis (31 December 2009), no project was contracted under this KAI. For the immediate next period, one contract is planned to be financed through OPTA within PA 2, KAI 2.1: Developing the MySMIS Portal, with an estimated value of 2 MEUR.

KAI 2.2 – Functioning of the SMIS Central Unit and its coordination network

Absorption progress

239. Since the available funds for this area have not been used at all, the absorption rate is zero.

Contracted projects

240. By 31 December 2009, no contracts had been either finalised or in the implementation stage for this KAI.

241. The process of hiring temporary staff that was supposed to be supported by OPTA under this KAI is quite difficult under current regulations, requiring dedicated vacant positions formally approved in the organisational chart. Given the recent measures adopted during the economic crisis, almost all vacant positions were disbanded. Therefore hiring contractual staff is not feasible for the moment, leaving no scope for OPTA interventions, at least until a policy or regulatory change.

SMIS help-desk

242. Formally, the SMIS CU fulfils the help-desk function. Informally, the help-desk function is shared by SMIS coordinators[69].

243. The coordinators have a double interface role. The first role is to participate in the design of the application, and bring into discussion the specific needs and the particularities of their respective OP. The second role is to disseminate the information received at central level, during the SMIS meetings and WGs, within their local organisation, thus ensuring the bidirectional flow of information.

244. The SMIS coordinators have benefited from special training, which was more comprehensive than usual user training. Normally, they should be the first help-desk and should have in-depth knowledge of the ICT system, as well as privileged access to the application with advanced security rights. SMIS coordinators are also in charge of making a preliminary training for new employees, as future SMIS users.

245. Nevertheless, sometimes the SMIS coordinators cannot fully meet their responsibilities, either due to excessive workload or due to the lack of staff with technical and functional abilities to adequately fulfil this role.

[69] *The SMIS coordinators are thought of as the 'pillars' of the SMIS community. Each IB has 2 coordinators (a main coordinator and a deputy). Similarly, each MA also has 2 coordinators.*

246. As a result, despite the fact that the SMIS CU was initially thought of as a help-desk of last resort, it is often used a first source of help, which leads to an unscheduled workload.

247. Even if interviews suggest that SMIS users are satisfied with the quality of answers and the response times of the SMIS CU, the current support provided is not sustainable in terms of staff overburden.

248. The need to change and improve the help-desk application was acknowledged by SMIS CU[70] but was not considered to be an immediate priority.

249. Some MAs have created their own informal SMIS help-desk, tailored for the specificities of their OPs. In the case of ROP, coordinators at IB level are first asking for the help of the MA SMIS coordinator, usually for issues particular for this OP.

250. This indicates the need to consider a help-desk application with two levels – a general one, available to all users and focused on the technical component of the application (managed by SMIS CU) and a specific one, focused on the functional side and on the specific data uploading problems and management issues characteristic for each MA (managed in a decentralised way at OP level and relying on SMIS coordinators).

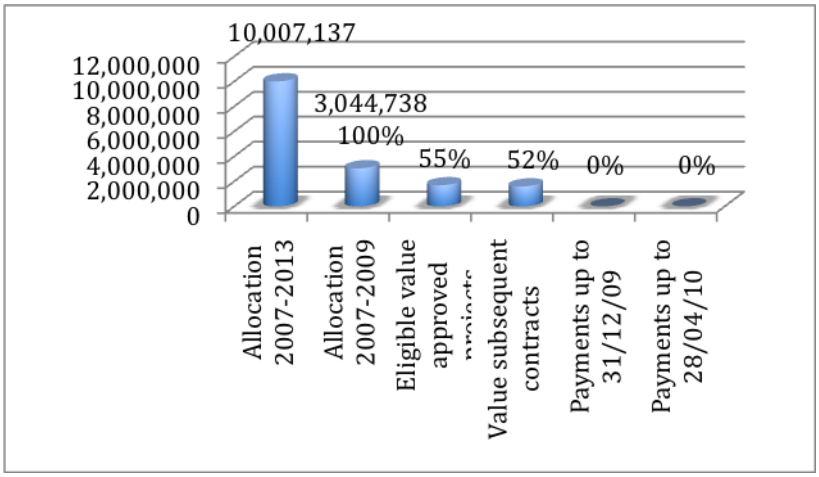
251. In terms of tools backing up the help-desk function, SMIS CU acknowledges the need to implement a web-based interactive and dynamic support framework. The help-desk portal can include a discussion forum for the SMIS community, thus officialising the existing informal discussion group. Such approach can prove to be extremely efficient in terms of data resources and response times.

KAI 2.3 – Training of the users, distribution of procedural guides and user manuals and information activities related to SMIS

Absorption progress

252. In terms of absorption by end-2009, the contracted projects cover 55% of the planned budget for 2007-09, as seen in the figure below:

Figure 6: Absorption Progress of KAI 2.3



Source: own calculations, based on data from the OPTA FDI and the ACIS Report regarding projects contracted until 31 December 2009.[71] **NB**: contract values are exclusive of VAT.

253. No payment was made by end-April 2010.

[70] *Based on an interview with the SMIS CU.*

[71] http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/stadiul-absorbtiei-231.

Contracted projects

254. By end 2009, only one project was contracted for SMIS training.

Table 10: Value of Contracted Projects at Cut-off Date - KAI 2.3

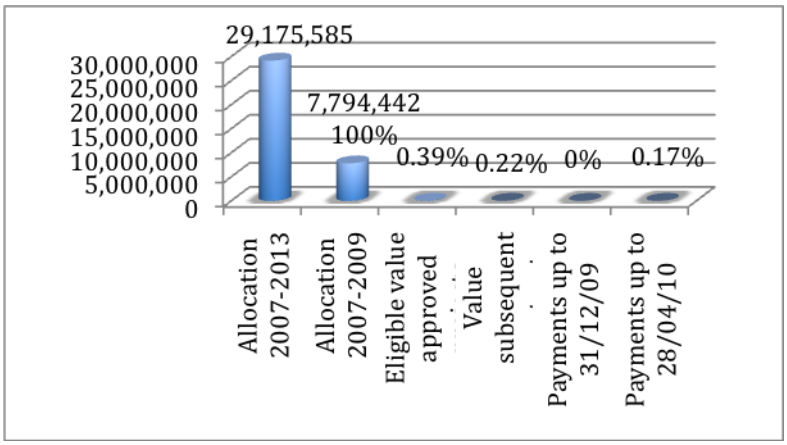
N°	Contracted projects by 31 December 2009	Eligible Value (EUR)
1	Development of an efficient and professional community of SMIS-NSRF users	1,689,308

KAI 2.4 – Supply of IT&C goods and services

Absorption progress

255. In terms of absorption by the end of 2009, the contracted projects cover only 0.39% of the allocation for 2007-09, as seen in the figure below:

Figure 7: The Absorption Progress of KAI 2.4



Source: own calculations, based on data from the OPTA FDI and the ACIS Report regarding projects contracted until 31 December 2009.[72] **NB**: contract values are exclusive of VAT.

256. In terms of payments, only 0.17% of the 2007-09 financial allocation was paid by end-April 2010 (no payments until end 2009).

Contracted projects

257. By end 2009, only two projects for the procurement of SMIS equipment were approved, whose beneficiaries were the OP DAC MA and the Bucharest-Ilfov RDA.

Table 11: Value of Contracted Projects at Cut-off Date - KAI 2.4

N°	Contracted projects by 31 December 2009	Eligible Value (EUR)
1	Support for SMIS functioning within OP DAC	21,604
2	Acquisition of ICT&C equipment for SMIS functioning within RDA Bucharest Ilfov	8,445
	TOTAL KAI 2.4	**30,049**

258. These projects have a total eligible value of EUR 30,049, which is very low as compared to the financial allocation for this KAI.

259. The short term perspective is marked by 3 projects which are part of the contracting plan and which were at the end of December 2009 still in the planning stage: Modernising the SMIS-NSRF by acquiring new equipment and licenses, valued at EUR

[72] http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/stadiul-absorbtiei-231.

490,791, ACIS ICT Equipment, estimated at EUR 490,791 and Service- upgrade for out–of-warranty equipment, valued at EUR 196,316.

260. Additionally, at the beginning of 2010 a small contract was entered in the SEAP for the maintenance of the SMIS national digital network (without having submitted a project for OPTA financing). This contract is valued at EUR 20,000.

ICT equipment and licences endowment

261. At the end of 2009, the technical services and equipment existing at the level of the institutions involved in managing the SI ensured a normal functioning of the SMIS applications.

262. Keeping in mind fact that the SMIS applications are web-based, and therefore do not require a particular type of equipment for the end-user (the access is allowed from any type of station, using any Internet browser, as long as the employee has a predefined username and password with the respective security clearance), many MAs and IBs use the existing computers or the ones acquired through other programmes (Phare) or through their own TA axes.

263. The territorial transmission loop is ensured by the County Special Telecommunication Offices within the STS – without any acquisitions or maintenance costs being supported by the SMIS users.

264. At the central level, the initial equipment acquired in 2005 through the first Phare project dedicated to SMIS is still functioning and has not raised any concerns during the implementation period. Nonetheless, after 5 years, when the equipment must be considered as having reached the end of its technical life and will be out-of-warranty, it will be in need of a thorough updating.

265. Therefore, the low demand for ICT&C equipment and services within this KAI over the period 2007-09 is understandable as endowment was relatively good. However, the ending of the warranty period for the equipment, both at central and local levels will enhance access to this KAI from 2010 onwards.

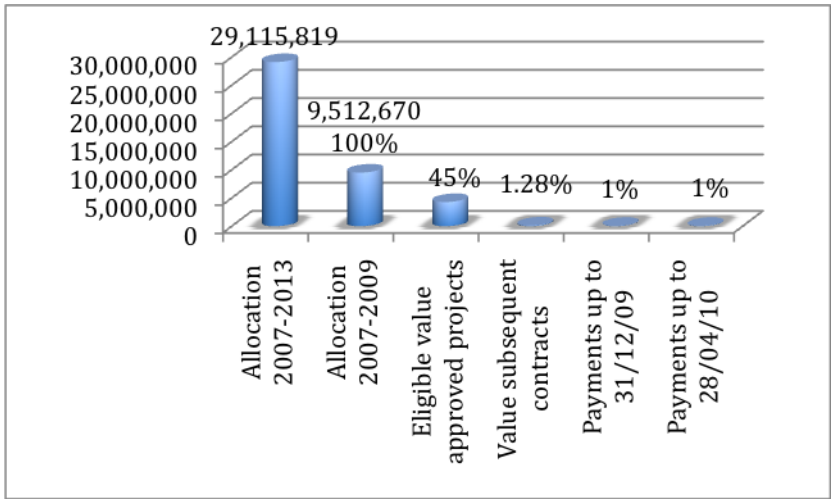
4.2.4 Priority Axis 3

KAI 3.1 – Dissemination of general information and publicity activities regarding the Structural Instruments allocated to Romania

Absorption progress

266. In terms of absorption by the end of 2009, the contracted projects cover 45% of the allocation for 2007-09, as seen in the figure below:

Figure 8: Absorption Progress of KAI 3.1



Source: own calculations, based on data from the OPTA FDI and the ACIS Report regarding projects contracted until 31 December 2009.[73] **NB**: contract values are exclusive of VAT.

267. In terms of payments, only 1% of the 2007-09 financial allocation was made by end-2009 and no additional payment was made by end-April 2010.

Contracted projects

268. As part of KAI 3.1, the SCD submitted only one project for OPTA financing, aiming at supporting the implementation of the Communication Plan.

269. A reason for the slow dynamics of projects is the postponement, contest and cancellation of tenders. During 2009, an important communication campaign, with a budget in excess of EUR 850,000, had to be cancelled due to contest of the tender outcome.

270. Even the contractors for the single active project within KAI 3.1 have been subject to excessive bureaucracy, in the tender period as well as during implementation. It takes long before contracts are signed (2-3 months from the moment of contract award notice) and a similar period for getting paid (2-3 months from the invoicing date).

Table 12: Value of Contracted Projects at Cut-off Date - KAI 3.1

N°	Contracted projects by 31 December 2009	Eligible Value (EUR)
1	Support for the implementation of the ACIS CP	4,286,326

271. Two subsequent contracts were concluded within the framework of the above-mentioned project: one for developing and maintaining the www.poat.ro website and another for maintaining the www.fonduri-ue.ro website.

272. As part of the same project, during 2009, a TA brochure was edited (1 title) and a communication and promotion event was organised for Europe's day, with 150 participants. Also, two TV and two radio spots were produced, promoting the Structural and Cohesion Funds. However, the four spots have never been used by ACIS, at least before mid-2010.

273. In addition to the contracts already mentioned, by 31 December 2009, two more contracts were launched for public procurement. The first contract is intended for broadcasting the spots and the second contract focuses on an opinion survey (the contract was signed on 31 March 2010 and the draft survey delivered in June 2010).

[73] http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/stadiul-absorbtiei-231.

274. In terms of message dissemination efficiency, the findings suggest that the only tools with national coverage used to promote SI were the two websites mentioned above. The brochure and the promotion event had limited, respectively, narrow distribution and participation lists. In addition, the TV and radio spots were not launched[74].

275. The above mentioned opinion survey[75] confirms that 13% of all Internet users[76] have visited at least once the website www.fonduri-ue.ro. The visit frequency is even higher for respondents involved in projects funded through SI. In addition, 72% of the respondents have declared themselves satisfied with the website. These results suggest that the official ACIS website is the only efficient way to disseminate information used so far with OPTA support.

KAI 3.2 – Operation of the Structural Instruments Information Centre

Absorption progress

276. As no project was contracted for financing, the absorption rate of KAI 3.2 funds is zero.

Contracted projects

277. By the cut-off date of the evaluation (31 December 2009), no project was developed in order to be financed under KAI 3.2.

[74] *The TV/radio spots had still not been launched at the end of the first semester 2010.*

[75] *Analysis Report on the level of awareness of public on SI in Romania provided by TNS CSOP Romania as contractor for ACIS with OPTA support (KAI 3.1).*

[76] *The respondent sample was made of 475 Internet users.*

5. Programme effectiveness

5.1 Introduction

278. This section investigates the effectiveness of OPTA to date. Given the early stage of programme implementation, effectiveness will be looked at from two angles.

279. First, the evaluators will assess the results by the cut-off date of 31 December 2009. Where available, an indication of progress up to April 2010 will be provided. This quantitative analysis includes a comparison between planned and achieved results and indicators.

280. Second, the evaluation will take into account aspects that may be indicative of trends in implementation. This qualitative approach addresses ways to improve programme effectiveness.

281. The analysis focused on the following information in order to supply a well-documented response regarding OPTA effectiveness:

- submitted, contracted and implemented projects up to the moment the evaluation started;
- performance and monitoring indicators, up to the moment the evaluation started;
- project pipeline, plans for future calls and perspectives on this issue;
- the main factors that prevented speedier or better implementation.

282. The quantitative part of the analysis relied mostly on desk research and on data received from OPTA MA regarding implemented projects. The qualitative assessment was backed by a series of interviews, which focused on the implementation progress.

5.2 Findings

283. To analyse the **differences between planned and actual performance**, the evaluation team compared the targets of the output indicators supplied by the FDI with the actual values at the end of 2009, and the updated targets for 2010[77].

Table 13: Comparison of Planned Indicators: AIR and CCTA Reporting (27 January 2010)

Programme indicators (as in FDI)	Baseline 2006 (FDI)	Target FDI 2009	Reported at 31 Dec 2009 (AIR 2009)	Target FDI 2010	Target 2010 (CCTA, Jan 2010)	Target FDI 2015
Studies, analysis, reports, strategies	1	35	2	52	46	154
Guides and other methodological documents	0	5	1	13	13	38
Events focused on experience exchange concerning the SI implementation and thematic aspects	0	28	0	46	30	159
Meetings of committees and relevant WGs (WGs, OPTA MC, TA CC, NCC, MCC)	0	28	29	50	19	158
Participant training days – beneficiaries	0	3,500	0	7,000	4,750	42,000
Participant training days – managing structures	0	5,420	3,924	11,770	6,961	28,000
Participant training days – other structures	0	100	n.a	300	n.a.	700

[77] *Presented during the CCTA meeting in January 2010.*

Programme indicators (as in FDI)	Baseline 2006 (FDI)	Target FDI 2009	Reported at 31 Dec 2009 (AIR 2009)	Target FDI 2010	Target 2010 (CCTA, Jan 2010)	Target FDI 2015
SMIS versions	1	0	0	1	n.a.	5
SMIS connected applications	0	0	0	3	n.a.	3
Inquiries received at help-desk	0	0	0	50	n.a.	420
Information and publicity materials (no of issues)	0	17	1	24	n.a.	72
Mass-media campaigns	0	2		4	1	10
Communication and promotion events	0	20	1 (150 participants)	34	2	120
Level of overall public awareness	5	8	0	9	n.a.	15
Number of visits on the SI website	0	250,000	499,165	400,000	n.a.	1,000,000
Inquiries received by the IC	0	9,000	0	17,000	n.a.	40,000

Source: FDI OPTA; AIR 2009; CCTA Report (27/01/2010)

284. Both the AIR 2009 and CCTA reporting from January 2010 lack data on all indicators[78], making it hard to provide a full quantitative assessment of progress. The low values of the reported indicators, as compared with initial estimates, show the slow start of OPTA, although recovery in some areas may be expected for 2010.

285. As the performance of OPTA is not homogenous, the following sub-sections provide a breakdown at PA/KAI level.

5.2.1 Priority Axis 1

KAI 1.1 - Support to the management and implementation of the Structural Instruments

Performance

286. Judged by the status of projects implementation at the end of 2009, progress must be considered very modest. Six out of eight contracted projects were signed just in the last part of 2009, and consequently there have been no results as yet.

287. In terms of its 2009 target, KAI 1.1 performance is rather poor, especially in terms of the number of studies, analyses, reports and strategies – only two out of a planned total of 26 had been delivered by end-2009. The two studies provided concerned the future of the cohesion policy from Romania's perspective, and a needs assessment for designing the TAF.

Table 14: Analysis of KAI 1.1 Indicators

Indicators	Baseline 2006 (FDI)	Target 2009 (FDI)	Reported at 31 Dec 2009 (AIR 2009)	Target 2010 (FDI)	Target 2010 (CCTA Jan 2010)	Target 2015 (FDI)
Studies, analysis, reports, strategies	0	26	2	36	32	106
Guides and other methodological documents	0	4	1	5	3	7
Events focused on experience exchange concerning the SI implementation and thematic aspects	0	1	0	1	24	3
Meetings of committees and relevant WGs (WGs, OPTA MC, TA CC, NCC, MCC)	0	7	2	14	5	49

Source: FDI OPTA; AIR 2009; CCTA Report (27/01/2010).

[78] *No data on supplementary indicators available.*

288. In addition, the TAF project produced a guide, whilst two meetings were organized (in the context of the study regarding the future of the cohesion policy).

289. The targets for 2010 are unlikely to be met, even if the TAF should not meet obstacles with regard to contracting. The TAF is expected to become functional at end-2010, at the earliest[79]. Regarding the possible progress until 2015, even under conditions of smooth implementation of the TAF, the launch of a similar project will still be necessary to come close to the planned targets.

290. It is important to note that for the new interventions added to this KAI (75% bonus to SI staff and support for the coordination of Growth Poles) there are no monitoring indicators and an assessment of actual vs. planned performance is not possible.

Focus: ensuring common standards, tools and information

291. Overall, this KAI has not made a major contribution to ensuring the availability of the common standards, tools and information necessary for the efficient management and implementation of SI.

292. On the positive side, the project regarding the future of the cohesion policy was useful in shaping Romania's view for the next financial perspective 2014-2020. This project involved all OPs and can be considered a prologue for the next programming exercise. However, it had several delays due to the relatively weak capacity of the DAP/ACIS to manage this kind of project[80];

293. Another positive result concerns the support for motivating the staff involved in managing and coordinating SI, in the form of funding the 75% bonus in a time of budgetary difficulties. Bonus payments have been made to eligible staff and are reimbursable under KAI 1.1.

294. The bonus scheme, although likely beneficial in terms of staff motivation has the potential to create two problems:

- It introduces certain feelings of discrimination between the staff responsible for the EU funds and the staff responsible for domestic funds. Within institutions managing both national and EU funds this creates a certain degree of tension among staff. However, differences between the two categories are not always significant, as staff not-related to SI implementation often receives other bonuses, which substantially reduces the differences created by the 75% SI bonus. A particular case is that of staff involved in the implementation of structural funds on the beneficiary side (e.g. public administration staff managing EU funded projects), which are not eligible for the 75%, although arguably they are involved in SI absorption. For this category instead of expanding the OPTA-financed bonus it would be advisable to ensure equivalent performance/project management bonuses from the national budget.
- It generates an eligibility issue, as OPTA restricts eligibility for the 75% bonus to only those institutions dealing directly with the coordination and management of SI, while the regulation in place, GD N° 595/2009, defines as being eligible for support not only all MA, IB, ACIS, CPA and AA staff involved in SI management and coordination, but also the staff of '*structures involved in activities of a legal nature' related to SI implementation*[81]. This implies that legal staff in ministries hosting MA/IB is eligible for the 75%, but the bonus is provided from the national budget and it is not reimbursed

[79] *The tender was cancelled in the first semester of 2010, as no offer seemed to fulfil the required criteria. This decision was then appealed by some of the tendering companies. This prevented a quick re-launch.*

[80] *As acknowledged by a DAP representative during the interviews.*

[81] *Art 2b, pt 16.*

through OPTA. Nevertheless, the lack of perfect overlapping between the national framework and the OPTA eligibility does not entail any problems other than a rather limited substantiation of the reasons behind such decision.

295. Another positive development was the 2009 decision to make support for the coordination of SI interventions within Growth Poles eligible under OPTA. Aside from the potential boost for absorption of KAI 1.1 resources it represents, this activity is likely to provide more coherence between sectoral and regional SI interventions.

296. There are two main limitations to support for Growth Poles coordination. The first one relates to the rather low capacity of coordinators in respect of influencing the final decision-makers, the County and Local Councils represented in an Inter-community Development Association, which provides the daily management of the Growth Poles. The degree influence varies with the charisma and expertise of the coordinator, but IDAs fully autonomous in their decision-making.

297. The related, second limitation concerns the mandate of the coordinator, which is only generally defined and lacks details regarding implementation mechanisms or monitoring activities. Currently, there is no evidence to suggest that if pole coordinators receive KAI 1.1 support this will with certainty lead to a better quantitative and qualitative absorption of SI-support for growth poles. As remarked above, the lack of target indicators for support to growth pole coordination makes it hard to assess the effectiveness, as well as ultimate impact of this specific intervention[82].

298. On the negative side, KAI 1.1 does not address horizontal themes such as public procurement and state aid. This is a significant vulnerability of OPTA, as public procurement issues are considered major bottlenecks, not only for the implementation of OPTA but also that of the other OPs.

299. MA and IB expectations with regard to solutions for an efficient public procurement process are mainly directed at ACIS, as this is a shared issue and identified as such during the programming of OPTA. The theme of state aid also requires horizontal support, but potential beneficiaries consider this need as less acute.

300. ACIS seems to rely to a large extent on the TAF project to obtain external legal support on public procurement issues. The ToR for the TAF framework agreement, launched in April 2010 [ref: *Section 4.2.2* **Para 212-214**], contain specific eligibility requirements for senior and junior legal experts with experience in public procurement.

301. ACIS was confronted with significant delays in launching the tender for the TAF framework agreement. These delays were partly determined by the prudential reaction of the ACIS[83] management in treating a tender of this scale and the relative limited degree of familiarity with this type of contract in Romania. Although the management of this project was externalised in September 2008, the framework agreement for service providers within the TAF was only released for contracting in April 2010. Therefore, a signed contract cannot be expected before second half of 2010.

302. ACIS has tried to reinforce its cooperation with the key institutions in the field, NARMPP and UCVPP, to try and simplify SI implementation. Several coordination meetings were held with these institutions to clarify aspects of TA public procurement contracts (e.g. how to best draft ToRs and which evaluation criteria to choose).

[82] *In April 2010, only the coordinator of the Iasi pole submitted a report of activity, whereas there is no template recommended officially by OPTA MA.*

[83] *At the level of the State Secretary's Cabinet.*

303. Although some progress has been achieved, there is a need to work on these issues on a continuous basis, in order to provide adequate answers to quite a number of pertinent questions raised by SI stakeholders.

304. Permanent cooperation in this field cannot be established without shared ownership between the three entities in respect of the problems to be addressed and the results to be obtained in enhancing the public procurement process.

305. In order to increase NARMPP and UCVPP interest and involvement, it is advisable that these institutions become beneficiaries under KAI 1.1, so as remove bottlenecks more rapidly, especially with respect to the evaluation and selection criteria in TA contracts. The Competition Council likewise might benefit from KAI 1.1 support in relation to state aid issues.

306. One explanation for the slow progress under KAI 1.1 is the availability of pre-accession (Phare) support of like character until end-2008 and early-2009.

307. The relatively weak capacity of potential beneficiaries to manage OPTA funded projects is another reason for poor progress. Two of the units within ACIS that were expected to be main beneficiaries of KAI 1.1 were not ve**r**y active in respect of preparing projec***t proposals.*** Th**e DAP** has submitted only one project [ref: *Section 4.2.2* **Para 215**] and the MD none. Both directorates held responsibilities in the period 2007-09 unrelated to SI that made up a substantial proportion of their activity[84]. This situation adds to the existing staff members' significant workload, with negative impact on the interest in OPTA implementation. Furthermore, the MD benefited from two EC-funded twinning programmes (United Kingdom – France and Germany) and, by end-2009, from bilateral support from Germany.

308. Both directorates have shown interest in submitting a project for GIS mapping of SI interventions, but it has not been possible to reach clarity on which of the two entities should take the lead for this activity.

309. DAP has been confronted with a difficult experience regarding the public procurement procedure for its only submitted project. This experience has much reduced its interest in submitting new projects, as long as it will not have external support for procurement management[85]. However, DAP admits the necessity of becoming more active in applying for OPTA support in coming years, in view of its involvement in the programming for the next financial perspective (2014-20).

KAI 1.2 - Evaluation

Performance

Table 8: Analysis of KAI 1.2 Indicators

Indicators	Baseline 2006 (FDI)	Target 2009 (FDI)	Reported at 31 Dec 2009 (AIR 2009)	Target 2010 (FDI)	Target 2010 (CCTA Jan 2010)	Target 2015 (FDI)
Studies, analysis, reports, strategies	0	3	0	6	4	14
Guides and other methodological documents	0	1	0	2	n.a	7
Events focused on experience exchange concerning the SI implementation and	0	1	0	2	4	3

[84] *MD representatives stated in interviews that Phare-related activities accounted for 50% of the Directorate's work in 2009 and even more in earlier years. DAP has allocated resources for managing the assistance from European Economic Area (EEA) and Norway grants 2004-2009 (98.5 MEUR) and is currently managing the grants for 2009-2014 (305.95 MEUR);*

[85] *Finding emanating from interview conducted with DAP.*

thematic aspects						
Meetings of committees and relevant WGs (WGs, OPTA MC, TA CC, NCC, MCC)	0	1	1	2	n.a	7
Participant training days- beneficiaries[86]	0	500	0	1,000	n.a	1,500
Participant training days- managing structures	0	420	0	770	n.a	2,220
Participant training days- other structures	0	100	0	300	n.a	700

Source: FDI OPTA; AIR 2009; CCTA Report (27/01/2010)

310. Only one indicator for KAI 1.2 has been achieved during 2009, namely that of *Meetings of relevant committees and WGs*. One EWG meeting was organized within the project concerning the development of evaluation capacity. The three projects[87] that were approved before 31 December 2009 are likely to improve the achievement of some indicators, such as the studies, analysis, reports and strategies to be developed and the events based on experience exchange.

Focus: developing a common evaluation culture

The institutional framework for evaluation of SI

311. The evaluation activity in relation to SI interventions has at least two major roles. Firstly, the evaluation assesses progress in achieving the Cohesion Policy objectives and, secondly, it helps helping to improve public policy formulation overall.

312. EU funds constitute important support for Romania, but more important than the money is the chance to reform institutions and mentality. The chance to understand and implement the principles and functions of evaluation is at least as important as the financial support offered to carry out evaluation exercises.

313. In this context, the creation of the ECU and, later, the EWG, laid the foundation for an institutional framework with an ambitious mandate, i.e. to generate a profound change of perspective on public policy evaluation arrangements vis-à-vis the SI, in accordance with EU regulations.

314. With financial support from the pre-accession period, ECU has established itself as a pro-active structure for coordinating SI evaluation at national level. From a strategic and a technical point of view, the framework for SI evaluation was easy to implement because of the in-built regulations of the Cohesion Policy. Multiannual and annual evaluation plans were developed and evaluation units at the MAs level created, thus setting up the institutional modalities for evaluation activities.

315. The EWG is a sound institutional initiative that emerged from the need to coordinate evaluation activity at NSRF level. But the WG's objectives now include the farther-reaching one of contributing to the development of a common evaluation culture at national level.

316. The EWG invested much in the professional upgrading of its staff in the evaluation field. With pre-accession support (Phare, including the Transition Facility), a series of TA projects were used for a sustained learning process and exchange of best practice, to meet the performance standards implied by the Cohesion Policy evaluations.

317. Regarding structural funds support for evaluation, the TA was divided in two main components. The first, funded through OPTA, ensures horizontal support for the

[86] *ECU does not intend to submit projects under KAI 1.2 providing training to beneficiaries, which may need a revision of the FDI to eliminate the respective monitoring indicator.*

[87] *Please refer to Table 7, pg.54.*

coordination and development of evaluation at NSRF level. The second component, financed separately under the TA axis under each OP, ensures support for specific evaluation needs related to the respective OP.

318. Within OPTA, support for evaluation was concentrated in KAI 1.2, with the ECU as the only eligible beneficiary.

Developing a common evaluation culture

319. The first requirement related to the objective of creating an evaluation common culture is to define the goal and the concept. A good starting point to address this issue is to define a series of common standards.

320. Achieving a common culture is more complex than observing a minimum set of common standards. Benchmarks are a professional requirement, but they are not sufficient. Evaluation can only be efficient and effective, if it is well embedded in the public policy process.

321. With the support of EU pre-accession assistance, the ECU has made solid progress on formulating common evaluation standards for Romania. For instance, with Phare-funded TA, the ECU has defined since 2006 a set of evaluation benchmarks. It has further stimulated evaluation demand and supply, thus enabling the development of an evaluation community.

322. In terms of embedding evaluation within public policy, the ECU has been instrumental in launching the NES, as the framework for increasing quality of public interventions.

323. Due to political instability and institutional change, the other governmental stakeholders responsible for the implementation of the NES were unable to provide follow-up to the strategic intention in their respective areas, leaving the ECU the only institution active in promoting evaluation in a continuous, coherent manner.

324. ECU's mandate is related to SI implementation, and although NSRF-related evaluations can create positive demonstration effects, it is not enough to reach a robust national policy on public intervention evaluation. Until the end of 2009, the discussion about an evaluation culture related to SI implementation was at the inception stage, as there were not so many evaluation reports related to SI published (only the ex ante evaluations for all OPs and the ROP IE were available). From 2010 onwards, given the fact that most of the interim evaluations will also be available, there will be better conditions for debating the quality of the evaluation culture in the field of SI.

The role of OPTA in promoting a common evaluation culture in the field of SI

325. Taking into account the limited progress on OPTA implementation, including within KAI 1.2, it can hardly be argued that OPTA has as yet contributed to achieving its targets in this area. As noted, positive developments were primarily generated by pre-accession assistance, particularly during 2005-08 and by EWG activity during the last three years. In fact, the existence of Phare support can be considered a plausible explanation for the late start of OPTA interventions.

326. At most it can be argued that, given the support for organising one EWG meeting so far, OPTA has contributed partially to EWG-related achievements to date.

327. That said, progress in the course of the fourth quarter of 2009 suggests that there are now better perspectives for OPTA to play a more direct role in consolidating a common evaluation culture in the field of SI in the next years.

328. The approved project – *Developing the evaluation capacity of the MAs and ACIS evaluation units* – that aims to support the evaluation units within the MAs has considerable

potential for consolidating EWG-related activity. The EWG already acts as a small professional community, which constitutes a good foundation to build upon.

329. It is understandable that not all the MAs have reached the same level of understanding of the evaluation activity, leading to slight differences in perception of the role of evaluation. Some of the main factors influencing the development of a common evaluation culture are staff attitudes, inter-departmental communication and MA management support for its evaluation units.

330. The institutional structure of evaluation units within MAs varies significantly, which influences the relative influence on MA management. The ECU's recommendation, as early as in 2006, was to subordinate the evaluation unit directly to the MA Director, in order to ensure good communication and enhance the evaluation culture. This has been achieved in the case of ACIS, as the ECU is subordinated directly to the ACIS Director, as well as in a few other MAs, but was not generalized.

331. Apart from support to the ECU, to evaluation units within MAs and to the EWG, OPTA will likely play a key role in developing an evaluation culture by enabling the launching of on-going and *ad hoc* evaluation exercises. This creates evaluation demand, supports external evaluation providers and improves the quality of evaluations through gains in experience in and competitive bidding.

KAI 1.3 – Horizontal training in the field of the management of programmes/projects

Performance

Table 9: Analysis of KAI 1.3 Indicators

Indicators	Baseline 2006 (FDI)	Target 2009 (FDI)	Reported at 31 Dec 2009 (AIR 2009)	Target 2010 (FDI)	Target 2010 (CCTA Jan 2010)	Target 2015 (FDI)
Studies, analysis, reports, strategies	0	0	0	0		1
Guides and other methodological documents	0	0	0	0		0
Meetings of committees and relevant WGs (WGs, OPTA MC, TA CC, NCC, MCC)	0	3	3	5		15
Participant training days- beneficiaries	0	3,000	0	6,000		40,500
Participant training days- managing structures	0	2,500	1,500	5,000		5,780
Participant training days- other structures	-	-	-	-		-

Source: FDI OPTA; AIR 2009; CCTA Report (27/01/2010).

332. One of the 2009 targets set for KAI 1.3 was achieved (3 meetings of the TWG) and one was achieved at 60% (days/participant to training – managing structures).

333. As shown in Table 9, beneficiaries were not trained at all until the end of 2009, which is a major vulnerability in terms of effective implementation of this KAI. The target of training 6,000 beneficiaries by end-2010 must be considered unrealistic under current circumstances.

Focus: ensuring highly qualified personnel

334. The interviews conducted in the course of the present evaluation yielded information regarding the quality and the usefulness of training activities financed by OPTA.

335. The Training Mechanism was established in 2004. Since then a series has occurred in respect of institutional progress in the field of training activities coordination, especially with regard to the methodology for training needs assessment within the public administration. The new approach, proposed in 2005, was based on a detailed

framework that set out training priorities, a total of five measures and topics of interest for four target groups:

- institutions with horizontal responsibilities in the field of SI management;
- MAs and IBs;
- members of MCs;
- beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries.

336. At OP-level, the TWG members, deputy members and IB representatives do the training activity and, implicitly, the need assessment.

337. The interviews conducted for the present evaluation yielded the following:

- TDCU activity for supporting MAs training activity is complex, from need assessment and development of ToT projects, through support for elaborating public procurements documents (for projects financed by OPs TA axis), to on-going support for the MAs' own needs assessment activity. The TDCU is not organised as a separate unit within ACIS, but as part of the Implementation Service (IS), within the DTA. Moreover, the identify and functions of the TDCU are not always clear even to a part of ACIS staff, the TDCU being within IS/DTA and seen as a distinct institution with the role of horizontal training coordination*88*.
- Each member of TDCU has additional tasks in their job descriptions, related to other activities of the Implementation Service. Neither TDCU nor TWG members have a background in HR studies (with some happy, but entirely coincidental exceptions);
- Training needs assessment is a product of the Training Mechanism, which will be updated to reflect current requirements. Compared to the initial programming period, when the training needs assessment was more qualitative, a unitary structure has been created at MA level to identify training needs, supported by a software application, which, unfortunately, was not implemented. The last comprehensive exercise for training needs identification was in 2008 (an up-date of the training needs fiches was done in 2009);
- The software application is still a desideratum, and the trend is to simplify the needs assessment. Thus, as the needs are becoming more and more specialised, more details about them are necessary. The TWG members are in the process of discussing a modification of the methodology for identifying and consolidating training needs;
- When identifying the training needs, other training initiatives for public administration are not taken into account, and the institutions developing these activities are not included in the training activities supported by OPTA. Moreover, these institutions, excepting the MA for OP DAC, are not represented in the TWG. Similarly, the IBs have no representative in the TWG and TWG members disagree on the usefulness of their membership. Their absence requires an effort on the part of the MA representatives to inform IB staff.

338. The training supported by OPTA is generally appreciated as useful, as it is sometimes the only training opportunity for MA and IB staff. The training activities eligible under KAI 1.3 are considered sufficiently large to cover all beneficiary needs. The training events on horizontal issues with participants from several MAs are especially appreciated because of the opportunity they offer to identify and share best practice and experience.

339. So far, no overlaps have been identified between the OPTA activity and each OP TA axis, with interviewed participants confirming the existence of a clear separation of training activities. Moreover, a communication and mutual information mechanism to avoid overlaps is in place at TWG level.

[88] *Finding emanating from interviews.*

340. Among MA and IB staff, the interest in the training activities varies from one institution to another, depending on the training activities developed at programme level (supported under OPs' own TA axes) and on training topics. So far, the training under KAI 1.3 has covered horizontal subjects, such as Structural and Cohesion Fund principles, the project management cycle and the new public procurement legislation (basic notions, 220 participants), financial management and control (102 participants), preparing and developing beneficiary guides and the management of financing applications (127 participants), Structural and Cohesion Funds audit (62 participants), and identifying instruments and techniques for monitoring horizontal issues (37 participants[89]).

341. For 2010, the training programmes aims to develop training sessions for the following themes identified through Training Mechanism: 1.1 Introduction to SI; 2.2 SI Coordination; 2.3 SI Management; 2.4 Project Evaluation, Selection and Contracting; 2.5 Financial Control; 2.6 Operational Programmes Audit; 3.1 Increasing Management Capacity; 3.2 Communication; 3.5 HR Management and Training. Training sessions for beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries will also be carried out in the field of: project cycle management, project identification and development, submitting and selection process, project management, monitoring and reporting processes[90].

342. In view of the above (and also because of reduced staff turnover) basic training in the field of SI is now considered less interesting than specialised training in the areas of financial management, audit and public procurements. These trends are also confirmed by the latest needs assessment: as the complexity of functions is increasing, the need for specialised training becomes clearer. There is also an increasing need for experience exchange, best practice examples, study visits, and presentations by representatives of SI management entities from other Member States.

343. A worrying aspect is the fact that staff often cannot give priority to training and make free the necessary time to attend training events, due to heavy workloads and in spite of generally keen interest to participate. Experience, including that relating to pre-accession training shows that training delivered in or close to the work location (i.e. Bucharest for most central public administration staff) is least effective because participants tend to be distracted by office duties and leave to attend to urgent work.

344. Some of the training activities and study visits to other EU Member States especially, proved to be motivational for the staff participating. Experience suggests that there is a challenge in respect of selecting participants for these activities. Should the most knowledgeable and effective staff be selected, by way of showing appreciation for their work? Or should junior, less effective staff participate for the purpose of quickly upgrading skills through exposure to international best practice and know-how.

345. TWG members prefer the exchange of best practice, during study visits or by inviting experts from similar structures in other Member States. This need partly arises from difficulties encountered with contracting highly quality, specialised training services.

346. Even if the utility of training courses is undeniable in the process of improving staff knowledge, several negative aspects were underlined:

- due to the long period between needs identification and its delivery its, the relevance of the training may be lost;
- training activity is often disconnected from the HR evaluation process; even though the evaluation fiches represent an important source for identifying personal development

[89] *Source: TDCU, 31 March 2010.*

[90] *Training Plan 2010.*

needs, the staff in charge of training activities do not always have the right to access them;

- there is no training follow-up mechanism, aside from the questionnaires handed out at the end of training sessions. The utility of courses for the jobs it is not known. There is no know-how transfer from the training participant to the rest of his team.

347. The total separation of training activity and the human resources management is likely to lead to reduced effectiveness of the training and skills development process.

KAI 1.4 – Functioning of the OPTA MA, ACIS, the CPA and the AA

Performance

Table 10: Analysis of KAI 1.4 Indicators

Indicators	Baseline 2006 (FDI)	Target 2009 (FDI)	Reported at 31 Dec 2009 (AIR 2009)	Target 2010 (FDI)	Target 2010 (CCTA Jan 2010)	Target 2015 (FDI)
Events focused on experience exchange concerning the SI implementation and thematic aspects	0	2	0	3	1	5
Meetings of committees and relevant WGs (WGs, OPTA MC, TA CC, NCC, MCC)	0	13	23	20	37	59

Source: FDI OPTA; AIR 2009; CCTA Report (27/01/2010).

348. KAI 1.4 has exceeded planned performance in terms of organizing meetings of committees and WGs (13 meetings planned and 23 meetings organised). The meetings included 5 OPTA Monitoring Committees and 5 CCTA meetings.

349. No events focusing on experience exchange were organized until 2009. One event of this type is foreseen for 2010 as part of the contracts signed at the end of 2009.

Focus: functioning of relevant OPTA-supported structures

350. KAI 1.4 covers a large variety of eligible activities that can be engaged by ACIS (including the OPTA MA), the CPA and the AA, to facilitate the functioning of these institutions, such as employment of contractual staff, operational expenditure, organisation of meetings and events, and supplies and consumables.

351. By end-2009, only ACIS and CPA had availed of OPTA financing. The AA has not yet applied for OPTA support, because it benefited from generous pre-accession TA until early 2009[91]. In addition, in 2009, the AA saw important HR restructuring, which affected its capacity to form a stable PMU.

352. For 2010, the AA plans to submit a project covering the revision of the audit manual, ICT development (document management and a system required by EC for monitoring the implementation of recommendations made by the AA in respect of audited institutions), organisation of regional meetings, various equipment and supplies, and the domestic and international travel costs related to working meetings.

353. Both ACIS and the CPA have encountered some contracting problems in relation to ongoing projects. Because these two beneficiaries form part of the MoPF, communication with the OPTA MA has generally been good in part because it could use informal lines of communication for overcoming obstacles.

[91] *Funded under Phare 2005 and involving TA by an audit team from France, Poland and Portugal. The support covered the most important needs of the AA for the period 2007-08, in areas such as training, procedure manuals and audit manuals.*

5.2.2 Priority Axis 2

KAI 2.1 – Development and maintenance of the SMIS and its digital network

Performance

Table 11: Analysis of KAI 2.1 Indicators

Indicators	Baseline 2006 (FDI)	Target 2009 (FDI)	Reported at 31 Dec 2009 (AIR 2009)	Target 2010 (FDI)	Target 2010 (CCTA Jan 2010)	Target 2015 (FDI)
Studies, analysis, reports, strategies	0	1	0	2	0	5
Guides and other methodological documents	0	0	0	6	0	24
SMIS versions	0	0	0	1	0	5
SMIS applications	0	0	0	3	0	3

Source: FDI OPTA; AIR 2009; CCTA Report (27/01/2010).

354. There was no progress with regard to KAI 2.1 until the end of 2009, as no projects and contracts were approved. However, the SMIS CU developed user manuals and add-on applications to increase the functionality of the IT system, using its own resources.

355. The performance for the remaining time of the financial perspective depends on the capacity of the SMIS CU to sign TA contracts in the second semester of 2010, the prospects for which are rather gloomy.

Box 6: Context of KAI 2.1 Performance

The SMIS application needs to be functional for the whole life cycle of the OPs (ten years, taking into account the closing period). Four phases where envisaged for the life-span of the system:

- an initial deployment phase – SMIS development in order to fulfil basic needs of institutions involved in the SI system;
- a development phase – designed to address additional needs for ensuring optimal functionality;
- a constant phase when the system is as stable as possible;
- a closing phase - may again request additional elements for the system.

The first initial phase started in 2004 and was finalized at the end of 2006. The second phase of SMIS was developed based on requests formulated during 2007 by the institutions using the system and based on EC Community regulations, programming documents and procedures existing at that specific cut-off date. The application and the generated reports have been tested thoroughly by the SMIS WG. When SMIS was launched for practical use related to SI, at the beginning of 2008, the system was fully addressing the requirements. For the period 2008 to 2010, the procedural changes within the institutions using the system could not be reflected in SMIS due to difficulties in contracting specialised services for development and maintenance.

The SMIS was developed as a system to be used in real time by the staff of MAs, IBs, CPA, ACIS and AA. The major delays in uploading data generated discrepancy between the projects' real dates and historical dates registered in the system, and, thus, to inconsistency of reports.

Data uploading was much encumbered by the format of the application forms, reimbursement forms, and technical progress reports which do not allow an easy identification of the information to be uploaded into the system. The users perceived this aspect as a deficiency of the ICT system, which was not the case in fact.

As regards the second objective of KAI 2.1 (preparing manuals and users guides) the findings gathered during the evaluation were mixed. On the one side, the SMIS CU and some of the final users believe that the manuals are excellent and complete from a technical viewpoint. On the other side, several final users complained about the manuals, suggesting they are thick, difficult to read (mainly in English) and treating only general issues, without addressing specific questions, which if remained unanswered can generate errors in the system. Overall, the existing manuals can be considered as covering well the technical component of the application. Instead, there is a need for more details on the functional level, which implies more accessibility for users and more customization to problems specific to each OP.

KAI 2.2 – Functioning of the SMIS Central Unit and its coordination network

Performance

Table 12: Analysis of KAI 2.2 Indicators

Indicators	Baseline 2006 (FDI)	Target 2009 (FDI)	Reported at 31 Dec 2009 (AIR 2009)	Target 2010 (FDI)	Target 2010 (CCTA Jan 2010)	Target 2015 (FDI)
Reunions of the relevant committees and WGs	0	4	0	9	0	28
Requests received from the help-desk	0	0	0	50	0	420

Source: FDI OPTA; AIR 2009; CCTA Report (27/01/2010).

356. As no projects and contracts were approved, there has been no progress under KAI 2.2.

357. However, several meetings of the SMIS WG were organised and several requests received from the help-desk located within SMIS CU before the end of 2009. It is likely that the relevant OPTA indicators have been met, albeit not through KAI 2.2.

KAI 2.3 – Training of the users, distribution of procedural guides and user manuals and information activities related to SMIS

Performance

Table 13: Analysis of KAI 2.3 Indicators

Indicators	Baseline 2006 (FDI)	Target 2009 (FDI)	Reported at 31 Dec 2009 (AIR 2009)	Target 2010 (FDI)	Target 2010 (CCTA Jan 2010)	Target 2015 (FDI)
Events focused on experience exchange concerning the SI implementation and thematic aspects	0	4	0	7	2	28
Participant training days – managing structures	0	2,500	2,424	6,000	6,000	20,000

Source: FDI OPTA; AIR 2009; CCTA Report (27/01/2010).

358. KAI 2.3 is the only KAI under PA 2 that registered progress by the end of 2009. The degree of indicator achievement related to participants in training reached 97% of the target.

359. The perspective for 2010, based on the existing project, is positive in terms of reaching the planned target. The current contract, which started in April 2009, aims at providing six revised manuals (one for each SMIS-NSRF module), seven sets of data training (one for each OP), 6,000 training days and seven events for experience exchange.

360. Concerning the second indicator of KAI 2.3, two events focused on experience exchange are foreseen for 2010, which is not enough in terms of meeting the planned target.

Focus: contribution of training, communication and support activities for a better SMIS

Training

361. Some SMIS uses have remarked upon the limited usefulness of the training supported through OPTA under KAI 2.3, in that these training sessions were only available long after they had begun to upload data into the SMIS and use the application.[92] This contributed to a series of data input errors, which proved difficult to correct and had significant impact on the consistency of SMIS data. During 2009, and even in 2010, considerable effort had to be made to correct the existing data and fill in gaps.

[92] *Findings based on interviews with SMIS users, crosschecked through interviews with the SMIS CU.*

362. The training materials were elaborated on the state of affairs at the time of the last Phare TA in support of SMIS, when the details regarding the OPs and their specific data were unknown. This is why users participating in training stressed that data used for case studies was redundant and did not resemble the kind of information they had already introduced into the system.

363. Training sessions were limited to generalities and focused on technical aspects of SMIS. Due to the time lag between the development of the application and training delivery, participants that had not used the application before, had no questions. Those persons that had used the application before the training sessions had very specific questions, which the training was unable to answer.

364. This problem has been addressed in the case of the most recent series of trainees, with participants being regrouped on the basis of interest and shared experience, and with the case study material adapted to real data input situations.

365. The findings collected through interviews with SMIS users suggest that a basic level of training has been reached for all staff involved with SMIS.

366. Given their limited number and lack of external technical assistance, SMIS coordinators within the MAs and IBs were often under pressure from users to answer their questions, share information and know-how and solve technical glitches. However, some of the SMIS coordinators lack the necessary training and competences to disseminate information to other people effectively. This suggests that specific Training-of-Trainer sessions are needed.

Communication

367. The information and communication process centres around the SMIS WG, which meets at the initiative of the SMIS CU and whenever necessary. SMIS CU staff collects and collates information on all problems encountered by its counterparts and bring them to the attention of the SMIS WG. SMIS coordinators at regional level are responsible for the information flow at that level.

KAI 2.4 – Supply of IT&C goods and services

Performance

Table 15: Analysis of KAI 2.4 Indicators

Indicators	Baseline 2006 (FDI)	Target 2009 (FDI)	Reported at 31 Dec 2009 (AIR 2009)	Target 2010 (FDI)	Target 2010 (CCTA Jan 2010)	Target 2015 (FDI)
Entities equipped	-	5	0	10		50
Unplanned SMIS malfunctioning period	-	<15	0	<15		<15
Network availability	-	≥99	0	≥99		≥99
Package loss	-	≤1	0	≤1		≤1
Latency for data packages losses	-	≤100	0	≤100		≤100

Source: FDI OPTA; AIR 2009; CCTA Report (27/01/2010).

368. KAI 2.4 does not have any output or result indicators to measure the interventions under this KAI. The supplementary indicators assigned to this KAI [ref: **Table 15**] are reported neither in the AIR nor within the CCTA.

5.2.3 Priority Axis 3

KAI 3.1 – Dissemination of general information and publicity activities regarding the Structural Instruments allocated to Romania

Performance

Table 16: Indicators – KAI 3.1

Indicators	Baseline 2006 (FDI)	Target 2009 (FDI)	Reported at 31 Dec 2009 (AIR 2009)	Target 2010 (FDI)	Target 2010 (CCTA Jan 2010)	Target 2015 (FDI)
Studies, analysis, reports, strategies	1	5	0	8		28
Communication and promotion events (no)	0	20	1	34		120
Information and publicity materials	0	17	1	24		72
Mass-media campaigns (no)	0	2	0	4		10
Level of awareness	5	8	0	9		15

Source: FDI OPTA; CCTA report, 27/01/2010.

369. Performance under KAI 3.1 is insignificant, as only two out of five indicators show (slight) progress. For 2009, 20 communication and promotion events and 17 information and publicity materials were planned. By end-2009, only one communication event had been held and only one set of information material developed. KAI 3.1 is therefore far removed from attaining its aims.

KAI 3.2 – Operation of the Structural Instruments Information Centre

Performance

Table 17: Indicators – KAI 3.1

Indicators	Baseline 2006 (FDI)	Target 2009 (FDI)	Reported at 31 Dec 2009 (AIR 2009)	Target 2010 (FDI)	Target 2010 (CCTA Jan 2010)	Target 2015 (FDI)
Web pages visits	0	100,000	499.165	400,000	0	1,000,000
Information requests received at the IC	0	2,000	0	17,000	0	40,000

Source: FDI OPTA; CCTA report, 27/01/2010.

370. At a first glance, KAI 3.2 performance seems good, as the indicator concerning web page visits was exceeded by 499% at the end of 2009. Although OPTA MA reporting points to an achievement, it was not due to OPTA support, since there was no project. This suggests the target was set much too low. A new target should start from the yearly average of visits from the existing sites and set a higher average as the target to be reached after the incoming OPTA interventions.

371. There was no progress with regard to the handling of information requests, because the IC has not yet been established.

372. Even if the IC would be established by end-2010, it is unlikely that the planned target will be met.

Focus: dissemination of general messages regarding the SI. Alternative solutions.

373. During the period evaluated, the main instruments for information dissemination were two websites, respectively *www.fonduri-ue.ro* and *www.poat.ro*.

374. The site *www.fonduri-ue.ro* is used as a portal with information about SI, in principle useful not only for (potential) beneficiaries but also for the general public and mass media. A recent survey tested the public opinion regarding the website (see analysis of efficiency, paragraph 264). More than half of respondents argued that the accessibility of

the language used to present information is not satisfactory (below average). The respondents also required more updated information.

375. Where the opinion of mass-media representatives is concerned, several journalists argued during a focus group session dedicated to SI information and communication, that the website lacks a good structure and it is not very user-friendly (e.g. information on all OPs appears on a single webpage, making it difficult for users to find the information they are especially interested in. The portal was considered to contain valuable information but in a volume that creates the impression of overload. The portal has a cluttered structure likely to have new visitors cut short their visit and look for alternative sources of information (e.g. private websites, such as *http://www.fonduri-structurale.ro*; banks websites) In addition, even though the site is supposed to be bilingual, most of the information is in Romanian only. A total of 493,734 visits were registered on the website until the end of 2009. An additional number of 109,703 visits were recorded in the first six months of 2010.

376. The *www.poat.ro* website offers detailed, structured and organised information on OPTA, the financing opportunities for potential beneficiaries, but also details on contracting in the framework of OPTA financed projects. This website is opened to the general public as well but visited mostly by TA stakeholders. A total of 5,431 visits were counted on the OPTA website by 31 December 2009. An additional number of 2,894 visits were registered in the first semester of 2010, showing a slight upward tendency.

377. Aside from these two tools, a series of bilingual TA brochure was published with OPTA support (a first issue was produced under the project Phare 2006/018-147.04.03; the third issue appeared in March 2010), an event (celebrating Europe's day) was organised and four spots (two radio spots and two TV spots) were produced without being broadcasted.

378. According to the ACIS Communication Programme, the coordination and management of communication activities is the task of a '*dedicated communication team (communication unit)*[93]', functioning within the SCD. At present, the team consists of three staff, directly subordinated to the SCD Head.

379. The communication team has complex tasks, which cannot be efficiently performed in its current structure. The team has to:

- coordinate and manage ACIS's all communication activities;
- coordinate the communication teams of the different OPs;
- develop and propose to Monitoring and Coordination Committee policy, rules, communication tactics;
- ensure operational coordination the communication activities, manage the fonduri-ue.ro portal, the IC and the call-centre;
- ensure technical coordination of professional services externally contracted for implementing information and communication activities; and
- report to DG Regio on the progress of communication and information activities.

380. The CWG, comprising communication staff from all Management Authorities, facilitated coordination of the communication activities for all OPs. CWG meetings provide the opportunity to discuss the communication and publicity activities undertaken by each MA, thus avoiding overlaps in the messages transmitted during campaigns or events organised by MAs.

[93] *Communication Plan for OPTA, pg 9.*

381. A noteworthy outcome of CWG meetings is the Visual Identity Manual for Structural Instruments 2007-13, developed in close cooperation by the WG members. The Visual Identity manual was adjusted to the specificities of each OP and now forms part of all contracts.

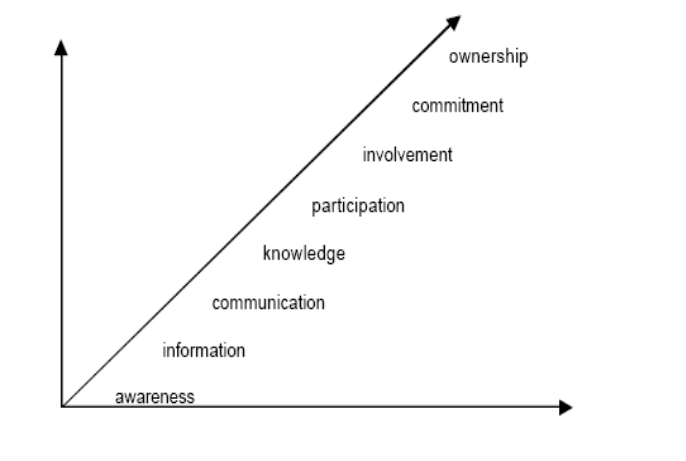
382. One reason for the limited progress on KAI 3.1 implementation was the informal embargo on publicity expenses imposed by the Government. For almost a year, no contract for communication, information and publicity activities related to the SI could be concluded. The ban was lifted in March 2010, with several public procurement procedures foreseen in the short term to address activities stipulated by the CP and programming documentation.

383. The interviews conducted during the evaluation revealed that representatives of the mass media are willing to participate in SI-related communication and that they would appreciate training sessions and meetings on specific topics of interest to the media.

384. In a focus group organized during the evaluation, media experts have expressed their view that there is no 'spokesperson' for the SI, which causes a measure of confusion among the general public, with regard to the institution that is supposed to lead the management and implementation of interventions financed with EU assistance.

385. Building the communication and information tools and messages should take into account the fact that the involvement of a target group in a communication process can evolve from awareness level to ownership level, as seen below.

Box 7: Improving the Communication Process – from Awareness to Ownership



Source: DC Communication

A proper communication process implies customizing instruments for each target group. Otherwise, the general public will never be interested in reaching more than a minimal level of **awareness** regarding the SI. Once receiving customized messages, the target group gives more attention to specific **information** and starts to search for it in frequently used and trustworthy media. The next step is to encourage the target group to adopt a more pro-active attitude towards **communication** and to engage in a dialogue with communicators. When this level is reached, the target group should be invited to participate in a series of events (seminars, meetings, conferences) in order to assimilate the information acquired, thus reaching the '**knowledge**' stage. This stage should be the optimal stage of communication for potential beneficiaries, as target group.

Other target groups (mass-media, public institutions, stakeholders) may reach even higher levels of communication. For example, mass-media should ideally reach at least the **participation** stage, which would mean that journalists may go as far as taking over a part of the communication tasks – adding new messages, starting their own campaigns etc.

Information Centre

386. By the end of 2009, there was no progress in the implementation of KAI 3.2 activities, which centre on the establishment of an IC for SI.

387. It was originally envisaged to establish the IC within ACIS headquarters, in order to create a solid and coherent entity and so ensure direct interaction between SI management system and target groups.

388. For various reasons (not subject to the current evaluation) ACIS headquarter were located in a building not well suited to the requirements of an IC. It had been intended to house the IC on the ground floor of the building, but this proved impossible due to a lack of space and access, as well as the design of the ground floor. The establishment of the IC had to be postponed until a proper location can be found.

389. The IC should provide the interface between the public and the institutions involved in SI management; it should gain the position of authorised and accurate information supplier. It should be the main channel of information about the SI and familiarise the public with concepts such as 'Structural Instruments' and 'European Funds'.

390. Based on the interviews with SCD/ACIS and with external communication experts, four alternatives seem suitable for the development of the IC within KAI 3.2:

A. Establish the IC within ACIS, in more suitable premises for ACIS operations

391. The first option is for ACIS to find another location for its operations, more in line with its needs, and offering the possibility to establish and to operate the IC.

392. The main advantage of the IC operating from the same premises as ACIS is that the activity of the IC may be closely supervised.

393. The main disadvantage consists in the fact that a decision on ACIS relocation cannot be taken rapidly, since it does not solely depend on ACIS management.

B. 'Green field' establishment of the IC

394. The second option is to find a separate location for the IC, meeting the criteria detailed below. This solution, by its nature, implies physical dissociation of ACIS and the IC.

395. The advantages of this option are many. First, the process of establishing the IC can start with little delay. Second, the whole process can be externalised, from finding an appropriate location, to recruiting the team and assuming IC management. An external contractor may be found to offer solutions to these issues, under the guidance of the ACIS communication team.

396. A disadvantage is that a tender for such an important contract runs a substantial risk of being contested, leading to delays or cancellation of the tender.[94]

C. Taking over the Infoeuropa Centre from the Department for European Affairs (DEA)[95]

397. The Infoeuropa Centre was the information centre of the EC Delegation in Romania in the period 1999-2007. The main advantage of this solution is that the location was used for 8

[94] *A case in point is a tender launched by the Ministry of Agriculture for consultancy services related to a Network Support Unit. The tender procedure was started on 30 December 2008, but a contract has not yet been awarded, because the tender outcome was contested twice.*

[95] *DEA is the national central authority for coordinating the European affairs and it is directly subordinated to the Prime Minister.*

years for the same type of activity. The premises meet the key criteria in respect of central position, visibility, accessibility, lay-out, size and facilities for the public.

398. This option has the disadvantage that the premises are used by DEA and dedicating them to the IC would require negotiations involving ACIS management and the DEA Minister.

D. 'Virtual' IC

399. The fourth option concerns the establishment of a 'virtual' centre, involving a call-centre and on a web portal. The virtual IC would receive and answer solicitations from the public by phone or by e-mail.

400. The obvious advantage of this option is that premises housing the virtual IC can be simpler than those of a 'physical' IC, in terms of location, accessibility, dimensions and facilities. The main, important disadvantage is that this solution would remove face-to-face interaction with the public from the SI management and implementation system, perhaps perpetuating its negative image as being complex and inaccessible.

6. Impact

6.1 Introduction

401. Implementation of the Cohesion Policy in the period 2007-13 is based to a large extent on Council Regulation (EC) N° 1083/2006[96]. Article 29 of this regulation deals with the reporting required of Member States. Romania had to provide a concise report containing information on the contribution of the programmes co-financed by the Funds by the end of 2009. [97]

6.2 Findings

402. Given the early stage of OPTA implementation, little can be said about the programme's impact, as only a few of the implemented projects have started to show results.

403. The main findings in respect of impact are set out in the following paragraphs, in accordance with the evaluation questions stipulated in the ToR.

Implementing the objectives of cohesion policy as established by the Treaty

404. The analysis of OPTA's contribution to achieving the objectives set out in EU and national strategic documents is based on two pillars. The first pillar monitors OPTA's contribution to the priorities detailed in the Community strategic guidelines on cohesion as set in Council Regulation (EC) N° 1083/2006. The second pillar is represented by OPTA's contribution to the goals set out in the NSRF that underpins the OPs and ensures their synergy in meeting national medium- and long-term development needs.

405. Article 158 of the Treaty states that, in order to strengthen its economic and social cohesion, the EU aims to reduce disparities between the levels of development of various regions. Romania is eligible for support under the Convergence objective, which provides funding for improving conditions for growth and employment through the increasing and improvement of the quality of investment in physical and human capital, the development of innovation and of the knowledge society, adaptability to economic and social changes, the protection and improvement of the environment, and administrative efficiency.

406. Therefore, a critical condition for implementing the objectives of the cohesion policy and fulfilling the tasks of the Structural and Cohesion funds is adequate management and coordination of the EU support.

407. Given that OPTA's global objective is to ensure support for the coordination and to contribute to sound, effective, efficient and transparent implementation and absorption of the SI in Romania, it can be argued that OPTA is aligned with the goals of the Cohesion Policy.

Fulfilling the tasks of the funds as set out in the Council Regulation (EC) Nº 1083/2006

408. Above and beyond the management of the Funds, the existence of an efficient public administration and public services is a fundamental requirement for stimulating economic growth and job creation. In line with the revised Lisbon Strategy which calls

[96] *Council Regulation (EC) N° 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) Nº 1260/1999.*

[97] *The evaluation team delivered this section earlier than the rest of the IE, in order to be used for Romania's reporting. The cut-off date for this section therefore is end-September 2009 instead of end-December 2009.*

for better legislation, policy design and delivery to create the conditions for economic growth and job creation, the structural funds are meant to support investment in the human capital of administrative and public services at all territorial levels.

409. For countries and regions under the Convergence objective, increasing productivity and quality at work in the public sector, especially in the economic, employment, social, educational, health, environmental and judicial areas, is essential to pursue and accelerate reforms, raise productivity and growth in the wider economy and promote social and territorial cohesion and sustainable development. Under the Convergence Objective, Member States are called upon to build up the public administration and public services at national, regional and local level.

410. In line with the principle of concentration, Member States have been invited to conduct a comprehensive analysis to identify the policy areas requiring the most support for administrative capacity. Romania has responded to this call and identified the main needs as: the need of coordination and networking, the need for training actors in all functions regarding SI management, the need of further developing the management and monitoring system, and the need of dissemination of information.

411. Consequently, the Romanian authorities have filled in the category list under Annex IV of the Council Regulation № 1083/2006 regarding expenses related to increasing the administrative capacity and believe that all 12 OPTA contracted projects contribute to fulfilling the Lisbon objectives, as they relate to ensuring efficient SI implementation.

412. The progress registered in 2008, namely the completion of preparations for the management and control system, the inception of actual implementation of OPTA and the enhanced experience of beneficiaries in accessing and using TA has created the prerequisites for a significant contribution of OPTA from 2009 onwards, to strengthening the SI management systems and hence the fulfilment of the Lisbon Strategy.

Implementing the priorities detailed in the Community strategic guidelines on cohesion and specified in the priorities set by the NSRF

413. The priorities set by the NSRF are defined in such a way as to meet medium and long-term national development needs, strengthen the synergy effect of the actions envisaged by the strategy and achieve the highest impact of the structural funding co-financed by the EU for the 2007-13 period. The NSRF is drawn up with a close view to the Community Strategic Guidelines for Cohesion and the general strategic direction defined by the EU regulations.

414. As concluded by the OPTA *ex ante* evaluation, the weakness of administrative capacity has been recognized as a key issue and included as a distinct thematic priority in the NSRF. Furthermore, together with the TA PAs, and especially with the OP DAC, OPTA directly addresses this priority, in that it contributes to Building an Effective Administrative Capacity.

415. OPTA contributes to the above mentioned NSRF thematic priority three-fold, namely by:

- supporting the implementation of Structural Instruments and coordination of programmes (under PA 1);
- developing and supporting the functioning of the Single Management Information System (under PA 2) and
- disseminating information and promoting the SI (under PA 3).

416. The OPTA strategy takes also into account the commitments undertaken by the Government through the Complementary Position Paper on Chapter 21 – Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments and the developments in the implementation

of the Single Action Plan aiming at improving the management systems for the operation of the EU funds in Romania (pre-accession funds and SI), adopted by the Government in 2005 with the subsequent amendments.

417. Furthermore, considering the strategy for developing the growth poles in Romania the concept of pole coordinator responsible for supporting the coordination of the Integrated Development Plan for the related growth pole was created. In December 2008, to ensure support for the activities of these coordinators, they were integrated within OPTA, PA 1, KAI 1.1 – *Support for the management and implementation of the Structural Instruments*. This amendment contributes to another thematic priority stated in the NSRF, namely that of Promoting a balanced territorial development.

418. The AIRs[98] provide valuable insight in OPTA's progress towards implementing the NSRF objectives. The year 2008 marked the completion of preparations for the management and control system and the inception of OPTA implementation process. Apart from this, the AIR 2008 indicates progress in supporting the implementation of SI and coordination of programmes through the first series of meetings of committees and relevant WGs. In 2009, OPTA interventions led to a comprehensive debate on the EU Cohesion Policy, to several training sessions for staff coordinating SI, to enhanced coordination via the WGs, to enabling adequate SMIS functioning and to communication through two major web-sites[99]. For 2010, there are good premises for more active OPTA implementation, leading to solving horizontal hindrances in SI implementation and improving ACIS capacity to manage the objectives of the NSRF.

Achieving the objective of promoting competitiveness and job creation and working towards meeting the objectives of the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-08)

419. In its Communication on a renewed Lisbon strategy of February 2005, the Commission proposes to focus efforts on 'delivering stronger and lasting growth and creating more and better jobs'. This calls for member states actions to deliver growth and competitiveness and to make Europe a more attractive place to invest and work. It also emphasizes the need to stimulate entrepreneurial initiative, attract sufficient risk capital to start up businesses for a strong European industrial base. At the same time, facilitating innovation and eco-innovation, more and better investment in education and training, the uptake of ICT&C and the sustainable use of resources are being targeted.

420. In view of the above and the renewed Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs, programmes co-financed through the cohesion policy seek to target resources on the following three priorities:

- Improving the attractiveness of Member States, regions and cities by improving accessibility, ensuring an adequate quality level of services, and preserving their environmental potential;
- Encouraging innovation, entrepreneurship and the growth of the knowledge economy by increasing the research and innovation capacities, including new information and communication technologies;
- Creating more and better jobs by attracting more people into employment or by promoting entrepreneurial activity, improving adaptability of workers and enterprises and increasing investment in human capital.

421. The Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005 – 2008) particularly mention that only by mobilising the potential for growth that exists in all regions, can an equilibrated economic growth and the maximisation of the growth rate within the EU be attained. The

[98] *AIR 2008 and AIR 2009.*

[99] www.poat.ro, www.fonduri-ue.ro.

Cohesion Policy can have a significant contribution to meeting the Lisbon objects through:

- supporting the implementation of coherent strategies over the medium to longer term through multiannual budgeting;
- improving governance through fostering improvements in institutional capabilities related to policy design and implementation; and
- developing synergies and complementarities with other Community policies.

422. The Communication on Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-08) specifically promotes the idea that strengthening institutional capacities and governance where they are considered to be a priority for less developed regions. In Romania's case, the OPTA *ex ante* evaluation concluded that the weakness of administrative capacity is a key issue that needs to be addressed.

423. Furthermore, as specified in the NSRF, increasing the capacity of public and central authorities for the management and control of SI is a top priority for Romania, that is addressed by OPTA for the programming period 2007-13 and which will unquestionably have a positive impact on the creation of jobs and will foster economic growth, contributing thus to the objectives of the Lisbon Agenda.

424. It can be argued that, through its interventions, OPTA has so far contributed to the attainment of the Cohesion Policy objectives, to the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-08), to the Lisbon Agenda and to the NSRF in at least three important ways.

425. First, it promoted Convergence by improving the coordination of SI used for TA and thus fostered synergy with the TA PAs included in each OP.

426. Second, it promoted inter-institutional coordination of funds at political, operational and technical level and also determined the distribution of tasks between the different structures of the management system in Romania, starting from the obligations laid down in Community regulations. Thus, it contributed to improving governance.

427. Third, it supported the implementation of coherent strategies and planning over the medium-term through multiannual plans (Training, Evaluation and Communication) and monitored through SMIS the progress of the SI implementation under the Convergence Objective. OPTA supports the evaluation activities planned in the Multi-Annual Evaluation Plans for NSRF, which allows ACIS to react for improving SI coordination, so as to better meet the NSRF, and indirectly, the Lisbon objectives.

Which are the achievements, challenges and future prospects in relation to implementation of the OPTA strategy?

428. This question has been addressed and answered earlier (please refer to the context changes discussed under, respectively 'Relevance' [ref: **Section 2.3**] and 'Effectiveness' [ref: **Section 5.2**].

429. In summary, it can be argued that the 2007-09 timeframe meant a period of intense preparation for the OPTA MA, which materialized in the following achievements:

- OPTA approval;
- set-up of the OPTA MC;
- preparation and approval of the OPTA FDI, Applicant's Guide and Manual of Procedures;
- completion of the establishment of the OPTA management and control system;
- approval of eligibility criteria and project evaluation mechanism;
- start of first round of projects by implementing their subsequent contracts.

430. The main challenges registered during this period were related, first, to the delay in launching OPTA. This was partially understandable because Romania was facing its first experience in managing SI and needed a longer time to prepare a coherent and efficient implementation system.

431. As previously presented [ref: **Section 2**], the negative context caused by the economic crisis also contributed to the generation of several strategic and operational difficulties in relation to:

- the difficulty of the main stakeholders to coordinate their actions;
- the limited capacity of the main beneficiaries to prepare and manage projects;
- the impact of economic crisis on public budgets, and indirectly on proper staffing and on adequate priority given to PR and transparency function;
- the obstacles related to public procurement, financial management and long approval procedures, as well as the other regulatory obstacles caused by existing or changing national legislation.

432. Given current progress, the prospects for OPTA cannot be very optimistic, especially considering the relative failure to frontload TA in order to push for faster absorption. Stronger political support is required to improve national legislation by streamlining regulatory procedures, solve the understaffing problem, and keep SI coordination above the separate agendas of individual Ministries hosting MAs/IBs.

Could examples of good practice be identified? Which are they and their added value?

433. Examples of good practice are meant to highlight the positive experiences in the implementation of the SI, and offer solutions and ideas for the improvement of the impact of the Cohesion Policy. In the case of Romania, because the absorption of structural and cohesion funds is still in an incipient phase, there are a few positive elements that can qualify for good practice. In this context, the OPTA contribution to supporting the institutional coordination of SI can be considered as a possible good-practice.

434. Well aware of the challenges that may arise in the SI coordination process, the Romanian authorities have considered SI coordination by building a solid institutional framework, doubled by the creation of OPTA, which was entrusted with effectively supporting these new institutions, through a consistent budget.

435. The typical institutional architecture for the 2007-13 period assumed the existence of the MAs and IBs to manage the various OPs, under the coordination of a single national central unit responsible for the whole SI implementation process. A common problem of the system is the fact that the MAs and the IBs are on the one hand subordinated to their own ministries and follow the hierarchical organization principles of these entities, but on the other hand are also required to follow the rules regarding the implementation of the SI, established and coordinated by ACIS. As a result, an efficient management of the SI implies both a vertical, hierarchical coordination and a horizontal one at inter-institutional and thematic levels.

436. Vertically, SI strategic coordination is provided at top governmental level, through structures such as the NCC for IS or the Inter-ministerial Group for Monitoring the Community Funds Absorption.

437. Operational coordination is ensured by the MCC, under the leadership of ACIS. Horizontally, under MCC guidance, a series or WGs were created to answer the need for coordination of thematic aspects or issues that require inter-institutional coordination arise. The WGs benefit from support for their thematic activities through TA funding.

438. The TA architecture within the NSRF is based on OPTA, as well as on the TA axes in the OPs. This hybrid-solution was chosen in order to facilitate strategic actions at NSRF level and the flexibility at OPs level to use TA resources to support efficient programme implementation. The decentralisation of technical assistance resources at OPs level also allowed a higher adequacy of resources to meet specific programme needs.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Relevance

7.1.1 Important changes (Q1)

C1 The economic recession has invalidated the macro-economic assumptions and indicators foreseen at the time of OPTA programming (2007). The crisis had direct impact on the public budget, which was severely constrained in 2009 and 2010. Romania may resume growth in 2011, but without clear indication that this will happen budgetary restrictions are likely to stay in place [ref: *Section 2.2* **Para 28-34**].

7.1.2 Context (Q2)

C2 OPTA remains largely relevant for all beneficiaries and ample for addressing their current needs. It is therefore not necessary to adjust the OP for reasons of uncovered needs [ref: *Section 2.2* **Para 35-42**].

C3 The overhang of pre-accession assistance from the period 2007-08 diminished demand for OPTA resources. At the end of 2009, a series of problems that OPTA had been designed to address had already been partially solved through the deployment of pre-accession assistance and other external support. This is applies to *inter alia* coordination issues, basic training related to SI, development of an evaluation culture, general information on SI, as well as the institutional capacity of, respectively, ACIS, the AA and the CPA [ref: *Section 2.3* **Para 66, 71, 76, 116**].

7.1.3 Relevance of PA/KAI (Q3)

Priority Axis 1

KAI 1.1 – Support to the management and implementation of Structural Instruments

C4 Horizontal policies and regulations cannot be clarified and improved through OPTA without proper support by regulatory stakeholders. This implies that TA to improve public procurement or manage state aid schemes cannot be successful without validation by and the long-term involvement of institutions such as UCVPP, NARMPP and the Competition Council [ref: *Section 2.3.1* **Para 50-56**].

C5 Support for Growth Poles coordination is well justified in view of the need to ensure horizontal management of multiple interventions from several OPs [ref: *Section 2.3.1* **Para 58-59**, **Box 1**].

C6 The introduction of the 75% salary bonus was relevant in terms of keeping staff turnover within acceptable limits and attracting good experts, given the budgetary constraints caused by the economic crisis [ref: *Section 2.3.1* **Para 60-61**].

***KAI 1.2* - Evaluation**

C7 OPTA support for enhancing evaluation of publicly funded interventions remains relevant. However, the initial programming relied on the implementation of the NES, which encounters delays on the part of national publicly funded programmes. As a result, ECU/ACIS has remained the sole protagonist of developing an evaluation culture, itself largely restricted to SI [ref*: Section 2.3.1* **Para 66-68**].

KAI 1.3 – Horizontal training in the field of the management of programmes/projects

C8 The training activities within OPTA, as originally conceived, were based on a thorough needs assessment. However, the gap between planning and the start of training sessions

was considerable and a new assessment would be advisable. As the specialisation of the MA and IB staff increases and staff turnover remains low, the envisaged training is considered too basic. The change from basic to specific training will require the adoption of new training tools, tailored to smaller groups of experts [ref: *Section 2.3.1* **Para 70-72**].

C9 There has been virtually no training for beneficiaries, although most implementation problems are at beneficiary level [ref: *Section 2.3.1* **Para 73**].

KAI 1.4 – Functioning of OPTA MA, ACIS, the CPA and the AA

C10 Support for institutional coordination is both relevant and mandatory for successful implementation of SI [ref*: Section 2.3.1* **Para 76-77**].

Priority Axis 2

SMIS long-term needs (Q19)

C11 There are four main needs in respect of long-term SMIS development: (i) ensuring full compatibility with third party applications; (ii) enhancing date security; (iii) enabling the customisation of system menus for final users; and (iv) providing training on a continuous basis [ref*: Section 2.3.2* **Para 98-106**].

KAI 2.1 – Development and maintenance of the SMIS and its digital network

C12 Further SMIS development is required and relevant for reaching optimal functionality [ref: *Section 2.3.2* **Para 85-86**].

KAI 2.2 – Functioning of the SMIS Central Unit and its coordination network

C13 The coordination network is critical for the functioning of SMIS and requires OPTA support. The same applies to the SMIS help-desk function. The recruitment of staff on a contract basis, although welcomed in principle, is hampered by existing regulations [ref: *Section 2.3.2* **Para 88-90**].

KAI 2.3 – Training of the users, distribution of procedural guides and user manuals and information activities related to SMIS

C14 SMIS-related training and user-friendly manual preparation are important for reducing the number of errors in the system and would benefit from OPTA support [ref: *Section 2.3.2* **Para 92-93**].

KAI 2.4 – Supply of IT&C goods and services

C15 Demand for SMIS-related equipment was overestimated at the time of programming, at least for the period 2007-2011, because available pre-accession support was insufficiently taken into account [ref: *Section 2.3.2* **Para 96-97**].

Priority Axis 3

KAI 3.1 – Dissemination of general information and publicity activities regarding the Structural Instruments allocated to Romania

C16 Although three years after Romania's accession to the EU one would expect a reasonable level of public awareness of SI, available data still suggest a low level of awareness on the part of the public. The original programming, based on a 2007 needs assessment, remains valid in 2010 [ref*: Section 2.3.3* **Para 116-121**].

KAI 3.2 – Operation of the Structural Instruments Information Centre

C17 The IC for SI is the backbone of the Communication Plan and there remains a critical need for it to be set up. The lack of action to date in establishing the national information

network demands immediate steps for soliciting the active involvement of stakeholders at local level [ref: *Section 2.3.3* **Para 123-126**].

7.2 Consistency and Coherence

7.2.1 Coherence (Q4)

C18 OPTA is well designed and equipped with proper mechanisms to ensure coherence with the other OPs and relevant European and national policies. Coherent principles and instruments guide the implementation of TA overall. There is nonetheless much difference between the TA activities conducted by each coordination structure and performance is variable [ref: *Section 3.2.1* **Para 132-138**].

The CCTA is essential for coordinating TA interventions. The CCTA focuses on avoiding overlap between horizontal and vertical TA and has successfully created and implemented a series of procedures in this respect. Under the guidance of the Directorate for TA of ACIS (DTA/ACIS), the coordination mechanism provides a platform for sharing concerns and identifying adequate, agreed upon solutions for problems in efficient TA implementation [ref: *Section 3.2.1* **Para 139-142**].

C19 CCTA influence on the decisions by TA units for other OPs is still limited and varies from one OP to another, mainly because of differences in institutional positioning of those units within their host entities. A number of thematic WGs may act inter alia as the CCTA's 'early-warning system' for overlap between OPTA and TA under other OPs. The WGs that are most important for TA coordination are those for, respectively, evaluation, training, communication and SMIS.

Although all WGs share the same functional philosophy, their operational modalities differ much. Some WGs have adopted proceedings more formal in character than those of other WGs and the frequency of their meetings varies. This operational variety partly explains the marked differences in effectiveness between WGs in respect of their mandates [ref: *Section 3.2.1* **Para 143**].

7.2.2 Consistency (Q5)

C20 OPTA remains a key source of funding for supporting ACIS to constantly assess the efficiency and effectiveness of recent Cohesion Policy reforms, as well as to prepare rigorously Romania's positions regarding the future policy changes. Already through KAI 1.1, OPTA provided funding for the "*Study to identify the priority reform directions for the Cohesion Policy post 2013 from Romania's perspective*". This in itself is a proof of consistency with EU developments in the field [ref: *Section 3.2.2* **Para 147-154**].

Similarly, ACIS staff was actively engaged in working groups and other debate session at EC level on the next agenda of cohesion, both before and after Barca's report[100] was launched.

C21 However, even ACIS was active and tried to stir a wider debate within the Romanian society on the Cohesion Policy reform, the echoes were very limited. This can be partially explained on grounds of novelty of such topic for the wider public or given the lack of habit, even at expert level, to participate and contribute to debates on issues of a national importance. However, OPTA leverage was also insufficiently used for this purpose. So far,

[100] *„An Agenda For A Reformed Cohesion Policy", Independent Report prepared at the request of Danuta Hübner, Commissioner for Regional Policy, Fabrizio Barca, April 2009;*

only one serious study was commissioned from OPTA resources, which is low by all standards, given the generous allocation available [ref: *Section 3.2.2* **Para 147-154**].

C22 The thematic WGs are not only relevant for coordinating TA and avoiding overlap, they also contribute to increased consistency of TA with wider policies for improving public administration. This applies also to the way in which OPTA interventions are correlated with OP DAC objectives and implementation. OPTA and OP DAC both deal with horizontal issues such as public procurement. Both OPs support the development of evaluation and its embedment in public policy design and implementation. Both OPs focus on training public employees. Both OPs aim at developing ICT systems within the public administration that can serve better policy execution and monitoring. Both OPs emphasise the importance of transparency in public policy, which requires adequate information and communication.

All these issues are currently addressed separately, because SI management is as seen separate from the management of other national public policies and interventions. As a result, the cooperation between OPTA and OP DAC remained rather limited at the end of 2009. Both OPs are well informed about their separate activities (through membership of Monitoring Committees, all WGs and similar venues for information exchange), but there is no common strategy for enhancing administrative capacity [ref: *Section 3.2.2* **Para 163-168**].

7.3 Efficiency

7.3.1 Mechanisms & structures (Q6)

C23 Its current organisational set up and procedures provide the basis for the proper functioning of the OPTA MA. An important factor hampering efficiency remains the lack of clear delineation between the DTA's OPTA-MA functions and its other, ACIS-related functions. Combined with understaffing, this blurring of functions undermines DTA's capacity to manage the increasing number of projects to be selected, contracted and implemented in the remainder of the programme period [ref: *Section 4.2.1* **Para 174-180**].

C24 OPTA MA staff, especially young entrants in the public administration, may reach a critical lack of motivation, if – after meeting the requirements for promotion – they are told that this is not possible for budgetary reasons. In combination with the recent decision for a 25% reduction in salaries, a promotion stop is likely to lead to resignations, especially amongst quality junior staff [ref: *Section 4.2.1* **Para 183**].

C25 Although only two minor irregularities have occurred so far, OPTA MA staff's efficiency and willingness to shoulder responsibility may be expected to suffer in the continued absence of transparent, predictable and fair procedures for dealing with irregularities [ref: *Section 4.2.1* **Para 187**].

C26 There is a need for clarifying implementation procedures at the operational level and a proper manual of guidelines, as beneficiaries consider the communication between them and the OPTA MA unclear and unstructured [ref: *Section 4.2.1* **Para 188**].

C27 There is a need for a more pro-active engagement of the OPTA MA with current and potential beneficiaries, to help them with problems in procurement and implementation and fill the project pipeline, for a more efficient and effective absorption of OPTA resources. Contracting external assistance for public procurement may be required, at least until the cooperation with UCVPP and NARMPP is reinforced [ref: *Section 4.2.1* **Para 189-192**].

C28 Efficient implementation of OPTA projects is affected by time-consuming approval and signing procedures at beneficiary level (especially in the case of ACIS, but also that of other OPTA beneficiaries). Much of the delay is due to the number of statutorily required approvals at State Secretary level [ref: *Section 4.2.1* **Para 193**].

C29 Although the MC has proven useful in planning or amending the OPTA, it does not use the possibility to involve external stakeholders (civil society and local authorities) to maximum potential.[101] Communication with external stakeholders tends to concentrate around MC meetings and is not conducted on a continuous basis. In addition, there likely exists limited capacity amongst external stakeholders to follow and contribute in more in-depth fashion to OPTA improvement [ref: *Section 4.2.1* **Para 194-202**].

7.3.2 Efficiency of PA/KAI (Q7)

Priority Axis 1

KAI 1.1 – Support to the management and implementation of the Structural Instruments

C30 Given the fact that the original allocation for KAI 1.1 amounted to nearly 25% of the total of OPTA resources, contracting and implementation under this KAI has been relatively inefficient [ref: *Section 4.2.2* **Para 209-214, Table 6**].

Out of the originally intended beneficiaries, only DAP and ECU have successfully submitted projects. Both DAP and MD are lacking the project management capacity to generate a constant flow of projects under KAI 1.1 [ref: *Section 4.2.2* **Para 215**]

C31 The TAF project, intended to be the centrepiece of a new way to handle procurement (by means of framework contracts), was vaguely defined and significantly delayed [ref: *Section 4.2.2* **Para 213-214]**.

C32 Nevertheless, it is likely that KAI 1.1 resources will soon be insufficient to cover the entire 2007-13 period, because of programming amendments and substantial, continuous expenditure on staff bonuses and wages for coordinators [ref: *Section 4.2.2* **Para 209-214**].

***KAI 1.2* - Evaluation**

C33 The projects already approved and the pipeline for KAI 1.2 look promising, but additional contracting is delayed [ref: *Section 4.2.2* **Para 218-220**].

C34 Training, networking, publishing results and actively launching new evaluations together seem to form the solution for increased efficiency in terms of the contracting rate [ref: *Section 4.2.2* **Box 4**].

KAI 1.3 – Horizontal training in the field of the management of programmes/projects

C35 Since the start of the programme period, it is noticeable that the entire coordination mechanism for training activities – i.e. TDCU and TWG – has matured. But the institutional system is not yet sufficiently structured to face current needs, leading to slow progress of KAI 1.3 and with likely negative impact on future training activities [ref: *Section 4.2.2* **Para 227-228**; ***Box 4***].

C36 Without institutional coherence of the TDCU, the targeted results could and cannot be reached. A Human Resource Unit may help it to shift from mere training coordination to more complex tasks, such as on-going evaluation of staff skills, specific staff evaluation related to SI implementation and motivational level tests. For all these tasks, horizontal

[101] *External in the sense of not being involved in the day-to-day coordination of SI – from this perspective, the EC representatives are 'internal', rather than external.*

coordination of MAs, IBs and the other institutions involved in public servants training activities is needed. Transfer of good practice from similar entities such as ECU is likely to improve TDCU capacity [ref: *Section 4.2.2* **Para 222-228**; *Section 5.2.1* **Para 336**].

KAI 1.4 – Functioning of OPTA MA, ACIS, the CPA and the AA

C37 ACIS and the CPA have been active in respect of this KAI, providing it with a good and apposite range of projects. However, CPA already encounters significant problems during implementation, as it lacks a solid and experienced PIU. The AA case is even worse, as so far it had trouble in putting forward projects, as its current structure misses entirely a PIU. However, the AA has plans to establish such an implementation structure as soon as possible [ref: *Section 4.2.2* **Para 229-235**].

Priority Axis 2

C38 Correcting errors is difficult and leads to delays in data processing, due to the necessary security and system access modalities, combined with an insufficient number of staff for data entry and processing. Although ACIS has expressed its dissenting view on empowering SMIS coordinators with more security/access rights because potential vulnerabilities in data security, the evaluation team considers useful to set a discrete list of common errors that could be corrected directly at SMIS coordinator level [ref: *Section 4.2.3* **Para 236**, **Box 5**].

C39 At the start of the programming period, the SMIS application was not fully able to accommodate the functionalities required by SI management and implementation. This has led to substantial delay in data upload and caused input of erroneous and incomplete data. The system is now functional and operational, although it cannot yet respond to all data management and reporting needs of all MAs and IBs, partly because those entities' relevant procedures have changed since the start of the SI [ref: *Section 5.2.2* **Para 354**, **Box 6**].

C40 Even though OPTA funding may be used to hire specialised staff on a contract basis, current Romanian legislation does not allow the contract-based employment of such experts. However, allowing the hiring of contract staff with OPTA financing would enable attracting people with competences that are extremely hard to acquire and sustain under normal budgetary conditions [ref: *Section 4.2.3* **Para 241**].

C41 The help-desk application in place is functional but users prefer to phone the SMIS CU or SMIS coordinators to quickly solve any issues arising. This causes much extra work for SMIS CU staff. A communication network for SMIS users at regional level has emerged, based on common interests and in the context of training delivered at the OP's programming stage. The present informal network may developed into a formal system able to benefit from coordination and support at central level. SMIS Coordinators within the MAs and IBs act as a first help-desk level for solving issues of low to average complexity for the users within their ambit, and also ensure initial know-how transfer to SMIS users [ref: *Section 4.2.3* **Para 242-251**].

C42 The SMIS application is relatively complex, mostly due to the complexity of the programmes it is supposed to reflect. It is perceived as not user-friendly, especially by users that do not possess at least a medium level of technical competence, in general, and knowledge of ICT applications, in particular [ref: *Section 4.2.3* **Para 236**, **Box 5**].

Priority Axis 3

C43 The communication and information tools already developed have either not been used at all (media spots) or were not used to maximum efficiency (websites *www.fonduri-ue.ro* and *www.poat.ro*) [ref: *Section 4.2.4* **Para 267-275**].

As regards the www.fonduri-ue.ro portal, even if it remains, for the moment, the main tool for ACIS communication, it is not user-friendly in terms of language and ease of finding information [ref: *Section 5.2.3* **Para 373-374].**

C44 It may be possible to turn mass-media representatives into effective communication partners, by reaching out to them with specialised information and training events [ref: *Section 5.2.3* **Para 382, Box 7**].

7.4 Effectiveness

7.4.1 Progress (Q8)

C45 At the end of 2009, progress on OPTA implementation was still very weak. Although the institutional setting for managing the programme is in place, most of OPTA interventions still had not been launched or failed to finish procurement procedures [ref*: Section 5.2* **Para 282-283**].

7.4.2 Performance gap (Q9)

C46 Judging by the degree of attainment of output indicators, programme performance at the end of 2009 fell short of expectations, with the exception of the number coordination meetings at all levels and the training events provided. The number of visits to the ACIS website has exceeded expectations. For several output indicators, there was no performance to monitor, as the planned activities had either been postponed or were still under implementation [ref: *Section 5.2* **Para 282-283**].

C47 No statements can be made in respect of the attainment of result and impact indicators, because most of the projects under the various KAIs were still in the inception stage at the end of 2009 [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 285;** *Section 5.2.2* **Para 353, 355, 359, 367;** *Section 5.2.3* **Para 368, 370**].

7.4.3 Influence factors (Q10)

C48 Both internal (understaffing, heavy workloads) and external (economic crisis, public procurement problems, public finances legislation, beneficiary capacity & approval procedures) factors prevented more effective OPTA implementation. Most of these factors could be only partially foreseen at the programming stage. The OPTA MA has limited control over internal factors, as its small administrative power does not provide many degrees of freedom. The OPTA MA does not have the competence to find solutions for many of the external factors. Some institutional problems can be solved at ACIS management level, while only the highest echelons of the MoPF can deal with most of the others (e.g. rescinding the need for approvals at State Secretary level) [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 300**].

C49 OPTA effectiveness can much be increased through multi-stakeholder involvement, as beneficiary capacity for implementing OPTA projects is as critical as the ability of the OPTA MA to coordinate all interventions. Increasing effectiveness requires that the OPTA MA improve its own capacity. In addition, it requires the OPTA MA to work closely together with eligible beneficiaries to increase their capacity to use TA to positive effect [ref: *Section 5.2* **Para 302-306**].

7.4.4 Effectiveness of PA/KAI (Q11)

Priority Axis 1

C50 OPTA support for pole coordinators is vital in ensuring the management of interventions at local level through the different OPs, as they are defined in the NSRF. Two problems related to this type of assistance need to be solved. The first is that there are no clear performance targets at OPTA level for the interventions supporting growth pole coordination and the periodical reports at project level received by OPTA MA are too basic to monitor the overall performance of this strategic operation. The second problem resides in the fact that no pole coordinator has ultimate decision-making powers regarding growth pole development, thus they have a limited influence on the use of SI. In other words, coordinators facilitate and do not have an executive role in SI absorption [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 295-297**].

C51 The decision to finance the 75% bonus for staff with functions related to SI implementation was made in 2004, at the suggestion of the EC. In 2009, the Government agreed with the EC to co-finance the staff bonus through OPTA. The bonus is a useful instrument for motivating staff to keep absorption of the EU funds at optimum levels. The bonus may however lead to tension and decrease of motivation for the public staff not contributing to SI absorption. There is a gap between potential beneficiaries under GD 595/2009 and OPTA's eligible beneficiaries, as in the case of the legal experts with relevant experience that are eligible under the first regulation and not under OPTA [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 293-294**].

C52 OPTA demonstrated flexibility in 2009 when it introduced support for growth pole coordinators and additional expenditure for staff involved in managing and implementing SI. Both measures are compliant with OPTA's general objectives, but they require a substantial yearly budget, that may trigger the need for financial reallocation from other PA/KAI to KAI 1.1 until the end of the financial perspective 2007-13 [ref: *Section 2.3.1* **Para 62**].

C53 An important obstacle faced by KAI 1.1 concerns the lack of capacity at beneficiary level for proposing and implementing projects. With regard to its 2009 project in support of preparing Romania's position towards EU regional policy, DAP experienced the public procurement process as cumbersome and the quality of support received from IS/DTA as less than optimal. A similar situation applies to the Monitoring Directorate within ACIS, which has been unable so far to put forward any project proposal, mainly due to its heavy workload involved in monitoring the remaining projects financed through Phare. The AA is expected to submit projects starting in 2010, as until 2009 it still had access to pre-accession assistance [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 306-308**].

Common standards (Q15)

C54 At the end of 2009, OPTA had not significantly contributed to support on horizontal issues, especially in fields such as public procurement and state aid. This is a significant vulnerability, as public procurement issues are generally considered bottlenecks, not only for the implementation of OPTA, but also that of the other OPs. All MAs and IBs look to ACIS for solutions to arrive at an efficient public procurement process. The issue of state aid also requires horizontal support, but beneficiaries see this need as less acute [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 297-304**].

C55 The most critical project for the achievement of KAI 1.1 objectives – the TAF – recently saw the launch of the contracting phase for a framework-agreement for services providers. If this contract is awarded without incident, it should provide real support for the management and implementation of SI. The launch of the TAF framework-agreement

is important in that it is one of very few short-term solutions for realising more flexible and faster project implementation and procurement. However, the manner in which Lot 1 of the relevant tender for TAF is structured does not provide the right set of incentives for enhancing the internal project management capacity of eligible beneficiaries, including DAP and MD [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 297-304**].

Evaluation culture (Q16)

C56 A key objective of KAI 1.2 is to achieve a common evaluation culture in Romania, but the evaluation culture concept is insufficiently detailed. There is no mechanism to monitor how OPTA contributes towards the achievement of this objective. There is a need for a monitoring mechanism that can assess the development of evaluation in Romania both qualitatively and quantitatively, and report periodically on the role played by OPTA support in reaching this KAI 1.2 objective [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 309-330**].

C57 There is a clear need for evaluation training, in order to reach a critical mass of expertise that can in turn allow for better evaluations and change in the attitude towards evaluation. Training needs to be differentiated between core-evaluation staff (members of the evaluation units) and other staff that may have a stakeholder role in evaluations. Specific training on niche themes related to evaluation can be of interest for core-evaluators, while basic know-how about evaluation is of an interest for many other experts outside the evaluation units [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 337-345**].

C58 The EWG is currently the best coordinated of the WGs organised at ACIS level. Support for the EWG through OPTA was very limited so far, and this hindered an even more active activity of the evaluation group [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 312-315**].

C59 The visibility of SI evaluation activity is low. There is insufficient awareness of the importance of evaluation for the improvement of SI interventions and of public policy in general. Evaluation is still regarded as audit and not as a tool improve management and implementation [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 324-328**].

C60 Launching new evaluations is key to improving evaluation culture. Excellence and best practice transfer come only through accumulating experience. Outsourcing of evaluation, funded through OPTA, is likely to enhance know-how transfer to ECU staff and EWG members [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 330**].

C61 'In-house' evaluation is also a useful option. Evaluation units' staff can increase their practical experience by carrying out *ad hoc* evaluations of smaller dimension, thus acquiring hands-on experience in how to deliver evaluations [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 330**].

The evaluation activity at this moment is dominated by a top-down approach in which ECU plays most often the role of initiating evaluations. However, even if ECU is the formal beneficiary of KAI 1.2, and in the case of externalised evaluations is the contractual Client, there is a need for a stronger ownership feeling and more proactive role at the level of the direct beneficiaries – the structures within the MAs/IBs that receive advice on how to improve their policy (e.g. Programming and Monitoring Directorates) [ref: *Section 4.2.2* **Box 4**].

Training (Q17)

C62 KAI 1.3 progress has been less than expected, but developments during the first trimester of 2010 have crated the premises for reaching the indicators and targets assumed, conditioned to keeping the current pace [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 331-346**].

C63 The TDCU has a sustained, pro-active activity for coordinating the training process, already demonstrating its usefulness in identifying and prioritising the training needs.

Nevertheless, a series of factors of legislative, institutional or procedural nature has a negative impact on its activity. At the same time, the tasks overload of each TDCU member led sometimes to a poor performance of TDCU activity. Another element influencing TDCU efficiency is the lack of HRD education of TDCU members [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 336-340**].

C64 The relevant institutions (National Agency for Public Servants, Public Finance and Customs School, European Institution of Romania) and Intermediate Bodies (at least with observatory status) are not represented to the TWG, leading to a lack of transparency related to TWG initiatives and decisions and to an increased dissemination activity [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 336**].

C65 The training mechanism, the TDCU and the TWG required improvement to provide a coherent framework and common tools for training needs in the field of SI. Their activity is known by all stakeholders involved, but the mechanisms to identify and prioritise training needs are still not updated, creating difficulties in collecting and consolidating the information, and risking reducing the activity efficiency of all structures involved [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 341-345**].

Supporting relevant structures (Q18)

C66 KAI 1.4 progress was limited at end of 2009. The potential beneficiaries did not fully seize the opportunities provided by OPTA to meet their training needs, or their capacity of implementing more projects at the same time is quite low [ref: *Section 5.2.1* **Para 347-352**].

There were some situations where the approval and signing process was delayed; from the time of the notifying tender results until the actual signing of the contract, a period of 3-4 months passed. The contractors had their own negative influence on the delays (either because of the difficulty in providing the Contracting Authority with the Letter of Guarantee or to open a Treasury account), but most of the time, there are delays caused by the complex flow of institutional approval procedures.

Priority Axis 2

SMIS support (Q20)

C67 By end-2009, no contract had been awarded under KAI 2.1. There is a need to (re-) launch the tender procedure for TA in support of the further development of SMIS. A new contract, correlated with the coordination and usage experience accumulated to, should lead to a rapid and effective implementation [ref: *Section 5.2.2* **Para 355-356**, **Box 6**].

C68 The late start of the training courses for SMIS users caused operational delays and errors. The training sessions have been adjusted and now use real data sets, taken from the production system tests and demo runs, for greater practical relevance. Users have been regrouped, based on common areas and interest domains, improving targeting and impact [ref: *Section 5.2.2* **Para 353-367**].

C69 SMIS coordinators within MAs and IBs have benefited from supplementary training on the details of the SMIS application and its functionalities [ref: *Section 5.2.2* **Para 353-367**].

C70 The existing infrastructure at central and regional level ensures SMIS functioning within normal parameters. In the short to medium term, the number of supply contracts for equipment is likely to rise, because most SMIS equipment is nearing the end of its economic or technical lifespan [ref: *Section 5.2.2* **Para 353-367**].

C71 There is a series of connected applications developed with own resources aiming at facilitating the data uploading and management [ref: *Section 2.3.2* **Para 99**].

C72 The MySMIS application has a high potential to significantly contribute to the improvement of the quality of the projects submitted by the beneficiaries at a national level as well as of the quality of all OPs, by making beneficiaries act in a more responsible way and by offering an executive and dynamic framework for the project submitting and follow up [ref: *Section 2.3.2* **Para 101-103**]

C73 The parallel database application operated by the SOP HRD MA (i.e. ActionWeb) cannot be easily linked to SMIS, as differences exist between the data required by SMIS and ActionWeb. A single integrated information management system is bound to enhance for SI management and implementation. It is expected that further development of SMIS, funded by OPTA, will create that integrated system [ref: *Section 2.3.2* **Para 98**].

C74 The existing manuals for using the application cover mainly, but not comprehensively enough, the technical part of the application and are written in English, which makes it more difficult for users to consult them. Moreover, for the functional aspect of SMIS, the end users (the staff registering data into SMIS) express the need to have manuals guiding them step-by-step in the process of correlating the projects documents (submitted in hard copy) and the data to be uploaded in SMIS [ref: *Section 5.2.2* **Para 354 Box 6**].

Priority Axis 3

SI communication

C75 PA 3 objectives are far from being accomplished, with implementation progress very poor at the evaluation cut-off date. The reasons for not achieving the goals are related to internal issues (DSC functioning) and external issues [ref: *Section 5.2.3* **Para 368-380**].

C76 The lack of a 'spokesperson' creates confusion among the general public as regards the 'leading' institution concerning the SI. Even if the IC should be considered the key actor in the communication process related to SI, up to end-2009 no steps had been taken to create the Centre [ref: *Section 5.2.3* **Para 382**].

C77 Four possible options exists in respect of the establishment of the IC: (i) a new headquarters housing both ACIS and the IC; (ii) creating the IC as a 'greenfield' project; (ii) taking over the Infoeuropa Centre from the DEA; and (iv) creating a 'virtual IC'. Establishment of the IC needs to be supported by a series of connected communication an information tools, as initially envisaged by OPTA [ref: *Section 5.2.3* **Para 384-397**].

7.5 Impact [Strategic Questions under Article 29 of Council Regulation (EC) № 1083/2006]

7.5.1 Strategic contribution (Q12)

C78 Starting from the key aims of the NSRF 2007-13, namely to strengthen the strategic focus of Romania's Economic and Social Cohesion Policies and make appropriate linkages to the EU policy, OPTA indirectly contributes to the achievement of Cohesion Policy by assisting efficient implementation of SI interventions [ref: *Section 6.2.1* **Para 401-424**].

7.5.2 Achievements & challenges (Q13)

C79 Increasing the capacity of public and central authorities in relation to the management and control of SI is a priority identified in the NSRF. This priority is being addressed in the present programming period and is likely to have positive impact on job creation and fostering economic growth, thus contributing to the objectives of the Lisbon Agenda [ref: *Section 6.2.1* **Para 425-429**].

7.5.3 Good practice (Q14)

C80 OPTA supports multi-level participative coordination, encompassing a large number of entities involved in SI implementation. This provides the necessary conditions for an effective, efficient and transparent implementation of SI, as well as the resources for the permanent monitoring, coordination, best practice exchange and improvement of the general impact of TA under OPTA and the TA axes in the other OPs. The support provided through OPTA to the complex institutional architecture composed of several Committees and WGs can be considered good practice, in that it ensures both hierarchical and thematic coordination of SI [ref: *Section 6.2.1* **Para 430-435**].

8. Recommendations

This section summarises the main recommendations emanating from the evaluation. The recommendations are divided into five main categories: (i) coordination, (ii) administrative change, (iii) human resources, (iv) design and implementation, and (v) regulatory framework.

8.1 Coordination

R1 It is recommended that the coordination of the existing institutions (WGs, CCTA) be improved [ref: **C18, C19, C54-C61, C64, C65**], as follows:

R1.1 Apply three key principles regarding the existing coordination institutions [ref: **C18, C19**]:

- OP representatives in the CCTA and their respective TA units at OP level report directly to OP MA Directors. Their mandate to coordinate TA cannot be circumvented (clear leadership assignment) [ref: **C18**];
- OP representatives in thematic WGs and their respective thematic units at OP level report directly to OP MA Directors. Their mandate to coordinate the specific themes (e.g. evaluation, training, ICT systems, communication) cannot be circumvented (clear leadership assignment) [ref: **C19**];
- permanent staff (Secretariat) of thematic WGs has direct access to the ACIS Director and are so placed in the organisational set up accordingly [ref: **C19**].

R1.2 Introduce the following operational improvements [ref: **C19**]:

- open every thematic WG to the representatives of the permanent Secretariat of all other WGs, as observers, for the purpose of cross-fertilisation of best practice from one WG to another [ref: **C19**];
- enhance the mandate and the importance of the MWG by aiming to provide support for project monitoring across OPs and jointly clarify the delineation of tasks between Programming and Monitoring Departments in the case of each OP [ref: **C19**];
- reactivate the Financial Management and Control WG to help solve the increasing amount of activity in this horizontal area [ref: **C19]**;
- open the thematic WGs to guests and observers from the IBs and other interested institutions, even those outside the SI management and implementation system, to ensure proper consistency between OPTA interventions and other national policies. In order to preserve the efficiency of the WG, the number of invited observers per meeting should be kept to a maximum of 10 people. The WG chair should invite different observers from one meeting to another, depending on the topic of the WG meetings. The observers should not intervene uninvited during the work of the WG, but they should have the opportunity to provide relevant feedback in a concluding session, at the end of the meeting [ref: **C19**].

R1.3 Reinforce networking through OPTA intervention, by:

- periodically inviting to WG meetings observers such as central & local government staff, researchers, professors, public accountability NGOs, consultancies, individual evaluators, for specific debates on evaluation-related issues [ref: **C19**];
- inviting as observers at least one representative of the other WGs organised at NSRF level [ref: **C19**];
- organising conferences and workshops on evaluation topics, with a wider attendance than the core-evaluation teams at ACIS and MA level [ref: **C19**].

R1.4 Continue efforts for improving evaluation quality by [ref: **C58-C61**]:

- ensuring increased know-how transfer between external contractors and internal staff of evaluation units, through special stipulations in ToR and contracts and allowing experts to attend EWG sessions [ref: **C60**];
- enhancing the cooperation between evaluation units and the top and departmental management of ACIS, MA and IBs by [ref: **C59**]:
- ensuring that evaluation units are attending all management meetings focused on horizontal issues;
- implementing a participatory evaluation needs assessment in the fourth quarter of each year to update evaluation plans;
- engaging evaluation units with programming and monitoring Departments in improving the qualitative assessment methodology within the AIRs at OP level.

R1.5 Improve operational arrangements by [ref: **C64, C65**]:

- expanding TWG membership, so as to involve IBs in the process of training needs identification, as observers [ref: **C64**];
- increasing TDCU and TWG transparency, by activating as soon as possible the official ACIS web page dedicated to training activities: www.formarestructurale.ro [ref: C65];
- increasing CWG pro-activity in respect of identifying solutions for correcting imbalances in the communication process, which represents one of its functions. Under ACIS guidance, the CWG might well assume more responsibilities regarding the customisation of the communication process [ref: **C65**].

R2 ACIS is recommended to enhance cooperation in the field of public procurement by supporting the Bureau for Project and Public Procurement Assistance within the DTA and facilitate closer collaboration between ACIS, the MAs and IBs, as well as the national institutions in the field of public procurement. This might encompass [ref: **C53**]:

R2.1 Prioritizing public procurement, as follows [ref: **C53**]:

- Increase the quality of expertise regarding public procurement within the OPTA MA and beneficiary entities, through:
  - more specific training on public procurement for staff of the OPTA MA, ACIS, CPA, AA and other beneficiaries in respect of writing the technical part of ToR, drawing up budget estimates and drafting descriptions of specific requirements without restricting competition,
  - enhancing IS/DTA capacity to deal with public procurement issues by enhancing the capacity of the Bureau for Projects and Public Procurement Assistance in respect of full support for the elaboration of the administrative part of ToR, the evaluation procedure and grid, the adaptation of contract templates, and contracting and selection procedures, and
  - engaging external expertise through the TAF;
- Initiate regular discussions with NARMPP and UCVPP to find solutions for the blockages in the course of contracting, ideally through establishing a permanent Public Procurement WG;
- Promote and pursue more flexibility in public procurement; including the possibility to split up interventions, the use of swifter procurement methods (such as calls for offers, direct negotiation and direct contracting), and strategic measures such as the adoption of framework contracts.

R2.2 Improve public procurement procedures by making good use of TA [ref: **C53**] through:

- providing SMIS CU staff in charge of drafting tender documentation with training on the procurement system, to unlock as fast as possible its projects current at proposal or idea stage;

- designing further support SMIS not in the form of a TA contract, but as an ICT product development contract. This enables a focus on the lifecycle of the product and flexibility with regard to the technical specifications in the view of technological advances and changing user demands over that life-cycle;
- more widely engaging specialized and experienced consultancy services for drafting the technical and functional requirements in tender documentation, and minimising the administrative and procedural risks involved in the public procurement process.

R2.3 Improve the targeting of framework agreements for implementing OPTA projects, through better focus, clearer prioritisation and judicious separation into lots [ref: **C55**].

R3 It is recommended that the coordination between the MAs for, respectively OPTA and OP DAC be improved, through [ref: **C22**]:

- agreeing on a concerted effort to advocate at Government level the need to reassume the agenda put forward by the NES;
- reinforcing coordination with OP DAC in support of the evaluation culture in the rest of Romania's public administration;
- organising quarterly joint meetings between OPTA and OP DAC MA on the topic of monitoring the development of the capacity public administration overall. At these joint-meetings, it is advisable to invite other relevant institutions that are stakeholders in the process of building the administrative capacity for the public sector.

R4 It is recommended that the cooperation between the OPTA MA, the CPA and the AA be strengthened through supporting the development of dedicated PIUs (or equivalent) within these beneficiary entities and by increasing the capacity of AA and CPA as eligible beneficiaries under KAI 1.4 by [ref: **C37**]:

- organising quarterly meetings between the Strategies Service within DTA/ACIS and AA & ACP representatives, for a full debriefing on current projects, consultation on the project pipeline and know-how transfer in improving PMUs/PIUs for OPTA projects. During the meetings a TDCU representative should be invited to discuss progress in covering the training needs of AA and CPA;
- clarifying the status of the OPTA helpdesk function towards the AA and the CPA and amend the OPTA Procedures Manual accordingly. It is recommended that the SS assumes the role of help desk and acts pro-actively by initiating meetings with beneficiaries to help identifying financing opportunities in relation to their needs.

R5 It is recommended that SMIS coordination be improved and the roles of the SMIS CU and SMIS coordinators be strengthened, through [ref: **C41, C72-74**]:

- integrating as much as possible the functionalities for SOP HRD's ActionWeb into future versions of the SMIS application. As an interim solution, and without prejudice to the development of a single ICT system for SI management and implementation, it is advisable to create an interface that will automatically feed ActionWeb data into SMIS. This should be a two-way process. SMIS development should allow feeding data from ActionWeb, and the MA for SOP HRD should ensure that all data required by SMIS is duly provided [ref: **C73**];
- continuing the development of SMIS add-ons, including the prioritised implementation of the MySMIS application [ref: **C72**];
- translating manuals into Romanian, in parallel with the translation of the labels of SMIS application fields [ref: **C74**];
- organising on-line conference sessions or systematic meetings between the SMIS CU with the SMIS regional coordinators, assisted by procedures manuals in Romanian language, e-learning sessions, video tutorials, procedures for correlating SMIS with

the format of application forms, reimbursements documents and technical progress reports [ref: **C41**].

R5.1 Improve the procedures for error correction by optimising the security system and access rights, through lowering the level of authority for sending and receiving correction requests, thus allowing SMIS coordinators to correct directly a limited series of common/minor mistakes. However, the full access to the data base should be kept only at central level, to avoid even higher data inconsistency. As an alternative, ACIS could externalise error correction to a contractor, in parallel with the further development of SMIS [ref: **C38**].

R5.2 Integrate the help-desk function in a larger framework for the organisation of the community of SMIS users. It is recommended that a portal be created containing all the necessary information connected to the SMIS application: procedures, manuals, instructions, newsletters, a forum for SMIS users community; and a de-centralised help desk on at least 2 levels: one for all users, and another for OP-related questions [ref: **C41**].

R5.3 Encourage SMIS users at all levels to acquire their ICT equipment through OPTA, by accessing the dedicated funds available for this purpose [ref: **C70**].

R6 It is recommended that ACIS position itself as the communication leader for SI implementation in that it uses the communication tools already developed [ref: **C43**], by:

- signing the contract for broadcasting publicity spots without delay,
- building a user-friendly interface for www.fonduri-ue.ro for all target groups all target groups, including the general public,
- improving the www.poat.ro website to enhance transparency, by providing for each approved and contracted project a short description of objectives and planned results,
- externalisation, in due course, of websites improvement to experts with similar experience at national or European level;
- adopting the function of clearing house for information on SI implementation for all target groups [ref: **C76**];

R7 ACIS/ ECU should give priority to activities for the development of an evaluation culture, including [ref: **C60**]:

- public debates on key alternatives resulting from evaluation exercises;
- media coverage on results, including briefing media on the importance of evaluation;
- awareness campaigns on evaluation, targeting MAs and ministry departments connected to the evaluation process[102].

R8 It is advisable that ACIS advocates at top Government level for more political support in order to be able to provide better horizontal coordination and more efficient use of TA. ACIS requires a stronger power position vis-à-vis the Ministries hosting IBs/MAs. This implies that the coordination structures hosted by ACIS, such as the thematic WGs, would be able to obtain quick political commitment for implementing all decisions relevant to each line ministry. Such political support is also needed in order to cut red tape, by amending several regulatory procedures, in order to allow faster SI implementation, including at OPTA level [ref: **C79**].

R9 It is recommended that ACIS encourage and accelerate, with OPTA support from KAI 1.1, the debate on how to improve and simplify further the implementation of the Cohesion Policy. ACIS should be more active in commissioning constant research on this topic and

[102] *In cooperation with PA 3, as it is a communication exercise at horizontal level linked to SI implementation.*

foster debate among academia and practitioners, in order to affirm Romania's position as a Member State and consolidate a critical mass of experts in the field. In terms of practical aspects, a small grants scheme can be launched for this purpose [ref: **C20-21**].

8.2 Administrative Change

R10 It is recommended that DTA's functions related to the OPTA MA role be clearly separated from its ACIS-related functions, by reorganising the subordinated services (SS, IS, FMS) and by [ref: **C23**]:

- creating a separate OPTA Bureau within the FMS, dealing exclusively with MA-related functions;
- extracting the training coordination function from the IS, and create a proper positioning of TDCU in a separate HR Unit/Bureau under the direct supervision of the ACIS Director[103];
- Moving the help-desk function from the IS to the SS;

These changes raise obvious challenges, but they are absolutely necessary for an efficient OPTA implementation. The recommended new organisational charts can be found in Annexes 7 and 8. In order to achieve it, at DTA level, there is a need to amend the Procedure Manual and to hire and transfer the following staff:

- creating a new position of Head of OPTA Bureau within the new FMS structure dealing exclusively with OPTA MA-related functions;
- creating a new position of Financial Officer and engaging expertise within the FMS, acting exclusively on the beneficiary side;
- moving the current position of Training Officer (along with the expert in charge) from the Bureau for Project and Public Procurement Assistance within IS, to the new HR Unit/Bureau;
- moving one of the Project Officers positions within the IS inside the Bureau for Project and Public Procurement Assistance.

R11 It is recommended that the DAP and the MD be strengthened, in order to better cope with their responsibilities as OPTA beneficiaries, as follows [ref: **C30**]:

- let the DAP gain experience by building its own capacity for project implementation and prepare for the next programming period by launching its own projects, including a project for implementing a grant scheme for research studies;
- let the MD develop a more proactive involvement in launching its own projects, including one to providing assistance for better qualitative reporting, including GIS mapping.

R12 It is recommended to create a Human Resources Unit within ACIS with a 5+1 structure, similar to the ECU, directly subordinated to the ACIS General Director. In view of current staff restrictions, a compromise solution might be the creation of a mixed Unit for HR and Information and Communication activities, to be formed from SCD communication staff and IS/DTA training staff [ref: **C23**, **C36**, **C75**]. This would further involve:

- moving the Training Expert position from the IS within the DTA to the newly created structure;
- creating a new HR/Training Expert position and engage a new expert to fill it;
- creating a new HR/Communication Head of Unit position and engage appropriate management expertise to fill it.

[103] *This recommendation will be followed-up in the evaluation of PA 1 KAI 1.3 and PA 3, as it is suggested that TDCU may form a Bureau together with the current Communication Compartment within the SCD.*

R13 It is recommended that the IC be established by using the current DEA information centre. To this end, ACIS management might well open discussions with DEA management with a view to concluding an inter-institutional agreement to transform the Infoeuropa Centre into the IC for SI [ref: **C77**]. Related initiatives might involve:

R13.1 A branding strategy, in order to find the best solution concerning the visual identity of the Centre (logo, message, name) [ref: **C77**];

R13.2 Development of instruments to support the IC [ref: **C77**], including:

- transformation of the *www.fonduri-ue.ro* portal into a platform that can be used by all targets groups;
- establishment of a call centre to record specific information requests that need a longer period of time to be answered by IC staff;
- establishing a network of regional points of information, by developing relations with reliable partners recognised at regional or local level as promoters of local initiatives;

R13.3 In the case of ACIS deciding not to take over the current DEA information centre, to have the IC headquarters meet a series of criteria in terms of location and low-threshold access [ref: **C77**].

8.3 Human Resources

R14 It is recommended that a new training needs assessment be launched, in order to allow adequate programming of training activities for the remaining duration of OPTA [**ref: C8**]. Other recommendations in this context include:

R14.1 Involve HR departments and external contractors from each MA in the need assessment process. The final objective would be to develop project fiches for the remainder of the programme duration [ref: **C65**];

R14.2 Contract external assistance for public procurement, if needed, in order to accelerate the contracting process within projects already approved for financing [ref: **C27**];

R14.3 Find a solution for hiring and keeping competent contract/temporary staff. Initiate a regulatory amendment so that contract staff will not be assimilated in terms of hiring procedures with the formal permanent staff, instead being much faster and simpler. In order to avoid abuse, contract staff should not be kept more than 2 years and should be limited to a maximum number of available contract positions [ref: **C63**].

R15 It is recommended that staff efficiency be improved by professional training, including:

R15.1 Public procurement training for OPTA MA and all OPTA beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries [ref: **C54**];

R15.2 Evaluation training for staff working within the evaluation units, as well as other MAs, IBs and ministry staff using evaluation results, involving [ref: **C57**]:

- advanced training sessions with core-evaluation staff, based on intensive techniques,
- expansion of the eligibility for training beyond core-evaluation staff from MAs/IBs and even outside these structures (ministry staff involved in decision making such as top advisors for the political management etc.) and
- amendment, as required, of the FDI;

R15.3 Niche training for small groups, highly specialised, with horizontal character [ref: **C8**];

R15.4 Training-of-Trainers sessions for SMIS coordinators [ref: **C69**].

R16 It is recommended that MC members be trained in specialised fields related to SI implementation. The DTA might provide more resources to MC members, in order to keep them more informed about OPTA development. This may be done by team-building exercises to reduce the formal walls between external and internal MC members, providing special access to the OPTA website intranet, and contracting TA to support the MC beyond organising of its half-year meetings [ref: **C29**].

R17 It is recommended to diversify training tools, giving more importance to international experience exchange activities, using study visits, personal coaching and internships. This will require amendment of the Applicant's Guide [ref: **C8**].

R18 It is recommended that training and information sessions be organised for mass-media representatives on SI topics, including [ref: **C44**]:

- the process of European funds allocation, commitment, disbursement and reimbursement;
- monitoring and evaluation indicators;
- frequent mistakes and troubleshooting;
- coordination of SI with national policies.
- Eligible activities/expenditure related to specific communication/information training need to be clarified in order to allow flexible interactive sessions with mass-media.

8.4 Design & Implementation

R19 It is recommended that new categories of beneficiary are made eligible for OPTA financing:

- public stakeholders able to help improve the public procurement framework and process;
- public stakeholders that can help release state aid schemes;
- key local structures with decisional power in respect of growth pole coordination;
- key personnel, currently outside MAs and IBs, but critical for managing public procurement or accounting related to SI, in respect of the 75% staff bonus;
- local and county authorities able to help build a national information network on SI.

R19.1 Include as beneficiaries – under KAI 1.1 – the public authorities managing the public procurement horizontal theme (NARMPP, UCVPP) [ref: **C4**]. Two possibilities exist:

- Have NARMPP and UCVPP set institutional bureaus or task-forces that will deal exclusively with public procurement issues related to SI. Partially delegate management of these structures to ACIS. Allow the staff from these dedicated bureaus to be eligible under KAI 1.1 for the 75% staff incentive, provided ACIS is approving their monthly Activity Reports; or
- Accept NARMPP and UCVPP as eligible beneficiaries under KAI 1.1, allowing them to submit projects for TA aimed at increasing their capacity to provide horizontal support for public procurement issues related to SI implementation;

R19.2 Include support for local structures managing integrated development plans, such as IDAs [ref: **C49**], by expanding eligibility for OPTA support to IDAs and their members. The immediate instrument for this action would be a set of additional provisions to projects for pole coordinators, allowing a top-up on existing content that may be used for customized support provided to IDAs and IDA members. This means that pole coordinators should be able to cover small expenditure related to IDA staff training, studies, participation to relevant events (e.g. best practice sharing among all Growth Poles), as long as it is directly linked to the growth pole development agenda.

R19.3 Regarding the bonus of 75% to legal staff involved in the management of SI financed projects, clarify the differences between the potential beneficiaries under GD 595/2009 and OPTA's eligible beneficiaries. In order to implement this solution and avoid abuse, the following procedure should be generalised as good practice [ref: **C51**]:

- MA and IB Directors identify legal staff outside their structures that have a critical role in the implementation of IS funded projects (i.e. managing the contracting phase with the beneficiaries);
- MA and IB Directors provide ACIS/SCD with a well-documented and argued case for support in aligning the motivation of such critical staff;
- ACIS requests the NCC to delegate the identified staff to the respective MA or IB. The rules and conditions for such delegation should be strict and all MA and IBs should be capped in terms of how much delegated staff they can receive (need and budget based approval).

An alternative and more efficient solution to expanding the OPTA-financed bonus would be to ensure equivalent performance/project management bonuses from the national budget. Ideally, a national bonus should not only cover the legal staff supporting the management of SI, but also the staff outside the MA/IB that works on the implementation of SI-funded projects for the respective ministries, as beneficiaries.

R20 It is recommended that the IS issues, as soon as possible, an Implementation Manual, detailing all obligations on the part of beneficiaries, as well as the steps included in every phase of project implementation. The manual should clarify the respective roles of beneficiaries and the IS in managing public procurement procedures and provide templates for all documents beneficiaries must submit [ref: **C27**].

R21 It is recommended to develop monitoring criteria and/or launch regular thematic evaluations for OPTA interventions that are hard to quantify, in order to [ref: **C50, C56**]:

R21.1 enable better assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of OPTA support for Pole Coordinators [ref: **C50**];

R21.2 estimate progress in achieving the 'evaluation culture' [ref: **C56**]. It is advisable to design and implement, with OPTA support, an annual assessment concerning the development of the evaluation activity in Romania. The methodology may be based on an already existing study[104].

8.5 Regulatory Framework

R22 It is recommended that the efficiency of project approval procedures in use by MoPF and ACIS, as main OPTA beneficiary, be improved by:

- simplification of procedures, by adopting one of the following possible solutions [ref: **C28, C48**]:
  - Complete decentralisation of approvals and signatures from the State Secretary to the ACIS Director;
  - Delegation of at least the project idea approval from the State Secretary to the ACIS Director;
  - Allowing the ACIS Director to approve project ideas, if the projects are part of over-arching plans already approved by the State Secretary;
  - Introduction the 'tacit approval' procedure, so that if the *State Secretary* does not respond within a reasonable period of time, the request is considered approved. As a

[104] Assessment of the evaluation culture in Romania, *study developed within Phare RO 2003/005-551.03.03.04 Project, TA for programming. Authors: Hilary Curley & Eugen Perianu.*

second best, this procedure might be applied to the State Secretary's advisors, responsible for pre-screening requests.

- Limitation of procedural delays at all stages of OPTA project implementation [ref: **C28, C48**], by:
  - revising institutional procedures to shorten approval lags;
  - designating certain projects as priority projects, subject to fast track procedures;
  - simplifying payment procedures towards contractors and use risk assessment to decide how much additional justification and reporting is required from each contractor;
  - improving informal communication among OPTA stakeholders in order to increase the speed of formal approval.

R23 It is recommended that legal aspects regarding the liability of public servants in case of irregularities be clarified. The DTA is advised to engage with the AA and the CPA to clarify the staff liability of staff for irregularities and the procedure for recovering repayment in the case of confirmed, malicious irregularities, so as to increase predictability. This implies a clear definition of irregularities, a clear distinction between non-intentional and malicious irregularities and a continuously updated record of irregularities, subject to periodic, independent review by the responsible Irregularity Reporting Officer [ref: **C25**].

R24 It is recommended that ACIS allows as soon as possible staff promotion, especially for young entrants in the MoPF, even if, temporarily, employment will paid more, due to the crisis. Even if unaccompanied by higher salaries, promotions may serve the purpose of enhancing morale and carry a measure of reassurance that adequate compensation will be paid once the current economic crisis is over. [ref: **C24**].

Annexes

Annex 1 – Contracted Projects

No	Contracted projects	KAI	Eligible Value EUR	EU Contribution	Contract	Contract value (excluding VAT)	Payments by 31 Dec 2009	Payments 1 Jan – 28 Apr 2010	Total payments
1	Technical Assistance Facility	KAI 1.1	6.321.942	5.057.554	TAF Management	665.758	68.232	0	68.232
2	Study to identify the priority reform directions for the Cohesion Policy post 2013 from Romania's perspective	KAI 1.1	32.656	26.125	Study to identify the priority reform directions for the Cohesion Policy post 2013 from Romania's perspective	29.618	7.096	16.254	23.351
3	Improving the system of indicators used in NSRF and OPs monitoring and evaluation	KAI 1.1	490.791	392.633	Improving the system of indicators used in NSRF and OPs monitoring and evaluation	482.378	0	0	0
4	Support for CPA staff to improve efficiency in SI implementation by encouraging the experience exchange	KAI 1.1	375.312	300.250			0	0	0
5	Support for partial financing of personnel expenditure of the Ministry of Public Finance for the personnel involved in SI coordination, management and control	KAI 1.1	1.661.460	1.661.460	Without subsequent public procurement contract		322.466	0	322.466
6	Support for coordinating the implementation of the Integrated Plan for the development of the Brasov Growth Pole	KAI 1.1	568.895	455.116	Supply, installation and maintenance of office accessories, small office items, stationary and other paper items	11.132	0	170.669	170.669
					Supply, installation and maintenance of printers and connected items	1.814			

					Supply, installation and maintenance of computers	316			
					Supply, installation and maintenance of parts and accessories for photocopiers, memory media	12.637			
					Supply and installation of equipments and software licenses	8.656			
					Acquisition of mobile phones	182			
					Acquisition of inventory items (stamps)	23			
7	Support for coordinating the implementation of the Integrated Plan for the development of the Iasi Growth Pole	KAI 1.1	560.425	448.340	Acquisition of auto fuels	23.820	0	176.509	176.509
					Acquisition of mobile phones	181			
					Acquisition of fax machine	190			
					Acquisition photo camera	461			
					Acquisition of furniture items	1.663			
					Acquisition of chairs for visitors	212			
					Acquisition of adjustable chair	133			
					Space rental for daily activities of the pole coordinator	53.258			
8	Support for coordinating the implementation of the Integrated Plan for the development of the Ploiesti Growth Pole	KAI 1.1	764.649	611.719	Space rental for daily activities of the pole coordinator	52.054	0	229.395	229.395
					Supply contract (desks, shelves, cabinets, meeting table)	3.529			
					Supply contract (directorial chair, desk chairs, chairs for meeting table	497			
	TOTAL KAI 1.1		**10.776.130**	**8.953.197**		**1.348.514**	**397.795**	592.826	990.621
9	Developing the evaluation capacity of he MAs and ACIS evaluation units	KAI 1.2	653.220	522.576	Organisation of Evaluation Working Group, 19 June 2009	742	0	0	0
10	Evaluation for 2009-2010 period	KAI 1.2	560.905	448.724	Evaluation for 2009-2010 period	436.455	0	0	0

11	Developing the methodological framework for cost-benefit analysis	KAI 1.2	1.191.923	953.538	Withdrawn in 2010. To be re-launched	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL KAI 1.2		**2.406.048**	**1.924.838**		**437.197**	**0**	**0**	**0**
12	Continuous training in Structural and Cohesion Funds management in Romania	KAI 1.3	2.605.064	2.084.051	Continuous training for staff involved in the management of the Structural and Cohesion Funds	1.105.774	74.177	0	74.177
					Continuous training in SCF coordination and monitoring, as well as in training management activities in these fields	623.309			
					Space rental for different meetings, direct purchases	12.896	0	0	0
	TOTAL KAI 1.3		**2.605.064**	**2.084.051**		**1.741.979**	**74.177**	**0**	**74.177**
13	Support for ACIS functioning, including for OPTA MA	KAI 1.4	2.956.863	2.365.490	Support for ACIS functioning, including for OPTA MA	599.472	161.560	73.912	235.473
					Space rental for different meetings + promotional items for MC – direct purchases	15.541			
					Consumables for ACIS	24.359			
14	Development of CPA capacity for an efficient management of the SCF	KAI 1.4	2.076.789	1.661.575	Consultancy for developing CPA capacity for an efficient management of the SI	1.051.951	11.048	2.291	13.339
					Equipments acquisition for the good functioning of CPA	137.263			
15	Support for CPA functioning for on-the-spot verification process	KAI 1.4	833.691	666.953		0	0	0	0
	TOTAL KAI 1.4		**5.867.343**	**4.694.018**		**1.828.585**	**172.608**	**76.204**	**248.811**
16	Development of an efficient and professional community of SMIS-NSRF users	KAI 2.3	1.689.309	1.351.447	Development of an efficient and professional community of SMIS-NSRF users	1.593.781	0	0	0
	TOTAL KAI 2.3		**1.689.309**	**1.351.447**		**1.593.781**	**0**	**0**	**0**
17	Support for SMIS functioning within OP CDA	KAI 2.4	21.604	17.283	Supply contract for working stations and LCD 19” monitors	11.623	0	13.004	13.004
					Supply contract for UPS	5.487			

18	Acquisition of IT&C equipment for SMIS functioning within RDA Bucharest Ilfov	KAI 2.4	8.445	6.756		0	0	0	0
	Without project contracted	KAI 2.4			Maintaining the functioning of the SMIS national digital network	19.663	0	0	0
	TOTAL KAI 2.4		**30.049**	**24.039**		**36.773**	**0**	**13.004**	**13.004**
19	Support for the implementation of the ACIS communication plan	KAI 3.1	4.286.326	3.429.061	Development and maintenance OPTA website, maintenance for fonduri-ue.ro website	7.927	60.626	0	60.626
					Europe day event organisation	1.171			
					Developing and production of media spots	63.569			
					Public opinion surveys regarding the information degree of the general public concerning the SI	35.904			
					Translation services – direct purchase	636			
					TA brochure	12.556			
	TOTAL KAI 3.1		**4.286.326**	**3.429.061**		**121.762**	**60.626**		**60.626**
	TOTAL		27.660.269	22.460.651		7.108.592	705.206	682.034	1.387.239

Annex 2 – OPTA IE Methodology

Introduction

This document is a partial result of the work done under Sub-activity 2.1.2 – Defining Methodology. The purpose of this document is therefore, as set in the IR, to define data collection and evaluation tools to be used in the OPTA IE. It also details the evaluation procedure, target groups and expected correlation between findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The preparation work for this document included the reviewing of official programming documents of OPTA: the Operational Program, the Framework Document for Implementing OPTA and the Applicants Guide for OPTA. It also included the reviewing of other key documents, such as the Procedures Manual, the minutes and mandates of Working Groups etc.

An interview with the OPTA MA was also organised as part of a wider need-assessment exercise. The meeting discussed the draft of the Problem-Objectives Diagrams at both program level and PA level. The minute of the meeting is attached in Annex 3 (in Romanian).

One important result of the meeting was the setting of a tentative date for the kick-off meeting for OPTA IE for January 27th 2010. The suggestion of the OPTA MA was to have the kick-off within the Coordination Committee for Technical Assistance meeting, organised by the OPTA MA.

Part I. Programme level evaluation

The evaluation at this level will follow the four main evaluation criteria set in the ToR: relevance, consistency, efficiency and effectiveness. To this purpose, the ToR suggested a number of key questions, which have been assumed by the Consultant in the IR.

I.1 Program relevance

The overall question that needs to be answer in terms of relevance is **to what extent the initial OPTA programming is still relevant**? In order to respond, the following information is required:

- Info on when and how was OPTA programmed. Info on who was involved and how programming was influenced by the internal/external context;
- Info on the conclusions of the ex-ante evaluation. Assessment on how the ex-ante evaluation was taken into account;
- Info on how the OPTA indicators have been chosen. Assessment of their capacity to reflect OPTA expected results;
- Info on context change that has/may have influence OPTA's relevance. Focus on the two additions already approved by ACSI and the EC – support for National Growth Poles and support for increasing wages with 75% for all public staff involved in implementing SI in Romania.

Instruments:

- Document review:
  - Key documents required: NSRF, OPTA, Framework-Document for Implementing OPTA, Procedures Manual (2nd part, Section A.1 Programming), Ex-ante evaluation of OPTA (all documents available / already obtained from OPTA MA)
- Diagrams:

- Problems & Objectives Diagrams elaborated at program level, based on the official documents' review (already drafted - see Annex 2)

❖ Interviews:

- Interview with OPTA Managing Authority – Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI / purpose: overall understanding of the OPTA MA perspective on the relevance of the programme / discussion based on the draft Problems & Objectives Diagrams (1st interview already implemented with DTA Director in December 2009)
- Interview with the Strategies Service within DTA – interview with the internal staff responsible for programming (3 persons) / purpose: detailed understanding on the programming exercise and SS perspective on the relevance question(s) / timing: January 2010
- Interview with ACIS Director / purpose: overall understanding of the perspective of ACSI on the role/expected results of OPTA / timing: January 2010

❖ Focus group:

- Focus group with ACIS staff, Consultant's experts, external experts / purpose: debate on key findings related to relevance / timing: March 2010

❖ In-depth analysis

- Structured and detailed presentation of the context change / purpose: preparation of a textbox on context-change & relevance of OPTA programming / timing: March 2010

❖ Indicator analysis

- Review of monitoring/performance indicators for OPTA / purpose: assessment of relevance for the general OPTA performance meant to support coordination and implementation of SI / timing: February 2010

I.2 Program consistency and coherence

The second key question at OPTA level is **to what extent the consistency and coherence of OPTA is ensured?** The envisaged information that may generate valid findings for answering this question is the following:

❖ Info on the mandate of OPTA in providing technical assistance. Info on the mandate of all TA components of all the other OPs. Assessment of the degree of complementarity or overlapping in terms of mandate.

❖ Info on the practical implementation to-date of OPTA support in terms of technical assistance. Info on the practical implementation to-date of all TA components of all the other OPs. Assessment of the degree of complementarity or overlapping in terms of practical implementation.

❖ Info on the coordination mechanisms in place – mandate and implementation to-date. Assessment of the functionality of the existing coordination mechanisms.

❖ Info on the coherence of OPTA in terms of implementation with the Cohesion Policy and NSRF objectives

Instruments:

❖ Document review:

- Key documents required: NSRF, OPTA, Framework-Document for Implementing OPTA, Procedures Manual (1st part, Section II.3 Committees), mandate and

proceeding history for all coordination working groups related to OPTA's coordination with other OPs, proceedings of Monitoring Committee meetings (all documents available / already obtained from OPTA MA), SOP IEC, SOP Transport, SOP Environment, SOP HRD, SOP ACD, ROP, OPs Territorial Cooperation (OP, F-DI, Ex-ante evaluations, Annual Implementation Report 2008 for each OP) (all documents available)

- Interviews:
  - Interview with OPTA Managing Authority – Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI / purpose: overall understanding of the coordination mechanisms in terms of technical assistance, including the implementation of the Coordination Committee for Technical Assistance / timing: February 2010
  - Interviews (7) with the staff responsible with TA for each OP / purpose: detailed understanding on the practical implementation of AT for each OP / timing: February 2010
  - Interview with ACIS Director / purpose: overall understanding of the perspective of ACSI on the way technical assistance is expected to be implemented at NSRF level / timing: January 2010
- Focus group:
  - Focus group with ACIS staff, Consultant's experts, external experts / purpose: debate on key findings related to coordination among OPTA and TA from other OPs / timing: March 2010
- Indicator analysis:
  - Review of monitoring/performance indicators for the TA components of all other OP/ purpose: assessment of congruence of TA indicators / timing: February 2010

I.3 Program efficiency

The third key question at program level is **how efficiently is OPTA being implemented?** The required information needed to articulate a documented answer is the following:

- Info on the institutional structure behind OPTA.
- Info on the management / implementation system of OPTA.
- Info on the staff adequacy, motivation & skill level.
- Info on the internal procedures of OPTA.
- Info on monitoring and coordination of resources for OPTA's implementation.

Instruments:

- Document review:
  - Key documents required: NSRF, OPTA, Framework-Document for Implementing OPTA, Procedures Manual, Ex-ante evaluation of OPTA, proceedings of Monitoring Committee meetings (all documents available / already obtained from OPTA MA)
- Diagrams:
  - Problems & Objectives Diagrams elaborated at program level, based on the official documents' review (already drafted - see Annex 2)
  - Decisions Diagrams for the critical implementation processes

- Interviews:
  - Interview with OPTA Managing Authority – Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI / purpose: overall understanding of the OPTA MA use of resources (human / material / financial), implementation system & decision making process / discussion starting from the draft Problems & Objectives Diagrams (1st interview already implemented with DTA Director in December 2009)
  - Interview with the Strategies Service within DTA / purpose: detailed understanding on how OPTA resources (human / material / financial) are used, including work procedures, work burden, work conditions, staff motivation within the SS / timing: January 2010
  - Interview with the Financial Management Service within DTA / purpose: detailed understanding on how OPTA resources (human / material / financial) are used, including work procedures, work burden, work conditions, staff motivation within the FMS / timing: February 2010
  - Interview with the Implementation Service within DTA / purpose: detailed understanding on how OPTA resources (human / material / financial) are used, including work procedures, work burden, work conditions, staff motivation within the IS / timing: February 2010
  - Interview with ACIS Director / purpose: overall understanding of the perspective of ACSI on the use of resources and implementation efficiency of OPTA / timing: January 2010
- Focus group:
  - Focus group with ACIS staff, Consultant's experts, external experts / purpose: qualitative debate on key findings related to OPTA overall program efficiency related to implementation procedures and mechanisms / timing: March 2010
- In-depth analysis
  - Structured and detailed presentation of HR situation in OPTA MA, as a determinant for program efficiency / purpose: preparation of a textbox on HR in OPTA implementation / timing: March 2010
- Indicator analysis
  - Quantitative review of OPTA activity – aiming at calculating ratios among Objectives met due to OPTA & Actual Activities & Actual Resource Expenditure / purpose: assessment of program efficiency in the use of resources vis-a-vis activities delivered and attainment of objectives / timing: February 2010

I.4 Program effectiveness

The forth and last key question at program level, given the early stage of OPTA implementation, is **to what extent does the achieved progress create the premises for reaching the planned objectives**? The following information is crucial in order to provide a documented answer:

- Info on the submitted / contracted / implemented projects at cut-off date;
- Info on the monitoring / performance indicators at cut-off date;
- Info on project pipeline – plans for future submission / perspectives;
- Info on the main factors that have prevented faster/better implementation.

Instruments:

- Document review:

- Key documents required: NSRF, OPTA, Framework-Document for Implementing OPTA, Procedures Manual, Ex-ante evaluation of OPTA, proceedings of Monitoring Committee meetings (all documents available / already obtained from OPTA MA)

❖ Diagrams:

- Problems & Objectives Diagrams elaborated at program level, based on the official documents' review (already drafted - see Annex 2)
- Effects Diagrams depicting the outputs of OPTA implementation, including direct results, short-term outcomes linked to these results and the longer term (direct and indirect) existent/potential impact;

❖ Interviews:

- Interview with OPTA Managing Authority – Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI / purpose: overall understanding of the OPTA MA use of resources (human / material / financial), implementation system & decision making process / discussion starting from the draft Problems & Objectives Diagrams (1st interview already implemented with DTA Director in December 2009 / 2nd interview might be needed in March 2010)
- Interview with the Strategies Service within DTA / purpose: detailed understanding on the main hindrances in reaching results at the level of SS / timing: January 2010
- Interview with the Financial Management Service within DTA / purpose: detailed understanding on the main hindrances in reaching results at the level of FMS / timing: February 2010
- Interview with the Implementation Service within DTA / purpose: detailed understanding on the main hindrances in reaching results at the level of IS / timing: February 2010
- Interview with ACIS Director / purpose: overall understanding of the perspective of ACSI on the extent to which OPTA has attained its planned objectives and on the perspective for the remaining of the financial perspective / timing: January 2010

❖ Focus group:

- Focus group with ACIS staff (represented both as beneficiary and as management), Consultant's experts, external experts / purpose: qualitative debate on OPTA achieved progress and its perspectives / timing: March 2010

❖ In-depth analysis

- Structured and detailed presentation of main hindrances preventing faster/better progress of OPTA implementation / purpose: preparation of a textbox on factors contributing to the difference between the planned and real performance in OPTA implementation / timing: March 2010

❖ Indicator analysis

- Quantitative review of OPTA progress – aiming at calculating % of objectives reached and perspectives for the future progress / timing: February 2010

Part II. Priority Axis evaluation

II.1 PA 1 Support for the structural instruments implementation and programmes coordination

II.1.1 KAI 1.1 Support to the management and implementation of the Structural Instruments

The interventions under this KAI aim at **ensuring common standards, instruments and information necessary for an efficient process of structural instruments administration and implementation**. Moreover, a special attention was considered necessary in the programming phase for **horizontal themes such as public procurement and state aid**, in order to ensure the implementation of EU and national regulations (OPTA p.44, Framework Document for Implementing OPTA p.7, Applicant Guide p.7). Moreover, this KAI was aimed at supporting the organising of surveys, elaboration of studies on the implementation of the SI, and publishing best practice guides. Organising events on key horizontal themes was also subject to the support of this KAI. Assistance for the National Growth Poles coordinators is another topic of KAI 1.1. Last but not least, this KAI is supporting the partial funding of the staff expenditure for the public institutions involved in coordination, management and control of SI. Therefore the evaluation will aim to find the following:

- Info on the progress of ensuring common standards, instruments and information;
- Info on the support provided for horizontal themes;
- Info on the progress of delivering support for the other planned interventions within the KAI, as mentioned above.

Instruments:

- Document review:
    - Key documents required: OPTA, Framework-Document for Implementing OPTA, Procedures Manual, Ex-ante evaluation of OPTA, proceedings of Monitoring Committee meetings (all documents available / already obtained from OPTA MA)
- Diagrams:
    - Problems & Objectives Diagrams elaborated at PA 1 level, based on the official documents' review (already drafted - see Annex 2)
- Interviews:
    - Interview with OPTA Managing Authority – Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI / purpose: status of the projects within KAI 1.1 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with eligible beneficiaries / timing: 1st half of February 2010
    - Interviews with all eligible beneficiaries (at least one interview per each of the [category of] beneficiaries / at least three interviews with eligible beneficiaries that have not applied yet for support) / purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / timing: 2nd half of February 2010
        - ACSI Director/Management
        - ACSI, Department for Technical Assistance (as eligible beneficiary)
        - ACSI, Department for Analysis and Programming
        - ACSI, Department for System Coordination

- ACSI, Monitoring Department
- ACSI, Evaluation Central Unit
- Certification and Payment Authority
- Audit Authority
- at least one of the MAs for other OPs than OPTA
- at least one of the IBs within other OPs
- at least one RDA responsible with the coordination of a National Growth Pole
- at least one of the public institutions receiving partial funding for supplementing staff expenditure related to SI coordination & implementation.

  - Interview with at least one contractor for the implemented projects (or on-going) / purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation / timing: 2nd half of February 2010

- Focus group:

  - Focus group with RDA representatives, MA representatives, consultant's experts / purpose: debate on the implementation, needs and objectives of assistance for supporting the National Growth Poles coordination ACIS / timing: March 2010

- In-depth analysis

  - Structured and detailed presentation of the OPTA's role in ensuring common standards / purpose: understanding challenges and implementation progress / timing: March 2010

II.1.2 KAI 1.2 Evaluation

This KAI aims at **developing a common evaluation culture in the system of managing SI** by training and networking the staff responsible with evaluation in the institutions involved, as well as by continuously improving evaluation reports in a transparent way (by publishing). Moreover, KAI 1.2 supports the **evaluation process of OPTA, NSRF and NDP interventions** (OPTA p.45, Framework Document for Implementing OPTA p.13-14, Applicant Guide p.7-8). For the purpose of the OPTA Interim Evaluation, the following information will be sought:

- Info on the progress in reaching a common evaluation culture and on the instruments financed through OPTA in order to reach this objective;
- Info on the progress in supporting the evaluation process of OPTA, NSRF and NDP interventions.

Instruments:

- Document review:

  - Key documents required: OPTA, Framework-Document for Implementing OPTA, Procedures Manual, Ex-ante evaluation of OPTA, proceedings of Monitoring Committee meetings, proceedings of Evaluation Groups, OPTA Multiannual evaluation plan 2007-2013, OPTA Annual evaluation plan 2009, (all documents available / already obtained from OPTA MA)

- Diagrams:

  - Problems & Objectives Diagrams elaborated at PA 1 level, based on the official documents' review (already drafted - see Annex 2)

- Interviews:

- Interview with OPTA Managing Authority – Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI / purpose: status of the projects within KAI 1.2 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with the Evaluation Central Unit, as single beneficiary of this KAI / timing: 1st half of February 2010
- Interview with the single eligible beneficiary – Evaluation Central Unit within ACSI / purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / timing: 2nd half of February 2010
- Interview with at least one contractor for the implemented projects (or on-going) / purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation / timing: 2nd half of February 2010
- Interviews with at least two members of the Evaluation Working Group outside ACSI / purpose: assessing the perception of members on the efficiency of the Working Group and the impact of OPTA support for its activities

❖ Focus group:

- Focus group with evaluation experts active in the field of SI (both from public and private sectors) / purpose: debate on the challenges and progress towards reaching a common and improved evaluation culture / timing: March 2010

❖ Indicator analysis

- Quantitative review of OPTA progress towards developing a common evaluation culture – analysis of available indicators & measurement tools / timing: 2nd half of February 2010

II.1.3 KAI 1.3 Horizontal training in the field of the management of programmes/project

The objective of this KAI is to support the Training Development and Coordination Unit (TDCU) within the Implementation Service / Technical Assistance Department of ACSI to provide **horizontal training for all staff involved in the management and implementation of SI.** This KAI will also help TDCU with planning activities (Training Plan), networking and coordination (Training Working Group) and specific training for the coordination level within ACSI. (OPTA pg.46, Framework Document for Implementing OPTA pg.18-19, Applicant's Guide pg.8). Therefore the following will be looked for:

❖ Info on the training activities supported by OPTA;

❖ Info on the impact of training activities assisted by OPTA on staff receiving such training;

❖ Info on the institutional progress of TDCU to act as a training planning / coordination hub, based on the support received from OPTA.

Instruments:

❖ Document review:

- Key documents required: OPTA, Framework-Document for Implementing OPTA, Procedures Manual, Ex-ante evaluation of OPTA, proceedings of Monitoring Committee meetings, proceedings of Training Working Groups (all documents available / already obtained from OPTA MA) / OPTA multiannual plan 2007-2013 / annual training plan 2009 – to be obtained

❖ Diagrams:

- Problems & Objectives Diagrams elaborated at PA 1 level, based on the official

documents' review (already drafted - see Annex 2)

- Interviews:
  - Interview with OPTA Managing Authority – Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI / purpose: status of the projects within KAI 1.3 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with the TDCU, CPA and AA as the only beneficiaries of this KAI / timing: 1st half of February 2010
  - Interview with the beneficiaries / purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / timing: 2nd half of February 2010
    - TDCU – Implementation Service / Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI (as beneficiary)
    - Certification and Payment Authority
    - Audit Authority
  - Interview with at least one contractor for the implemented projects (or on-going) / purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation, checking training evaluation reports / timing: 2nd half of February 2010
  - Interviews with at least two members of the Training Working Group outside ACSI / purpose: assessing the perception of members on the efficiency of the Working Group and the impact of OPTA support for its activities

II.1.4 KAI 1.4 Functioning of OPTA MA, ACIS, ACP and AA

This KAI is meant for assisting the **functioning of the coordination structures** which do not receive technical assistance support through any other operational programme. The only beneficiaries of this KAI are thus ACSI, the Certification and Payment Authority and the Audit Authority, which are receiving support for contractual staff hiring and covering of eligible administrative expenditure. Thus, KAI 1.4 provides assistance for the logistics implied by the reunions of the National Coordination Committee and for its subcommittees/groups. In addition, this KAI provides support for the implementation of OPTA, including **assistance for MA OPTA** in organising the Monitoring Committee and other coordination meetings/events. (OPTA p.47-48, Framework Document for Implementing OPTA p.23-24, Applicant Guide p.8). For evaluation purposes, the following is required:

- Info on the support provided for coordination structures (incl. the NCC and other coordination groups) – type of support given, cost and results;
- Info on the assistance given to OPTA MA – type of assistance provided and cost.

Instruments:

- Document review:
  - Key documents required: OPTA, Framework-Document for Implementing OPTA, Procedures Manual, Ex-ante evaluation of OPTA, proceedings of Monitoring Committee meetings, (all documents available / already obtained from OPTA MA) / proceedings of CNC and other coordination events – to be obtained from OPTA MA/ACSI, depending on their relevance for the use of OPTA support
- Interviews:
  - Interview with OPTA Managing Authority – Department of Technical Assistance

within ACSI / purpose: status of the projects within KAI 1.4 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with the ACSI, CPA and AA as the only beneficiaries of this KAI / timing: 1st half of February 2010

- Interview with the beneficiaries / purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / timing: 2nd half of February 2010
  - ACSI Director/ Management (as beneficiary)
  - MA OPTA / Department for Technical Assistance within ACSI (as beneficiary)
  - Certification and Payment Authority
  - Audit Authority
- Interview with at least one contractor for the implemented projects (or on-going) / purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation / timing: 2nd half of February 2010

❖ Focus group:

- Focus group with ACSI management representatives / purpose: debate on the challenges and progress towards coordinating interventions from SI / timing: March 2010

II.2 PA 2 Further development and support for the functioning of the Single Management Information System

II.2.1 KAI 2.1 Development and maintenance of the SMIS and its digital network

This KAI will provide assistance under the coordination of SMIS Central Unit for the **development of SMIS software**, including the elaboration/update of user & procedure guides etc. Moreover, under KAI 2.1, the **SMIS maintenance** is covered throughout the entire period of OPTA implementation. (OPTA p.51-52, Framework Document for Implementing OPTA p.29, Applicant Guide p.9). The evaluation design assumes the collection of the following:

❖ Info on the progress to-date in SMIS development;

❖ Info on the needs that OPTA has yet to tackle regarding the SMIS development and operationalization (short/medium/long term).

Instruments:

❖ Document review:

- Key documents required: OPTA, Framework-Document for Implementing OPTA, Procedures Manual, Ex-ante evaluation of OPTA, proceedings of Monitoring Committee meetings (all documents available / already obtained from OPTA MA) / multiannual SMIS development plan (if exists – to be obtained from OPTA MA)

❖ Diagrams:

- Problems & Objectives Diagrams elaborated at PA 2 level, based on the official documents' review (already drafted - see Annex 2)

❖ Interviews:

- Interview with OPTA Managing Authority – Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI / purpose: status of the projects within KAI 2.1 – progress to-date in

the view of the MA, understanding the relation with SMIS Central Unit – Department for System Coordination within ACSI / timing: 1st half of February 2010

- Interviews with the single eligible beneficiary - Department for System Coordination within ACSI / purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / timing: 1st half of February 2010
- Interview with the initial contractor for designing/implementing SMIS / purpose: understanding the system limitations and strong points / timing: 1st half of February 2010
- Interview with at least one contractor for the implemented projects (or on-going) / purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation / timing: 2nd half of February 2010

❖ Focus group:

- Focus group with SMIS users outside ACSI / purpose: understanding users' perspective on SMIS and its development plans / timing: 2nd half of February 2010

❖ In-depth analysis

- Structured and detailed presentation of the SMIS development plans / purpose: understanding challenges and implementation progress / timing: 1st half of March 2010

❖ Indicator analysis

- Quantitative review of SMIS development / purpose: tracking the no. of SMIS versions developed & no. of SMIS related applications / timing: 1st half of February 2010

II.2.2 KAI 2.2 Functioning of the SMIS Central Unit and its coordination network

This KAI aims at providing support for the **functioning of the SMIS Central Unit and its coordination network**, including **hiring/training specialised contractual staff**, as well ensuring the **functioning of a help-desk** facility within the SMIS Central Unit. (OPTA p.52, Framework Document for Implementing OPTA p.33, Applicant Guide p.9). Therefore, the following information is useful for the evaluation:

❖ Info on how suitable is the OPTA support for recruiting on a contractual basis and training the internal staff needed for managing the SMIS service – both for SMIS Central Unit and for its coordination network;

❖ Info on the functioning of a SMIS help-desk within the SMIS Central Unit and on how OPTA assisted it.

Instruments:

❖ Document review:

- Key documents required: OPTA, Framework-Document for Implementing OPTA, Procedures Manual, Ex-ante evaluation of OPTA, proceedings of Monitoring Committee meetings (all documents available / already obtained from OPTA MA) / multiannual SMIS development plan (if exists – to be obtained from OPTA MA)

❖ Diagrams:

- Problems & Objectives Diagrams elaborated at PA 2 level, based on the official documents' review (already drafted - see Annex 2)

❖ Interviews:

- Interview with OPTA Managing Authority – Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI / purpose: status of the projects within KAI 2.2 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with SMIS Central Unit – Department for System Coordination within ACSI / timing: 1st half of February 2010
- Interviews with the single eligible beneficiary - Department for System Coordination within ACSI / purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / timing: 1st half of February 2010
- Interview with at least one contractor for the implemented projects (or on-going) / purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation / timing: 2nd half of February 2010
- Interview with at least one contractual staff hired with OPTA support – ideally working on the help-desk / purpose: understanding the support provided by OPTA for hiring contractual staff / timing: 1st half of February 2010
- Interview with at least three SMIS users outside ACSI / purpose: assessing the use of the help-desk / timing: 2nd half of February 2010

❖ Indicator analysis

- Quantitative review of staff hiring and help-desk activity / purpose: tracking the no. of additional staff hired with OPTA support & no. of help-desk demands / timing: 1st half of February 2010.

II.2.3 KAI 2.3 Training of the users, distribution of procedural guides and user manuals, and information activities related to SMIS

This KAI has the goal of **training SMIS users** and providing them **manuals and other guides**. A series of **communication events** are also supported through KAI 2.3. (OPTA p.52-53, Framework Document for Implementing OPTA p.36-37, Applicant Guide p.10). The following information is needed for the evaluation:

❖ Info on the progress in SMIS users training – themes / levels / ToTs;

❖ Info on the elaboration and updating of user manuals / guides / other materials;

❖ Info on the organising of communication / information events organised with OPTA support.

Instruments:

❖ Document review:

- Key documents required: OPTA, Framework-Document for Implementing OPTA, Procedures Manual, Ex-ante evaluation of OPTA, proceedings of Monitoring Committee meetings (all documents available / already obtained from OPTA MA) / multiannual SMIS training plan (to be obtained from OPTA MA)

❖ Diagrams:

- Problems & Objectives Diagrams elaborated at PA 2 level, based on the official documents' review (already drafted - see Annex 2)

- Interviews:
  - Interview with OPTA Managing Authority – Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI / purpose: status of the projects within KAI 2.3 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with SMIS Central Unit – Department for System Coordination within ACSI / timing: 1st half of February 2010
  - Interviews with the single eligible beneficiary - Department for System Coordination within ACSI / purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / timing: 1st half of February 2010
  - Interview with at least one contractor for the implemented projects (or on-going) / purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation, checking the training evaluation feedback / timing: 2nd half of February 2010
  - Interview with at least five SMIS users outside ACSI benefiting from SMIS training under OPTA support / purpose: assessing the training funded through OPTA / timing: 2nd half of February 2010
- Indicator analysis
  - Quantitative review of training / purpose: tracking the no. training days & participants / timing: 1st half of February 2010

II.2.4 KAI 2.4 Supply of IT&C goods and services

This KAI aims at supporting the **procurement and implementation of ITC equipment and services needed for correct SMIS functioning**. (OPTA p.53-54, Framework Document for Implementing OPTA p.40-41, Applicant Guide p.10). The required information is the following:

- Info on the progress in the procurement of ITC equipment, licenses and services to-date;
- Info on the procurement plan for ensuring correct functioning of the SMIS for the remaining of the implementation period.

Instruments:

- Document review:
  - Key documents required: OPTA, Framework-Document for Implementing OPTA, Procedures Manual, Ex-ante evaluation of OPTA, proceedings of Monitoring Committee meetings (all documents available / already obtained from OPTA MA) / multiannual SMIS procurement plan (to be obtained from OPTA MA – if exists)
- Interviews:
  - Interview with OPTA Managing Authority – Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI / purpose: status of the projects within KAI 2.4 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with eligible beneficiaries / timing: 1st half of February 2010
  - Interviews with eligible beneficiaries (at least one interview per [category of] beneficiaries) / purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / timing: 1st half of February 2010

- Department for System Coordination within ACSI (as beneficiary)
- Certification and Payment Authority
- Audit Authority
- Management Authorities of other OPs than OPTA MA
- Intermediate Bodies within OPs

  - Interview with at least one contractor for the implemented projects (or on-going) / purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation, checking the training evaluation feedback / timing: 2nd half of February 2010

❖ Indicator analysis

  - Quantitative review of IT equipment / purpose: tracking the no. of SMIS structures created / updated in terms of hardware equipment and licenses // timing: 1st half of February 2010

II.3 PA 3 Dissemination of information and promotion of Structural Instruments

II.3.1 KAI 3.1 Dissemination of general information and publicity activities regarding the Structural Instruments allocated to Romania

The purpose of this KAI is to assist the **implementation of the Communication Action Plan** developed by ACSI. This includes launching **information campaigns** based on sociological research, conducting **opinion polls**, **advertising and dissemination**, organising **campaigns and events**, preparing **publication materials**, **assessing impact and analysing best ways for promotion and advertising**. (OPTA p.56, Framework Document for Implementing OPTA p.45, Applicant Guide p.11). Thus, the following would be necessary for conducting a proper evaluation:

❖ Info on the information/communication tools used so far regarding SI, based on OPTA support;

❖ Info on challenges faced in the implementation of the Communication Action Plan, and the way in which OPTA may respond through assistance.

Instruments:

❖ Document review:

  - Key documents required: OPTA, Framework-Document for Implementing OPTA, Procedures Manual, Ex-ante evaluation of OPTA, proceedings of Monitoring Committee meetings, proceedings of Communication Working Groups (all documents available / already obtained from OPTA MA) / National Communication Strategy for SI 2007-2013, Communication Action Plan 2007-2013, communication annual plan 2009 (if exists – to be obtained from OPTA MA)

❖ Diagrams:

  - Problems & Objectives Diagrams elaborated at PA 3 level, based on the official documents' review (already drafted - see Annex 2)

❖ Interviews:

  - Interview with OPTA Managing Authority – Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI / purpose: status of the projects within KAI 3.1 – progress to-date in

the view of the MA, understanding the relation with the Information Compartment – Department for System Coordination within ACSI, as single beneficiary of this KAI / timing: 1st half of February 2010

- Interview with the single eligible beneficiary – Information Compartment – Department for System Coordination within ACSI / purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / timing: 2nd half of February 2010
- Interview with at least one contractor for the implemented projects (or on-going) / purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation / timing: 2nd half of February 2010
- Interviews with at least two of the Communication Working Group from outside ACSI / purpose: assessing the perception of members on the efficiency of the Working Group and the impact of OPTA support for its activities
- Interviews with at least three independent PR/media experts in SI / purpose: assessing the perception of specialists on the current programming approach and results achieved to-date

❖ Indicator analysis

- Quantitative review of OPTA information/communication effort / purpose: tracking the no. of implemented studies, events, advertising materials, mass-media campaigns / timing: 2nd half of February 2010

II.3.2 KAI 3.2 Operation of the Structural Instruments Information Centre

This KAI aims at providing resources for **developing and running an Information Centre** on SI, including a dedicated website and a call centre, and a network of regional/local information points. (OPTA p.56-57, Framework Document for Implementing OPTA p.49, Applicant Guide p.12). The following information is required for a robust evaluation:

❖ Info on the progress in implementation of the Information Centre for the Structural Instruments;

❖ Info on alternatives for implementing the Information Centre in the near future.

Instruments:

❖ Document review:

- Key documents required: OPTA, Framework-Document for Implementing OPTA, Procedures Manual, Ex-ante evaluation of OPTA, proceedings of Monitoring Committee meetings, proceedings of Communication Working Groups (all documents available / already obtained from OPTA MA) / National Communication Strategy for SI 2007-2013, Communication Action Plan 2007-2013, communication annual plan 2009 (if exists – to be obtained from OPTA MA)

❖ Interviews:

- Interview with OPTA Managing Authority – Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI / purpose: status of the projects within KAI 3.2 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with the Information Compartment – Department for System Coordination within ACSI, as single beneficiary of this KAI / timing: 1st half of February 2010
- Interview with the single eligible beneficiary – Information Compartment –

Department for System Coordination within ACSI / purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / timing: 2nd half of February 2010

- Interview with ACSI director/management // purpose: understanding the strategic view of ACSI related to the Information Centre implementation / timing: 1st half of 2010
- Interview with at least one contractor for the implemented projects (or on-going) / purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation / timing: 2nd half of February 2010
- Interviews with at least two members of the Communication Working Group from outside ACSI / purpose: assessing the perception of members on the efficiency of the Working Group and the impact of OPTA support for its activities

❖ Focus group:

- Focus group with PR experts, multiplicators of European Information, media representatives responsible with European information / purpose: debate on the challenges towards the creation of an Information Centre for SI / timing: March 2010

❖ In-depth analysis

- Structured and detailed investigation of possible paths to follow regarding the Information Centre / purpose: analysis of best practices in other member states and in Romania, including the experience of the Information Centre of the EC Delegation in Romania and of the European Information Multiplicators Network (2000-2006). Main issues of the analysis: web-site - analysis of demographic and professional segmentation of users, physical centre – analysis of demographic and professional segmentation of visitors and their demand, intranet facility – analysis of usage and results, multilevel coordination - central/regional/local; NSRF level/MA level/IB level, institutional setting // timing: 1st half of March 2010.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 – Evaluation Questions as proposed in IR

I Programme level

Evaluation Question
A. To what extent is the initial OPTA programming still relevant?
1. Are the baseline analyses and the 2004-2007 indicators set still reflecting the intervention needs? What are the important changes that have occurred between the programming phase and what are the expected ones?
2. To what extent do the changes in context affect the OPTA content?
3. Are the operations under the Priority Axes and subsequent KAIs still relevant?
B. Is the consistency and coherence of the OPTA ensured?
4. To what extent is there complementarity between the other OPs technical assistance priority axes and the OPTA?
5. To what extent are the OPTA operations consistent with European and national developments in the field?
C. How efficiently is the OPTA being implemented?
6. Is the management/implementation system functional and does it operate efficiently? Is the established institutional structure adequate? Are the human resources well trained?
7. To what extent does the Monitoring Committee contribute to increasing the OPTA implementation efficiency?
D. To what extent does the achieved progress create the premises for reaching the OPTA objectives?
8. What is the actual implementation progress?
9. What is the difference between the planned and real performance?
10. What are the factors contributing to the difference between the planned and real performance?

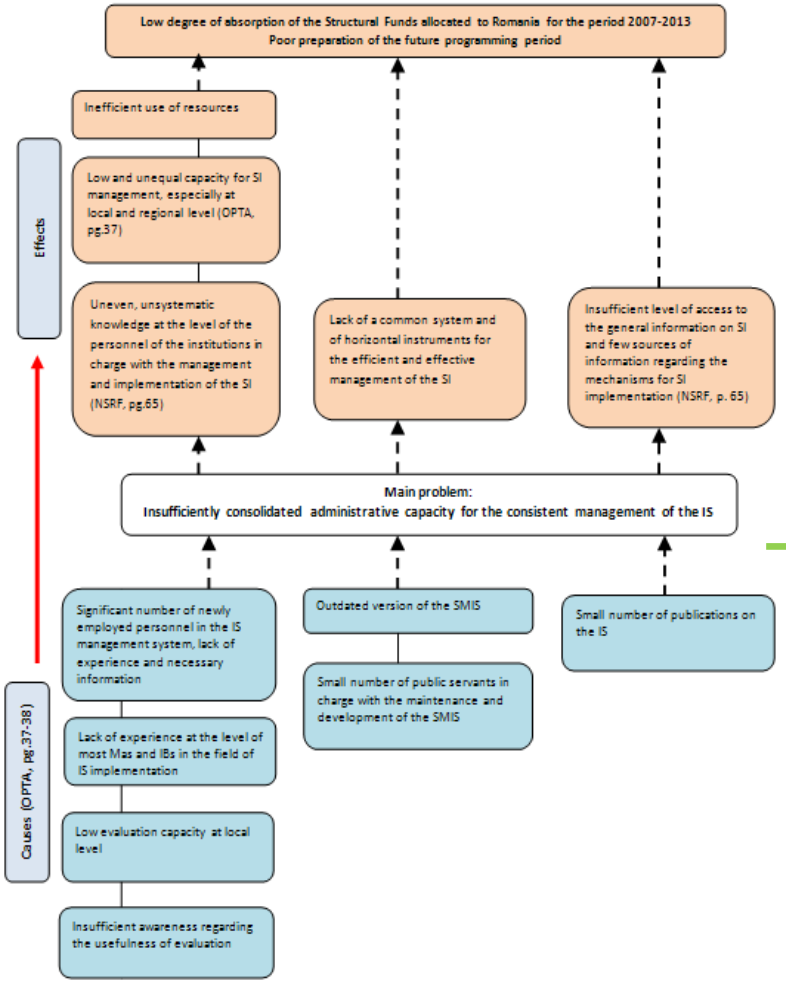
II PA/KAI level

Evaluation question
Priority Axis 1 – Support for the structural instruments implementation and programmes coordination
Key Area of Intervention 1.1
• What is the progress in ensuring common standards, instruments and information necessary for an efficient process of structural instruments administration and implementation?
• What is the modality to support the horizontal themes regarding public tenders and state aid?
Key Area of Intervention 1.2
• How can the development of a 'common evaluation culture' be supported within the administrative system for EU funds?
• How can the evaluation process related to the interventions in OP TA, NSRF and NDP be supported?
Key Area of Intervention 1.3
• How does the activity of UDCF unroll in order to coordinate and promote the formation process for the structural instruments administration?
Key Area of Intervention 1.4
• How does the support unroll for the functioning of coordination structures which are not being supported by technical assistance from the other operational programs (ACSI, ACP, and AA), as well as for the functioning of the structures involved in the administration process for OPTA?
Priority Axis 2 – Further development and support for the functioning of the Single Management Information System?
Key area of intervention 2.1
• Which is the progress in SMIS development? • Which are the long-term needs that OP TA has to tackle regarding the SMIS development and operationalisation?
Key area of intervention 2.2

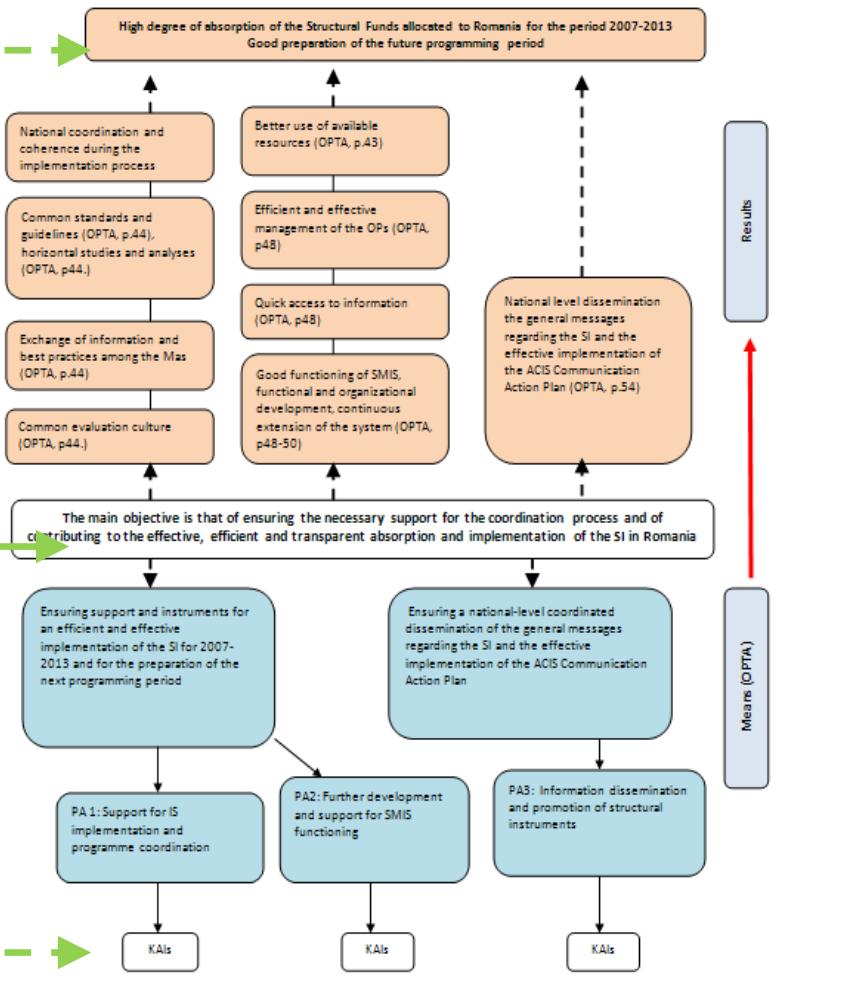
Evaluation question
• How suitable is at central and regional level the support in recruiting and maintaining the personnel with responsibilities in managing, administrating and insurance the necessary SMIS service?
• How does CU SMIS help-desk work?
Key area of intervention 2.3
• Which is the progress in SMIS users training?
• How to manage the communication/information process?
Key area of intervention 2.4.
• Which is the degree of endowment with equipment and IT&C licenses as well as the necessary services provided for the correct functioning of the SMIS?
Priority Axis 3 – Dissemination of information and promotion of Structural Instruments
Key area of intervention 3.1
• How are the general messages regarding structural instruments and the implementation of the ACSI Action Plan for communication according to National Communication Strategy for Structural Instruments disseminated at the national level?
Key area of intervention 3.2
• Which is the progress in implementation of the Information Centre for the Structural Instruments? • Are there any alternatives for attaining the objective of PA 3?

Annex 2 – Problems and Objectives Diagrams

OPTA – Problems diagram

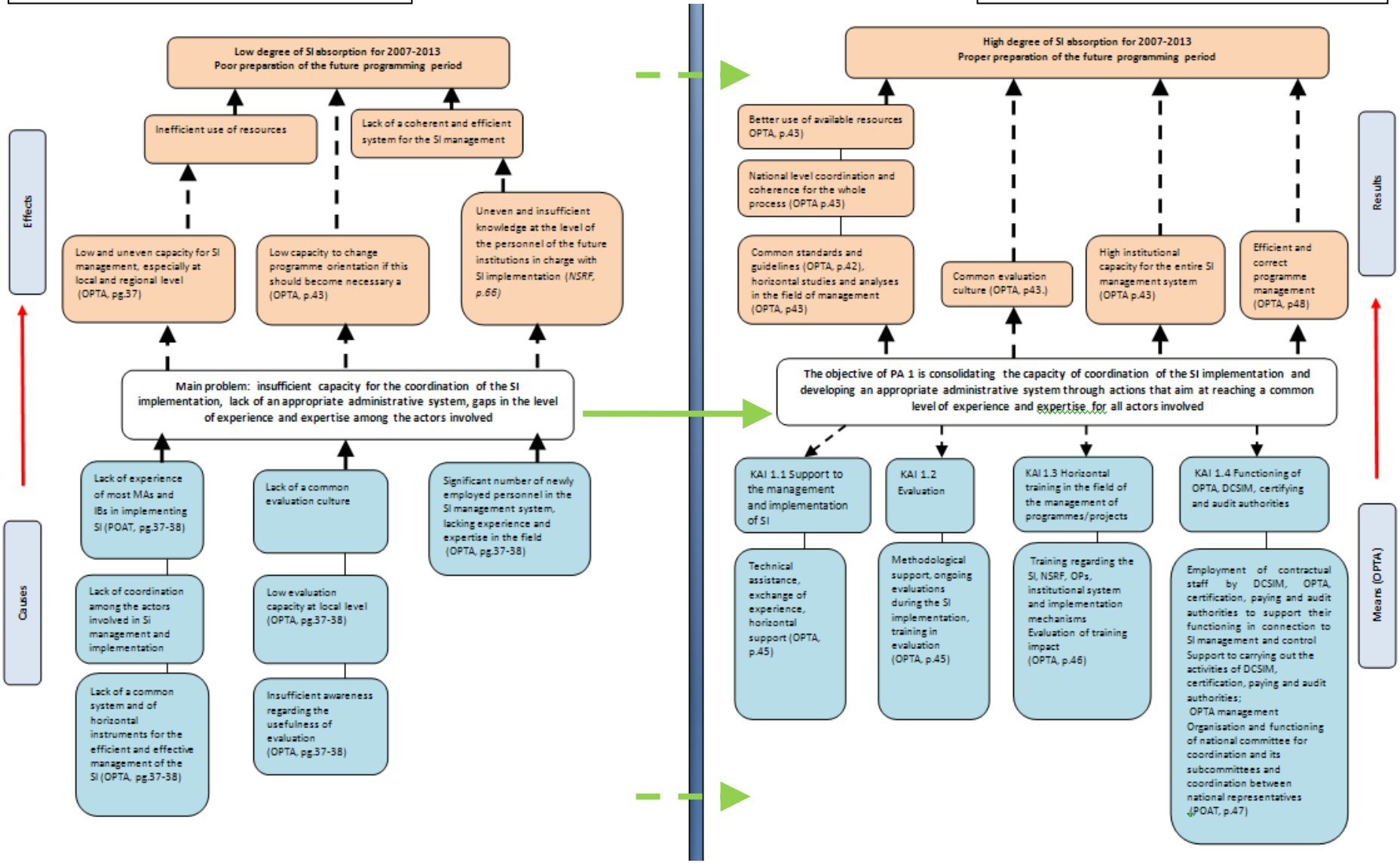


OPTA – Objectives diagram



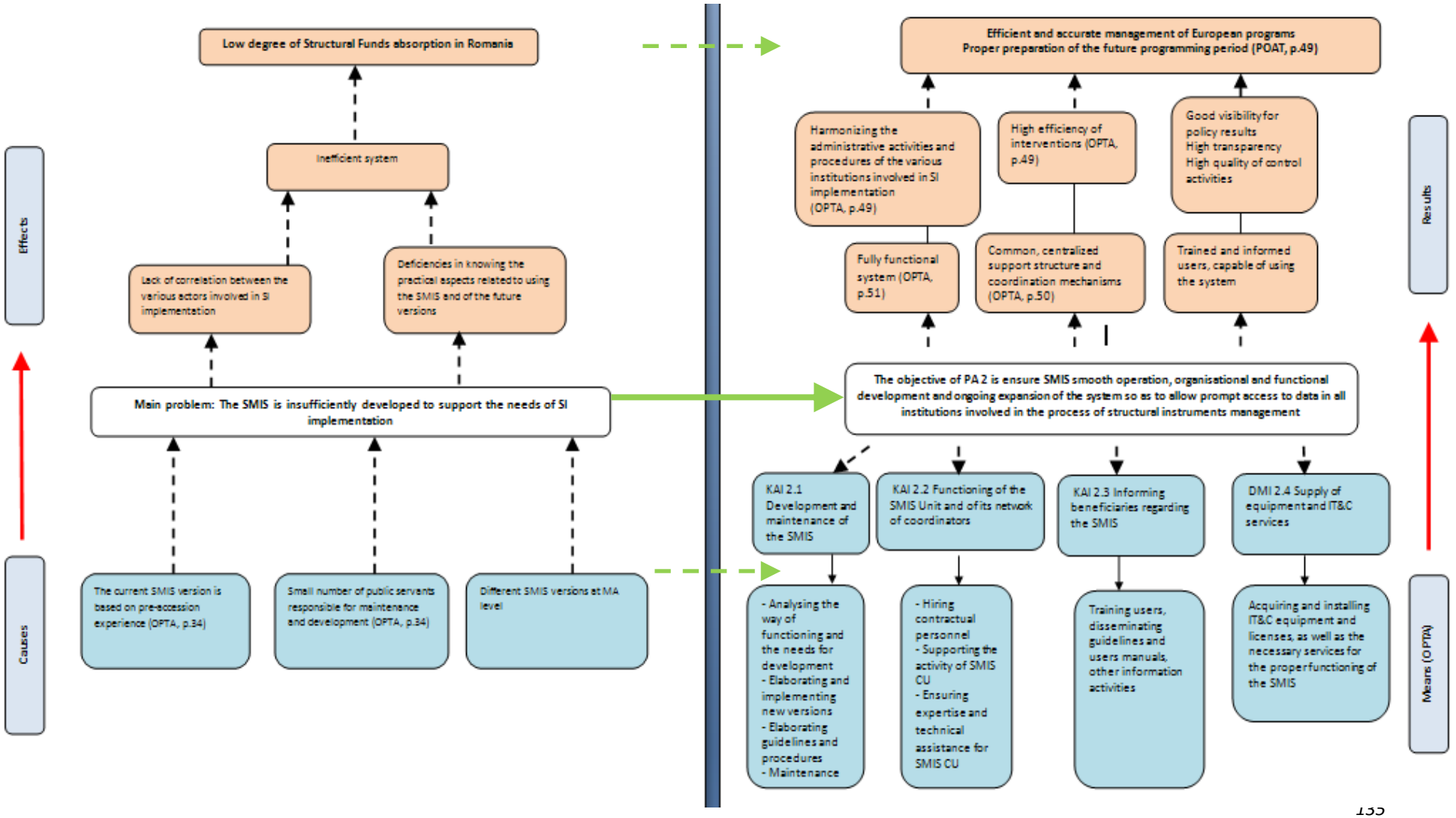
OPTA Axis 1 – Problems diagram

OPTA Axis 1 – Objectives diagram



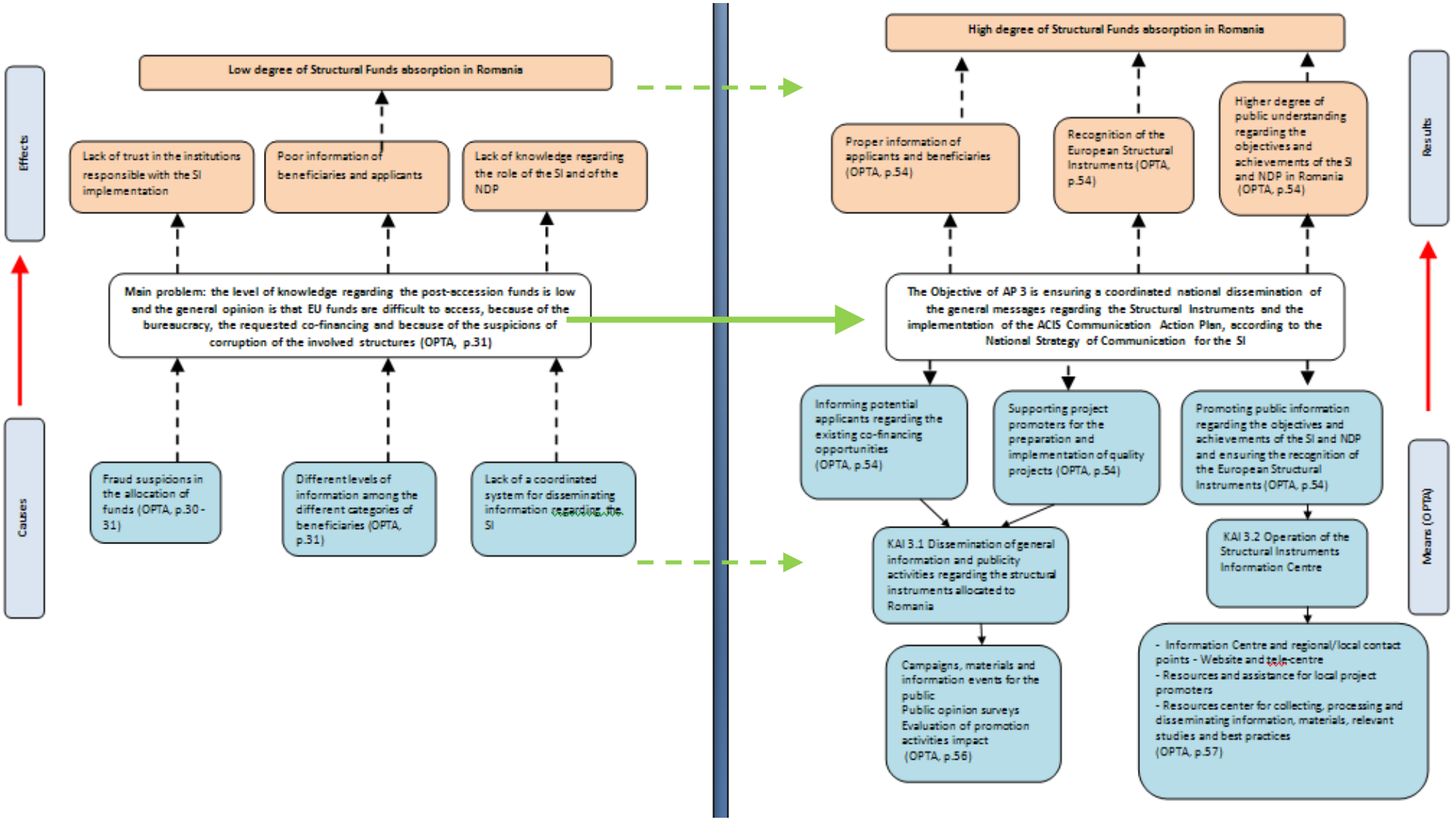
OPTA PA 2 Problems diagram

OPTA Axis 2 Objectives diagram



OPTA PA 3 – Problems diagram

OPTA Axis 3 – Objectives diagram



Annex 3 - Summary of interviews and focus groups

A. Summary of interviews

The following interviews will be further grouped in order to provide an efficient use of time both for the Consultant and for the interviewees.

I. Interviews with OPTA Managing Authority – Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI

1 - Purpose: overall understanding of the OPTA MA perspective on the relevance of the programme / discussion based on the draft Problems & Objectives Diagrams (1st interview already implemented with DTA Director in **December 2009**)

2 - Purpose: overall understanding of the OPTA MA use of resources (human / material / financial), implementation system & decision making process / discussion starting from the draft Problems & Objectives Diagrams (1st interview already implemented with DTA Director in **December 2009**)

3 - Purpose: overall understanding of the OPTA MA use of resources (human / material / financial), implementation system & decision making process / discussion starting from the draft Problems & Objectives Diagrams (1st interview already implemented with DTA Director in **December 2009** / 2nd interview might be needed in **March 2010**)

4 - Purpose: overall understanding of the coordination mechanisms in terms of technical assistance, including the implementation of the Coordination Committee for Technical Assistance / timing: **February 2010**

5 - Purpose: status of the projects within KAI 1.1 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with eligible beneficiaries / **timing: 1st half of February 2010**

6 - Purpose: status of the projects within KAI 1.2 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with the Evaluation Central Unit, as single beneficiary of this KAI / **timing: 1st half of February 2010**

7 - Purpose: status of the projects within KAI 1.3 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with the TDCU, CPA and AA as the only beneficiaries of this KAI / **timing: 1st half of February 2010**

8 - Purpose: status of the projects within KAI 1.4 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with the ACSI, CPA and AA as the only beneficiaries of this KAI / **timing: 1st half of February 2010**

9 - Purpose: status of the projects within KAI 2.1 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with SMIS Central Unit – Department for System Coordination within ACSI / **timing: 1st half of February 2010**

10 – Purpose: status of the projects within KAI 2.2 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with SMIS Central Unit – Department for System Coordination within ACSI / **timing**: **1st half of February 2010**

11 - Purpose: status of the projects within KAI 2.3 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with SMIS Central Unit – Department for System Coordination within ACSI / **timing: 1st half of February 2010**

12 - Purpose: status of the projects within KAI 2.4 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with eligible beneficiaries / **timing: 1st half of February 2010**

13 - Purpose: status of the projects within KAI 3.1 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with the Information Compartment – Department for System Coordination within ACSI, as single beneficiary of this KAI / **timing: 1st half of February 2010**

14 - Purpose: status of the projects within KAI 3.2 – progress to-date in the view of the MA, understanding the relation with the Information Compartment – Department for System Coordination within ACSI, as single beneficiary of this KAI / **timing: 1st half of February 2010**

II. Interview with the Strategies Service within DTA

1st interview with the internal staff responsible for programming (3 persons) / Purpose: detailed understanding on the programming exercise and SS perspective on the relevance question(s) / **timing: January 2010**

2nd Interview - Purpose: detailed understanding on how OPTA resources (human / material / financial) are used, including work procedures, work burden, work conditions, staff motivation within the SS / **timing: January 2010**

3rd interview - Purpose: detailed understanding on the main hindrances in reaching results at the level of SS / **timing: January 2010**

III. Interview with ACIS Director / Management

1 - Purpose: overall understanding of the perspective of ACSI on the role/expected results of OPTA / timing: **January 2010**

2 - Purpose: overall understanding of the perspective of ACSI on the way technical assistance is expected to be implemented at NSRF level / **timing: January 2010**

3 - Purpose: overall understanding of the perspective of ACSI on the use of resources and implementation efficiency of OPTA / **timing: January 2010**

4 - Purpose: overall understanding of the perspective of ACSI on the extent to which OPTA has attained its planned objectives and on the perspective for the remaining of the financial perspective / **timing: January 2010**

5 - Purpose: understanding the strategic view of ACSI related to the Information Centre implementation / **timing: 1st half of 2010**

IV. Interview with the Financial Management Service within DTA

1 - Purpose: detailed understanding on how OPTA resources (human / material / financial) are used, including work procedures, work burden, work conditions, staff motivation within the FMS / **timing: February 2010**

2 - Purpose: detailed understanding on the main hindrances in reaching results at the level of FMS / **timing: February 2010**

V. Interview with the Implementation Service within DTA

1 - Purpose: detailed understanding on how OPTA resources (human / material / financial) are used, including work procedures, work burden, work conditions, staff motivation within the IS / **timing: February 2010**

2 - Purpose: detailed understanding on the main hindrances in reaching results at the level of IS / timing: **February 2010**

VI. Interviews (7) with the staff responsible with TA for each OP - Purpose: detailed

understanding on the practical implementation of AT for each OP / timing: **February 2010**

VII. Interviews with eligible beneficiaries

1. Interviews with all **eligible beneficiaries (KAI 1.1 Support for the structural instruments implementation):** at least one interview per each of the [category of] beneficiaries / at least three interviews with eligible beneficiaries that have not applied yet for support) / purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / **timing: 2nd half of February 2010**

- ACSI Director/Management
- ACSI, Department for Technical Assistance (as eligible beneficiary)
- ACSI, Department for Analysis and Programming
- ACSI, Department for System Coordination
- ACSI, Monitoring Department
- ACSI, Evaluation Central Unit
- Certification and Payment Authority
- Audit Authority
- at least one of the MAs for other OPs than OPTA
- at least one of the IBs within other OPs
- at least one RDA responsible with the coordination of a National Growth Pole
- at least one of the public institutions receiving partial funding for supplementing staff expenditure related to SI coordination & implementation

2. Interview with the single eligible beneficiary (**KAI 1.2 Evaluation) – Evaluation Central Unit within ACSI** - Purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / **timing: 2nd half of February 2010**

3. Interview with the beneficiaries **KAI 1.3 Horizontal training for program / project management** - Purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / **timing: 2nd half of February 2010**

- TDCU – Implementation Service / Department of Technical Assistance within ACSI (as beneficiary)
- Certification and Payment Authority
- Audit Authority

4. Interview with the beneficiaries **KAI 1.4 Functioning of OPTA MA, ACSI, ACP and AA - P**urpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / timing: **2nd half of February 2010**

- ACSI Director/ Management (as beneficiary)
- MA OPTA / Department for Technical Assistance within ACSI (as beneficiary)
- Certification and Payment Authority
- Audit Authority

5. Interview with OPTA Managing Authority –Interviews with the single eligible beneficiary - Department for System Coordination within ACSI (KAI 2.1 Development and maintenance of SMIS and its digital network)- Purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / timing: 1st half of February 2010

6. Interviews with the single eligible beneficiary - Department for System Coordination within ACSI - Purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / timing: 1st half of February 2010

7. Interviews with the single eligible beneficiary - Department for System Coordination within ACSI (KAI 2.3 Training users, distributing procedure guidelines and user manuals, as well as information activities regarding SMIS) -

Purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / timing: 1st half of February 2010

8. Interviews with eligible beneficiaries KAI 2.4 ITC equipment and services procurement

At least one interview per [category of] beneficiaries) - Purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 / timing: 1st half of February 2010

- Department for System Coordination within ACSI (as beneficiary)
- Certification and Payment Authority
- Audit Authority
- Management Authorities of other OPs than OPTA MA
- Intermediate Bodies within OPs

9. Interview with the single eligible beneficiary – **Information Compartment – Department for System Coordination within ACSI** (KAI 3.1 Dissemination of general information and running the advertising activities related to the Structural Instruments allocated to Romania) - Purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 **/ timing: 2nd half of February 2010**

10. Interview with the single eligible beneficiary – **Information Compartment – Department for System Coordination within ACSI** (KAI 3.2 Functioning of the Information Centre for Structural Instruments) - Purpose: detailed understanding on the implementation of projects submitted (if the case) & on the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case) – see Eligible Beneficiary Interview Guide – Annex 4 **/ timing: 2nd half of February 2010**

VIII. Interview with contractors

1. Interview with at least one contractor for KAI 1.1 Support for the structural instruments implementation for the implemented projects (or on-going) - Purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation / **timing**: **2nd half of February 2010**

2. Interview with at least one contractor for **KAI 1.2 Evaluation** for the implemented projects (or on-going) - Purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation **/ timing: 2nd half of February 2010**

3. Interview with at least one contractor for **KAI 1.3 Horizontal training for program /**

project management for the implemented projects (or on-going) - Purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation, checking training evaluation reports / **timing: 2nd half of February 2010**

4. Interview with at least one contractor for **KAI 1.4 Functioning of OPTA MA, ACSI, ACP and AA** for the implemented projects (or on-going) - Purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation / **timing: 2nd half of February 2010**

5. Interview with **KAI 2.1 Development and maintenance of SMIS and its digital network** contractors

- Interview with **the initial contractor** for designing/implementing SMIS - Purpose: understanding the system limitations and strong points / **timing: 1st half of February 2010**
- Interview with **at least one contractor** for the implemented projects (or on-going) / purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation / **timing: 2nd half of February 2010**

6. Interview with at least one contractor for **KAI 2.2 Functioning of SMIS Central Unit and its coordination network** for the implemented projects (or on-going) - Purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation / **timing: 2nd half of February 2010**

7. Interview with at least one contractor for **KAI 2.3 KAI 2.3 Training users, distributing procedure guidelines and user manuals, as well as information activities regarding SMIS** for the implemented projects (or on-going) - purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation, checking the training evaluation feedback / **timing: 2nd half of February 2010**

8. Interview with at least one contractor for **KAI 2.4 ITC equipment and services procurement** for the implemented projects (or on-going) - Purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation, checking the training evaluation feedback / **timing: 2nd half of February 2010**

9. Interview with at least one contractor for **KAI 3.1 Dissemination of general information and running the advertising activities related to the Structural Instruments allocated to Romania** for the implemented projects (or on-going) / purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation / **timing: 2nd half of February 2010**

10. Interview with at least one contractor for **KAI 3.2 Functioning of the Information Centre for Structural Instruments** for the implemented projects (or on-going) - Purpose: understanding the potential influence of contractual arrangements on final implementation / timing: **2nd half of February 2010**

IX. Other interviews

1. Interviews with at least **two members of the Evaluation Working Group** outside ACSI - Purpose: assessing the perception of members on the efficiency of the Working Group and the impact of OPTA support for its activities
2. Interviews with at least **two members of the Training Working Group** outside ACSI - purpose: assessing the perception of members on the efficiency of the Working Group and the impact of OPTA support for its activities
3. Interview with at least **one contractual staff hired with OPTA support** – ideally working on the help-desk - purpose: understanding the support provided by OPTA for hiring contractual staff / **timing: 1st half of February 2010**

4. Interview with **at least three SMIS users outside ACSI** - purpose: assessing the use of the help-desk **/ timing: 2nd half of February 2010**
5. Interview with at **least five SMIS users outside ACSI** benefiting from SMIS training under OPTA support - purpose: assessing the training funded through OPTA **/ timing: 2nd half of February 2010**
6. Interviews with **at least two of the Communication Working Group from outside ACSI** - purpose: assessing the perception of members on the efficiency of the Working Group and the impact of OPTA support for its activities
7. Interviews with **at least two members of the Communication Working Group from outside ACSI** - purpose: assessing the perception of members on the efficiency of the Working Group and the impact of OPTA support for its activities
8. Interviews with **at least three independent PR/media experts in SI** - purpose: assessing the perception of specialists on the current programming approach and results achieved to-date.

B. Summary of focus-groups

1. **Focus group with SMIS users outside ACSI.** Purpose: understanding users' perspective on SMIS and its development plans. **Timing: 2nd half of February 2010**
2. **Focus group with ACIS staff, Consultant's experts, external experts Purposes:**

- debate on key findings related to relevance / timing:
- debate on key findings related to coordination among OPTA and TA from other OPs qualitative debate on key findings related to OPTA overall program efficiency related to implementation procedures and mechanisms

Timing March 2010.

3. **Focus group with ACIS staff (represented both as beneficiary and as management), Consultant's experts, external experts**. Purpose: qualitative debate on OPTA achieved progress and its perspectives. **Timing: March 2010**
4. **Focus group with RDA representatives, MA representatives, consultant's experts**. Purpose: debate on the implementation, needs and objectives of assistance for supporting the National Growth Poles coordination ACIS. **Timing: March 2010**
5. **Focus group with evaluation experts active in the field of SI (both from public and private sectors).** Purpose: debate on the challenges and progress towards reaching a common and improved evaluation culture. **Timing: March 2010**
6. **Focus group with ACSI management representatives.** Purpose: debate on the challenges and progress towards coordinating interventions from SI. **Timing: March 2010**
7. **Focus group with PR experts, multiplicators of European Information, media representatives responsible with European information.** Purpose: debate on the challenges towards the creation of an Information Centre for SI. **Timing: March 2010.**

Annex 3 – Current Organisational Chart of DTA

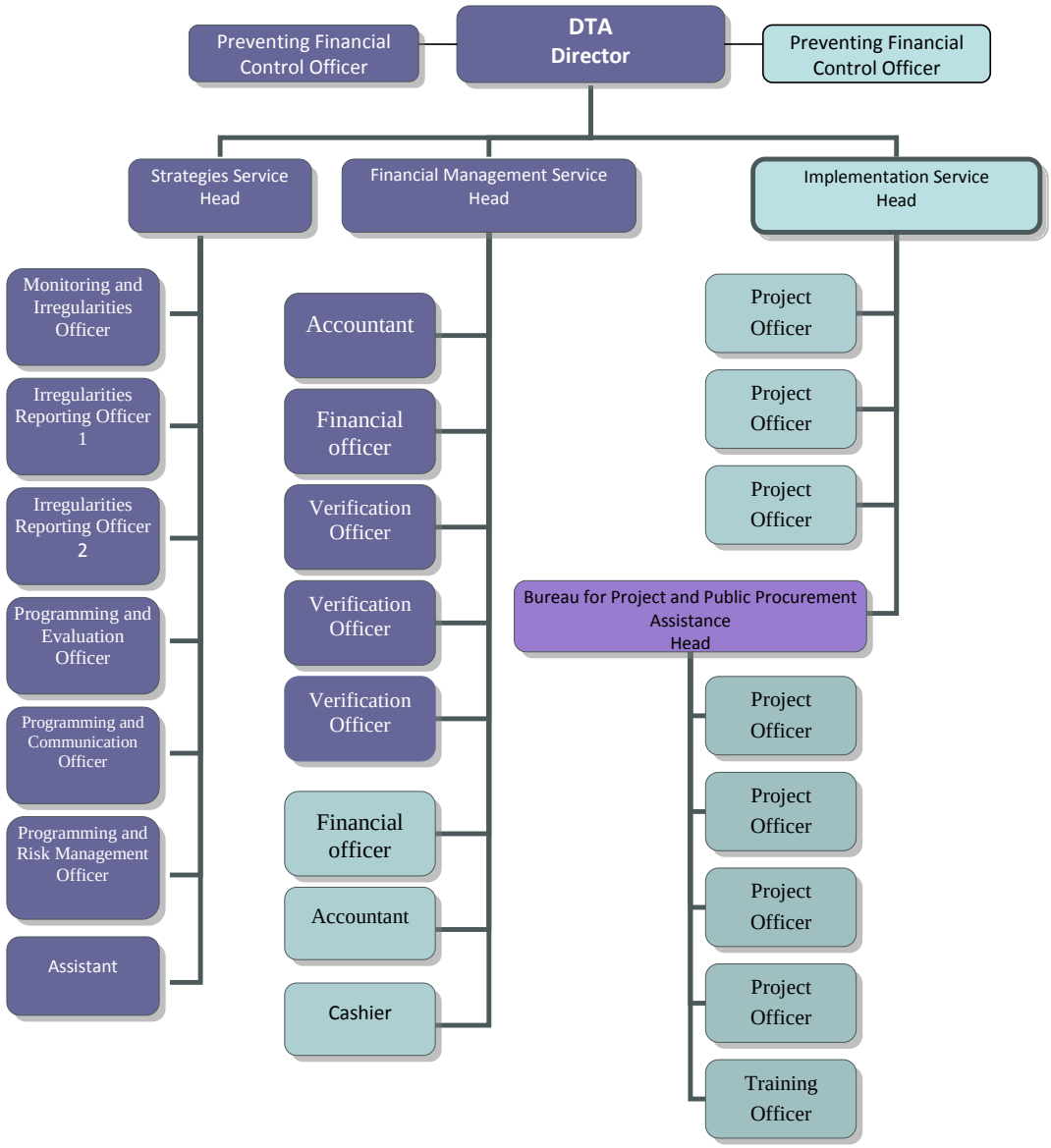
Ministerial Order 372/2007 approved the organisational structure of ACIS with subsequent amendments. According to this structure, the DTA is fulfilling the OPTA MA function. DTA's structure encompasses three services: Strategies Service (SS), Financial Management Service (FMS) and Implementation Service (IS).

As of 15 March 2010, the DTA had 30 positions and no vacancies. The allocation of positions is presented in the graphic below.

Compared to the prior version of the DTA structure (at 11 January 2010), the current structure brought three main changes:

- the two Preventing Financial Control Officers (PFCO) are not any more within the FMS;
- a Bureau was created within the IS for project and public procurement assistance (consisting of 6 positions, including one new position);
- within the IS, a new position was filled.

As DTA has attributions as MA but also as OPTA beneficiary, the figure below illustrates the division of positions for the two categories of tasks. Thus, in dark colour is represented the staff fulfilling MA tasks, and in light colour is the staff fulfilling beneficiary and ACIS support tasks. According to existing procedures, the new Bureau for project and public procurement assistance should have only one MA-task: the help-desk function for all OPTA beneficiaries, the rest of its tasks being related to supporting ACIS (and CPA) as beneficiary.



Annex 4 – Interviews and Focus Groups

Name	*Position*	*Date*
Balan, Daniela, Cristina Pătrăşcoiu	Head, Strategies Service, DTA	04/02/2010
Dorin, Dorian	Head, Implementation Service, DTA	05/02/2010
Molcuti, Mihaela	Head, Financial Management Service, DTA	05/02/2010
Chirita, Livia	Director, MA for OPTA	08/02/2010
Magdalina, Claudia	Head, Evaluation Central Unit	09/02/2010
Cimpoieru, Irina	Analysis and Programming Department	11/02/2010
Popescu, Antoaneta	Head, Monitoring Department	11/02/2010
Chirila, Andra	Head, System Coordination Department	16/02/2010
Ciobanu, Stefan	Director, ACIS	18/02/2010
Robu, Cristina	Auditor, Audit Authority (AA)	18/02/2010
Tarara, Lucica	Director, Certifying and Payment Authority	19/02/2010
Ioana, Daniela	Director, Audit Department for ESF, Phare and Other Funds, AA	26/02/2010
Nicula, Dan	Director, Regional Development Agency, Bucharest Ilfov	02/03/2010
Chirila, Andra	Head, System Coordination Department	05/03/2010
Chirila, Andra	Head, System Coordination Department	26/03/2010
Ionescu, Razvan	Expert, MA for OP DAC	09/03/2010
Macovei, Razvan	SMIS, MA for OP DAC	09/03/2010
Munteanu, Aura	Public Manager, MA for OP DAC	09/03/2010
Simion, Perla	Head, MA for OP DAC	09/03/2010
Ungureanu, Alina	Public Manager, MA for OP DAC	09/03/2010
Members	TA Working Group (Focus Group Session)	15/03/2010
TDCU Staff	Implementation Service	26/03/2010
SMIS CU Staff	System Coordination Directorate	26/03/2010
Platon, Gabriela	Programme Director, WYG International	22/03/2010
Videa, Simona	Managing Partner, Leader ATEC	22/03/2010
Comşa, Andreea	Director, East West Consulting	24/03/2010
Kubinski, Radu	Manager, Deloitte Consultanţă	25/03/2010
Boghianu, Marilena	Director, Regional Development Agency, South-West Oltenia	30/03/2010
Şerban, Carmen	Coordinator, Growth Pole Craiova	30/03/2010
Şendroiu, Alexandru	SMIS Coordinator, Regional Development Agency, South-West Oltenia	30/03/2010
Arghiropol, Mihai	Director, Media One	01/04/2010
Manea, Eugen	SMIS Coordinator, SOP IEC	01/04/2010
Vlad, Dragoş	SMIS Coordinator, SOP HRD	01/04/2010
Mihălcioiu, Andra	Communication WG, ROP	09/04/2010
Pielaru, Simona	Communication WG, SOP HRD	09/04/2010
Prunaru, Constantin	Director, Intrarom	12/04/2010
Boancă, Simona	Training WG, SOP IEC	12/04/2010
Tudorache, Mariana; Mitran, Venera	Training WG, SOP HRD	12/04/2010

Interview guide – Directorate for Technical Assistance (management level)

The objective of the meeting is to continue the discussion with the OPTA MA management from 14 December 2009, in order to obtain additional information and to systemize them according to the evaluation methodology.

According to the methodology, developed based on the ToR and the Inception Report, a new interview with the DTA management is proposed, in its OPTA MA and beneficiary role.

Evaluation Questions
A. To what extent is the OPTA programming still relevant?
1. Do the initial assessments and indicators established between 2004 and 2007 still reflect the intervention needs? What major changes have taken place since the initial programming and which are forecasted?
2. To what extent do the context changes impact the OPTA content?
3. Are the operations within the PAs and KAIs still relevant?
B. Are the consistency and coherence of OPTA ensured?
4. To what extent are the TA Pas in the OPs and OPTA complementarity?
5. To what extent are the OPTA operations consistent with national and European developments in this field?
C. How efficient is the OPAT implementation?
6. Is the management / implementation system functional and operating efficiently? Is the established institutional structure appropriate? Are the human resources adequately trained?
7. To what extent does the Monitoring Committee contribute to the enhancement of efficiency in the implementation of OPTA?
D. To what extent does the achieved progress ensure the prerequisites to meet OPTA objectives?
8.What is the real progress of the implementation?
9. Which is the difference between forecasted and real performance?
10. What are the factors contributing to the difference between the forecasted and real performance?

Interview Guide – Strategies Service

Objective:

- In-depth understanding of the OPTA resources use (human/material/financial), including in terms of procedures, tasks, work conditions, staff motivation;
- Underline the positive aspects (best practice) in the SS activity;
- In-depth understanding of the main hindrances at SS level.

Evaluation Questions – Strategies Service
A. SS tasks in OPTA architecture
• Are the tasks from the Procedures Manual clear and adequate to the needs? If no, please comment.
• From the first version of the Procedures Manual to the December version of the manual, there were any major changes regarding the SS tasks? If yes, please explain.
• There are any problems / deficiencies regarding the interaction between SS and other services and directorates implementing and managing the OPTA? If yes, please comment.
• What are the key inter and intra-institutional relations for SS activities?
B. SS working procedures
• Are the working procedures from the Manual clear and adequate to the needs? If no, please comment?
• From the first version of the Procedures Manual to the December version of the manual, there were any major changes regarding the SS working procedures? If yes, please explain.
• How are the changes of the procedures notified?
• How is the procedures compliance verified?
C. Human resources
• Compared to the Procedures Manual, how many persons are employed? • The staff established through the Procedures Manual is sufficient for fulfilling the SS tasks? • Are the job descriptions correlated to the Procedures Manual? • Is the level of training corresponding to the tasks from the job description? • How frequent are the job descriptions up-dated?
• What is the average work experience? • Since the SS was created, how many persons left and had to be replaced by new employments? • To what extent the staff migration created problems? • What kind of problems were created? (e.g. delays in fulfilling tasks, financial resources allocation for training new personnel)
• Was the SS activity and / or the level of motivation influenced by the budgetary restrictions, imposed by the financial crisis (the impossibility to hire new staff, temporary elimination of 75% wage increase, elimination of other financial incentives)? Please, detail.
• There are annual training plans at SS level? If yes: ○ Are the training plans observed? • What types of trainings are the SS staff attending? Is the staff benefiting from trainings relevant for their tasks? Yes, please detail / No • To what extent are the training sessions relevant for the job description and for current activity? • Is the staff benefiting from initial training? Yes / No
• On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent is the current HR situation influencing the programme implementation? (where 1 is to a very large extent and 5 is to a very little extent). Please comment.
D. SS activity
• What are the main factors disturbing the SS activity? (e.g. the lack of predictability, changes in vison /

Evaluation Questions – Strategies Service
requirements, tight dead-line, work overload, complexity of the tasks). Please comment.
• What was the context of OPTA programming?
• Did the SS benefit from consultancy for OPTA elaboration?
• Did the SS analyse and propose strategic changes for the OP, FDI and Applicant's Guide (compared to the official versions) including during the crisis period? If Yes, what were the changes and how were they finalised?
• What observations did the EC made regarding the OPTA progress?
• Did the SS develop and promote partnerships for OPTA? If Yes, what partnerships, with whom and what is the current status?
• What is the current status of the OPTA Communication Plan implementation? • What exactly did the SS do to implement the Communication Plan?
• How does the SS evaluate the Monitoring Committee activity?
• From the initial version of the Applicant's Guide, there where any major changes in the evaluation and selection criteria?
• Do you consider that the evaluation and selection criteria should: o Become more restrictive in order to obtain a higher quality? o Become less restrictive in order to attract a large number of projects? o Remain unchanged?
• Did the SS identify irregularities of funds use? If Yes, please comment
• Did the SS deploy activities for irregularities prevention? If yes, please detail.
• Did the SS initiate / promote legislative proposal in order to improve the OPTA implementation?
• Did the SS have difficulties in using the SMIS? If yes, please comment.
• Are the APs and KAIs operations still relevant?
• Is the coordination of activities within SS functional and efficient? • Is the institutional structure stable and adequate? (As compared to the planned one)
• Are there communication problems within SS? If Yes, please detail.
E. Material and financial resources
• Are the material resources (existing equipments) sufficient / adequate for the SS activity? If No, what are the additional needs?
• Are the financial resources (general Budget) sufficient for the SS activity? If No, what are the additional needs?

Interview Guide – Implementation Service

Objective:

- In-depth understanding of the OPTA resources use (human/material/financial), including in terms of procedures, tasks, work conditions, staff motivation;
- Underline the positive aspects (best practice) in the SI activity;
- In-depth understanding of the main hindrances at SI level
- In-depth understanding of the projects implementation status (if the case may be) or the reasons for not submitting projects (if the case may be) under KAI 1.3

Evaluation Questions – Implementation Service
A. SI tasks in OPTA architecture
• Are the tasks from the Procedures Manual clear and adequate to IS needs? If no, please comment.
• From the first version of the Procedures Manual to the December version of the manual, there were any major changes regarding the IS tasks? If yes, please explain.
• There are any problems / deficiencies regarding the interaction between IS and other services and directorates implementing and managing the OPTA? If yes, please comment.
• What are the key inter and intra-institutional relations for IS activities?
B. SI working procedures
• Are the working procedures from the Manual clear and adequate to the needs? If no, please comment?
• From the first version of the Procedures Manual to the December version of the manual, there were any major changes regarding the IS working procedures? If yes, please explain.
• How are the changes of the procedures notified?
• How is the procedures compliance verified?
C. Human resources
• Compared to the Procedures Manual, how many persons are employed? • The staff established through the Procedures Manual is sufficient for fulfilling the IS tasks? • Are the job descriptions correlated to the Procedures Manual? • Is the level of training corresponding to the tasks from the job description? • How frequent are the job descriptions up-dated?
• What is the average work experience? • Since the IS was created, how many persons left and had to be replaced by new employments? • To what extent the staff migration created problems? • What kind of problems were created? (e.g. delays in fulfilling tasks, financial resources allocation for training new personnel)
• Was the IS activity and / or the level of motivation influenced by the budgetary restrictions, imposed by the financial crisis (the impossibility to hire new staff, temporary elimination of 75% wage increase, elimination of other financial incentives)? Please, detail.
• There are annual training plans at IS level? If yes: ○ Are the training plans observed? • What types of trainings are the SI staff attending? Is the staff benefiting from trainings relevant for their tasks? Yes, please detail / No • To what extent are the training sessions relevant for the job description and for current activity? • Is the staff benefiting from initial training? Yes / No

• On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent is the current HR situation influencing the programme implementation? (where 1 is to a very large extent and 5 is to a very little extent). Please comment.
D. IS activity
• What are the main factors disturbing the IS activity? (e.g. the lack of predictability, changes in vision / requirements, tight dead-line, work overload, complexity of the tasks). Please comment.
• What were the IS activities to ensure the help-desk function for the OPTA beneficiaries?
• What problems were identified during the public procurement processes regarding OPTA finances projects for ACIS and CPA? Please detail.
• Were other problems identified during the implementation of the TA projects, at ACIS level (except for the public procurement)? If yes, please detail.
• Please comment the process of project proposal elaboration for ACIS and OPTA MA.
• Is the coordination of activities within IS functional and efficient? • Is the institutional structure stable and adequate? (As compared to the planned one)
• Are there communication problems within IS? If yes, please detail.
E. Material and financial resources
• Are the material resources (existing equipments) sufficient / adequate for the IS activity? If No, what are the additional needs?
• Are the financial resources (general Budget) sufficient for the IS activity? If no, what are the additional needs?

Interview Guide – Financial Management Service

Objective:

- In-depth understanding of the OPTA resources use (human/material/financial), including in terms of procedures, tasks, work conditions, staff motivation;
- Underline the positive aspects (best practice) in the FMS activity;
- In-depth understanding of the main hindrances at FMS level.

Evaluation Questions – Financial Management Service
A. FMS tasks in OPTA architecture
• Are the tasks from the Procedures Manual clear and adequate to the FMS needs? If no, please comment.
• From the first version of the Procedures Manual to the December version of the manual, there were any major changes regarding the FMS tasks? If yes, please explain.
• There are any problems / deficiencies regarding the interaction between FMS and other services and directorates implementing and managing the OPTA? If yes, please comment.
• What are the key inter and intra-institutional relations for FMS activities?
B. SMF working procedures
• Are the working procedures from the Manual clear and adequate to the needs? If no, please comment?
• From the first version of the Procedures Manual to the December version of the manual, there were any major changes regarding the FMS working procedures? If yes, please explain.
• How are the changes of the procedures notified?
• How is the procedures compliance verified?
C. Human resources
• Compared to the Procedures Manual, how many persons are employed? • The staff established through the Procedures Manual is sufficient for fulfilling the FMS tasks? • Are the job descriptions correlated to the Procedures Manual? • Is the level of training corresponding to the tasks from the job description? • How frequent are the job descriptions up-dated?
• What is the average work experience? • Since the was created, how many persons left and had to be replaced by new employments? • To what extent the staff migration created problems? • What kind of problems were created? (e.g. delays in fulfilling tasks, financial resources allocation for training new personnel)
• Was the FMS activity and / or the level of motivation influenced by the budgetary restrictions, imposed by the financial crisis (the impossibility to hire new staff, temporary elimination of 75% wage increase, elimination of other financial incentives)? Please, detail.
• There are annual training plans at FMS level? If yes: ○ Are the training plans observed? • What types of trainings are the FMS staff attending? Is the staff benefiting from trainings relevant for their tasks? Yes, please detail / No • To what extent are the training sessions relevant for the job description and for current activity? • Is the staff benefiting from initial training? Yes / No
• On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent is the current HR situation influencing the programme implementation? (where 1 is to a very large extent and 5 is to a very little extent). Please comment.
D. FMS activity
• What are the main factors disturbing the FMS activity? (e.g. the lack of predictability, changes in

Evaluation Questions – Financial Management Service
vision / requirements, tight dead-line, work overload, complexity of the tasks). Please comment.
• How are elaborated the OPTA financial forecasts? • To what extent the forecasts were fulfilled?
• How does SMF appreciate the quality of the reimbursement claims?
• To what extent were the expenses made by the beneficiaries correct?
• To what extent was the prevention financial control used and what were the results?
• What measures did FMS apply / intent to apply to speed-up the implementation of the approved projects?
• Did FMS encounter problems in using the SMIS? If yes, please detail.
• Is the coordination of activities within FMS functional and efficient? • Is the institutional structure stable and adequate? (As compared to the planned one)
• Are there communication problems within FMS? If yes, please detail.
E. Material and financial resources
• Are the material resources (existing equipments) sufficient / adequate for the FMS activity? If No, what are the additional needs?
• Are the financial resources (general Budget) sufficient for the FMS activity? If No, what are the additional needs?

Interview Guide – OPTA eligible beneficiaries

Objective: In-depth understanding of the projects implementation status and the reasons for not submitting other projects for OPAT financing

Evaluation Questions – Eligible Beneficiaries
A. Have you applied for support within OPTA?
• If yes, please move to section B.
• If no, please explain the reasons for which you have not applied: o OPTA not anymore relevant for your activity o Received support from other TA source (e.g. TA component of another OP) o You were not informed properly about your eligibility o You do not have the capacity to apply and/or it was too complicated to apply o Other reasons – please specify.
B. To what extent is the initial OPTA programming still relevant for you as a beneficiary?
B1- Are the baseline analyses and the 2004-2007 indicators for the operation you are eligible set still reflecting the support you need? B2 - What are the important changes that have occurred in your activity between the programming phase and what are the expected ones to occur? B3 - How is this going to affect the relevance of OPTA for your activity? B4 – What would you change in the programming of OPTA to make it more relevant for your activity?
C. Is the coherence of the OPTA ensured from your perspective as beneficiary?
C1 - To what extent can you receive support from other sources for the same activities you are eligible within OPTA? C2 – Have you already obtained such support from other sources?
D. How efficiently is the OPTA being implemented from your perspective as a beneficiary?
D1 – Has the MA proactively notified you about the availability of support for your activity, as eligible beneficiary? If so, please comment. D2 – Have you been assisted by the MA staff in preparing your application? If so, please comment. D3 – Do you find the evaluation of your application as being fair? Did you find the evaluation process transparent? D4 – Did your application involve public procurement? If so, did you receive support from the OPTA MA to facilitate public procurement procedures? Please comment. D5 – Did you receive support from OPTA MA during the project implementation? If so, please comment. D6 – Do you find the implementation procedures set by OPTA MA as being clear? D7 – How would you consider the staff in the OPTA MA that you have interacted with in terms of efficiency (1 – totally inefficient, 2 – inefficient, 3 – efficient, 4 – very efficient)? D8 – What would you change in the way OPTA MA is handling beneficiaries? D9 – Where you also a member of the Monitoring Committee of OPTA? If so, please comment on the contribution of the MC to the increase of OPTA efficiency.
E. To what extent does the progress achieved through the projects you applied/ implemented to-date within OPTA create the premises for reaching the OPTA objectives from your perspective?
E1 – How many projects have you applied/won/ implemented? What is the actual implementation progress of your projects? E2 – How is the implementation progress as compared to your initial goals/targets/objectives? E3 – Do you have a project pipeline and a planning for the rest of the OPTA implementation period? E4 - What are the factors that may influence your performance as a beneficiary within OPTA?

Interview Guide – SMIS users

Objective:

- Understanding the users perspective on SMIS – development, functioning, development perspectives
- Evaluation of the training fro SMIS users
- Evaluation of SMIS help-desk functioning
- Understanding the communication/information process from the central level to SMIS users
- Identification of the structure created at the local level and the needs in terms of hardware and software for SMIS functioning.

Evaluation Questions – SMIS users
1. What was the SMIS development in time? (number of users, allocated times, projects up-loaded, quality / quantity conformity).
2. What were the most frequent problems and difficulties encountered when using SMIS application? How have they been / will they be solved?
3. What are the recommendations for improving SMIS application, as perceived by the users and taking into account the further development of SMIS?
4. How many persons from your institution were trained – topics, levels, number of days / participants? 5. Is there any training session planned? If yes, will be any person from your organisation attending it?
6. Did you use the help-desk within SMIS CU? What types of problems did you report? 7. To what extent do you consider that the support offered through the help-desk is useful? How do you think that this service can be improved?
8. How do you perceive the communication and the information from the central level to SMIS users – what are the tools use? Do you think they are efficient? 9. How do you think that the SMIS communication / information process should be managed?
10. What is the endowment in terms of IT&C equipment and licences? 11. Are the services ensured for the SMIS correct functioning? 12. What other needs do you identify, in terms of IT&C equipments and services?

Interview Guide – Contractors

Objective:

In-depth understanding of the potential influence of the contract on the final project implementation.

Evaluation Questions
1. When the tendering was launched, the documentation was clear? Did you need additional clarifications from the contracting authority?
2. In terms of requested documents, the requirements were clear / easy to be observed?
3. What were the most important difficulties encountered during the process of preparing the offer? (external to your organisation)
4. After the offer was submitted, was the evaluation process transparent? Did you receive clarification requests? If yes, please detail.
5. Did the evaluation process observe the deadlines from the tendering documentation?
6. Was the tendering contested? If yes, please detail
7. Was the contract signed in due time in order to observe the initial activities planning? If not, what were the delays and how did they affect the activities?
8. What were the main difficulties in signing the contract? (if the case maybe)
9. From your point of view, are the contractual provisions clear / easy to be observed? If no, please detail.
10. After the signing of the contract, were any other delays registered? If yes, please detail their nature and causes.
11. What is the implementation status of your contract?
12. In terms of payments, there were / are any difficulties? If yes, please detail.
13. How is your the relation with the Contracting Authority? 14. How often do you interact with the CA? 15. Did the CA designate a single person for this contract or do you interact with several persons within CA? 16. Is the CA pro-active in its relation with you? Does the CA easily answer to your requests? 17. Are there any communication problems? 18. Was the contract modified from the initial version? 19. What are the difficulties encountered in your relation with the CA? Please, detail
20. Do you consider that the contract provisions may be observed in time? Do you forecast other difficulties in you relation with the CA that may lead to delays / not observing the contract?

Interview Guide for Training WG members

Objective: Evaluation of the TWG efficiency and the impact of the OPTA support on its activities.

Evaluation Questions
1. How do you appreciate the training activities supported by OPTA? (basic or specialised training for MAs/IBs, for beneficiaries)
2. To what extent does the initial OPTA programming is still relevant for the beneficiaries? (in terms of training activities)
3. Do you consider that it is difficult to avoid overlaps between the OPTA training activities and the training activities supported through other TA axis?
4. What would you change in the way of OPTA dealing with its beneficiaries training needs? (e.g. include other beneficiaries categories, training needs assessment)
5. How efficient is the OPTA implemented, in terms of horizontal training in the SI field?
6. How do you appreciate the training needs assessment?
7. How would you qualify the MAs/IBs staff you are interacting with in terms of efficiency? (1- totally inefficient, 2 – inefficient, 3 – efficient; very efficient)
8. Are the WG attributions clear and adequate to the operational needs? If no, please comment.
9. What are the main problems, constraints and weaknesses of the system, concerning the inter-institutional relations within TWG?
10. Please comment the TWG contribution to the increase of the training activities.
11. What would you propose in order to increase the efficiency / effectiveness of the TWG activity?

Interview Guide – Communication WG members

Objective: Evaluation of the CWG efficiency and the impact of the OPTA support on its activities.

Evaluation Questions
1. How do you appreciate the CWG activity?
2. Do you consider that it is difficult to avoid overlaps between the OPTA communication activities and the communication activities supported through other TA axis?
3. What would you change in the way of OPTA dealing with the communication/information/publicity activities?
4. How efficient is the OPTA implemented, in terms of SI horizontal communication activities?
5. How would you qualify the MAs/IBs staff you are interacting with in terms of efficiency? (1- totally inefficient, 2 – inefficient, 3 – efficient; very efficient)
6. Are the WG attributions clear and adequate to the operational needs? If no, please comment
7. What are the main problems, constraints and weaknesses of the system, concerning the inter-institutional relations within CWG?
8. Please comment the CWG contribution to the increase of the training activities.
9. What would you propose in order to increase the efficiency / effectiveness of the CWG activity?

Evaluation Working Group (Focus group 1)

Date: 22/02/2010

Agenda:

8. Debate regarding the challenges of and progresses towards reaching a common evaluation culture
    - What is the progress in achieving a common evaluation culture at the EWG level and at the Evaluation units level? What are the main hindrances and achievements?
    - How are the stakeholders accepting the 'common culture'?
    - If a common culture is reached, the coherence of the activities is implicitly ensured?

	Name	Organisation
1.	Raluca Ivanof	GEA Strategy&Consulting
2.	Dragoş Pîslaru	GEA Strategy&Consulting
3.	Livia Pîslaru	GEA Strategy&Consulting
4.	Jim Fitzpatrick	Fitzpatrick Associates
5.	Claudia Măgdălina	ACIS, ECU
6.	Anca Ionaş	ACIS, ECU
7.	Angelica Vlădescu	ACIS, ECU
8.	Anton Enăchescu	ACIS, ECU
9.	Irina Cimpoieru	ACIS, DAP
10.	Ileana Geambaşu	ACIS, MD
11.	Daniela Breazu	OP Transport MA
12.	Alina Ungureanu	OP DAC MA
13.	Razvan Ionescu	OP DAC MA
14.	Tiberiu Oprea	SOP HRD MA
15.	Steluţa Goanţă	SOP IEC MA
16.	Georgeta Susana	SOP IEC MA
17.	Cristina Moise	CPA / MoPF
18.	Cătălina Iordache	SOP Environment MA
19.	Carmen Cruceru	ROP MA
20.	Eliza Lupaşcu	ROP MA

    - How important the structure / the institutional power of the Evaluation Units is in ensuring the coherence? To what extent does the EWG succeed in ensuring the proposed evaluations coherence?
    - How the evaluation culture may be measured (especially quantitatively)? What indicators / tools may be used?
9. Debate on the EWG role

- How efficient is the EWG and what is the impact of the OPTA support on its activities?
- How can OPTA be improved for a better support of the EWG and the evaluation activity?

10. Debate on other aspects of the SI evaluation process
    - What is the border between the SI studies and SI evaluation? Within ACIS, both DAP and MD or SCD have evaluation needs in order to improve their activity. The non-compulsory evaluations should be initiated by the ECU or by the other directorates within ACIS?
    - How can the OPTA support for the evaluation activity be underlined and analysed?

Evaluation Working Group (Focus group 2)

Date: 29/03/2010

Agenda:

Discussion and validation of preliminary conclusions and recommendations regarding the progress in achieving a common evaluation culture.

PR Expert meeting ("mini" focus group)

Date: 05/03/2010

Agenda:

Possible solutions for launching PA 3 interventions

The Information Centre of the EC Delegation to Romania

- The objectives of the EC Delegation communication and information strategy;
- Best practice in establishing / functioning of the IC of the EC Delegation;
- EC Delegation web-site;
- Regional multipliers network;
- Connected instruments (intranet, call-centre, in-house publications);
- The IC role in the EC Delegation communication and information strategy;
- The IC development – number of visitors, web-site visits, events organised);
- The functioning and management of the EC Representation Information Centre, using the prior experience.

List of participants:

	Name	Organisation
1.	Andra Chirilă	ACIS, SCD
2.	Andreea Bucur	ACIS, SCD
3.	Coralia Zadorojnai	ACIS, SCD
4.	Dragos Pîslaru	GEA Strategy&Consulting
5.	Cristina Crăciun	KPMG România
6.	Livia Pîslaru	GEA Strategy&Consulting
7.	Tiberiu Cazacioc	DC Communication

Focus Group – mass-media representatives

Date: 07/04/2010

Agenda:

The debate was based on the following main themes:

- The relevance, coherence efficiency and effectiveness of the ACIS communication plan;
- The role of ACIS in the SI communication process
- The categories of campaigns / information events in order to increase the level of awareness and use of the SI;
- The best promotion and publicity modalities for the SI;
- The ACIS support through OPTA for mass-media efforts in covering the SI topics.

List of participants:

	Name	Organisation
1.	Andreea Bucur	ACIS, SCD
2.	Coralia Zadorojnai	ACIS, SCD
3.	Mariana Amza	ACIS, ECU
4.	Dragos Pîslaru	GEA Strategy&Consulting
5.	Livia Pîslaru	GEA Strategy&Consulting
6.	Cristian Ghinea	Dilema Veche / Centru Român de Politici Europene
7.	Ioana Morovan	Hotnews / Euractiv
8.	Ioana Sora	Financiarul
9.	Adriana Roşoga	Ziarul Financiar

Focus Group – independent evaluation experts

Date: 09/04/2010

Agenda:

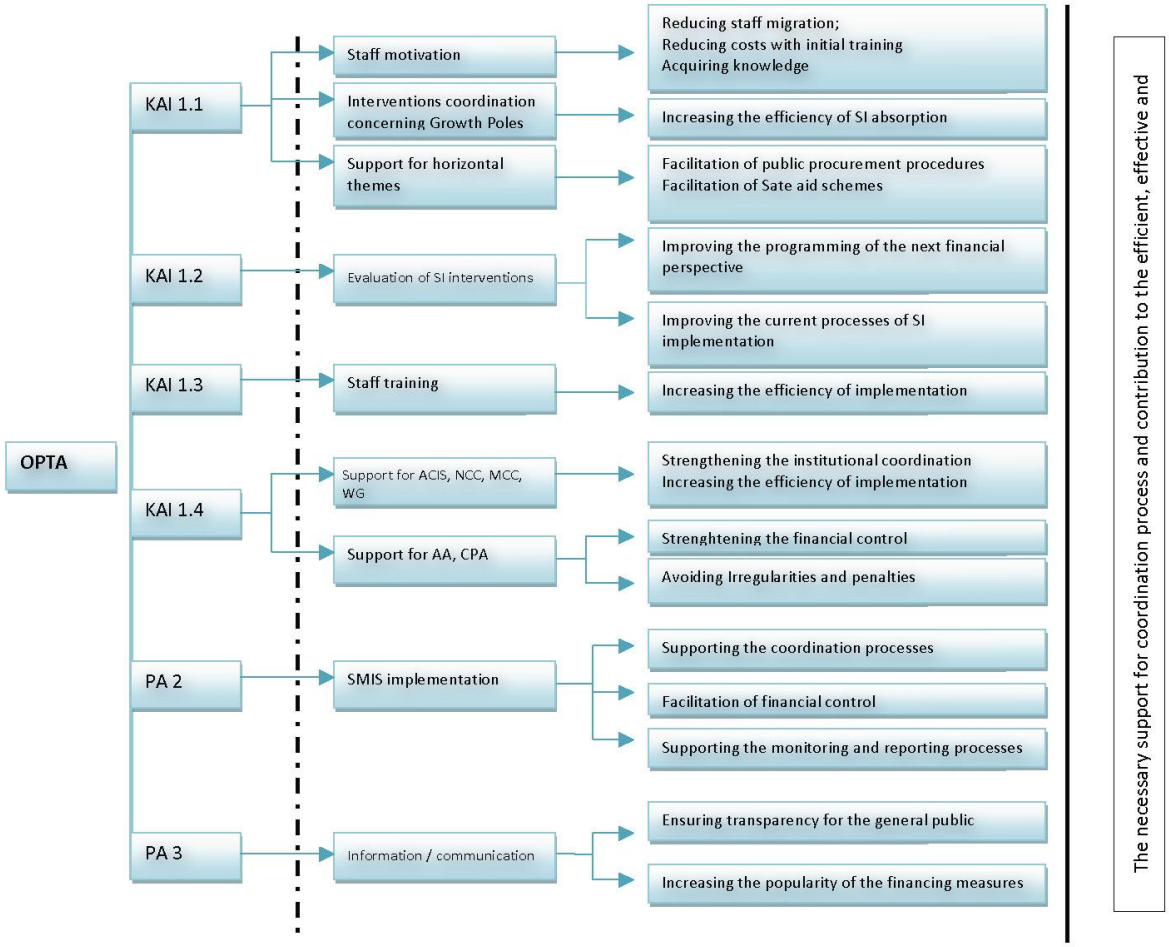
The debate was based on the following main themes:

- The progress in reaching a common evaluation culture, from the point of view of the independent evaluators;
- The independents evaluators perception of the OPTA activities for achieving a common evaluation culture;
- The complementarity of the ACIS effort (through OPTA) and the independent evaluators efforts in reaching a common evaluation culture.

List of participants:

	Name	Organisation
1.	Dragoş Pîslaru	GEA Strategy&Consulting
2.	Livia Pîslaru	GEA Strategy&Consulting
3.	Radu Kubinschi	Deloitte Consultanţă
4.	Suzana Dobre	Societatea Academică Română
5.	Rodica Novac	ADO SAH ROM
6.	Elisabeta Vârlan	Independent evaluator

Annex 5 – Effects Diagram



Annex 6 – References

Documents review

Name

ACIS organisational chart

Operational Programme Technical Assistance

Framework Document for Implementation of OPTA 2007 – 2013

OPTA Applicant's Guide

OPTA Working Plan for 2008-2009

Informative note regarding the implementation status of OPTA Working Plan for 2008-2009 at 31.05.2009

Informative note regarding the implementation status of OPTA Working Plan for 2008-2009 at 30.10.2008

AA – Audit Report - September 2009

CPA – Final Report regarding the mission to ensure the correct functioning of the OPTA MA managing and control system and to verify the expenses declarations no.2 and no.3 within OPTA KAI 1.4

Directorate for Internal Audit - Internal Audit Report regarding the evaluation of the preparedness and implementation status for the projects financed through SI

Note on difficulties encountered during the OPTA implementation process and remedial proposals

GEO on actions and normative regarding the specific expenses of the central and local public administration, as beneficiaries of Structural Instruments, the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance and the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument

Forms regarding the TA use 31/12/2009

Monthly reports regarding the OPTA contracted projects, June 2009 – March 2010

OPTA – finalised contracts / expenses, CCTA 27/01/2010

Committees and Working Groups

CCTA decisions synthesis, 22/09/2009

Minutes of the fifth meeting of the CCTA

OPTA Monitoring Committee decisions Synthesis 2007-2103, 16/05/2009

OPTA Monitoring Committee decisions Synthesis 2007-2103, 31/10/2008

OPTA Monitoring Committee decisions Synthesis 2007-2103, 3/06/2009

Management Coordination Committee Proceedings, 24/09/2009

Management Coordination Committee Proceedings, 26/06/2009

Operational Communication Working Group Proceedings, 05/09/2008

Operational Communication Working Group Proceedings, 16/01/2009

Operational Communication Working Group Proceedings, 6/02/2009

Communication Working Group Proceedings, 06/04/2009

Communication Working Group Proceedings, 08/05/2009

Communication Working Group Proceedings, 05/06/2009

Communication Working Group Proceedings 0/07/2009

Communication Working Group Proceedings, 02/10/2009

Communication Working Group Proceedings, 06/09/2009

Evaluation Working Group Proceedings, 23/04/2009

Communication Working Group Proceedings, 19/06/2009

Communication Working Group Proceedings, 12/10/2009

Monitoring Working Group Proceedings, 30/04/2009

Communication Working Group Proceedings, 30/09/2009

Main results of the Monitoring Working Group 2009

Main results of the Future Cohesion Policy Working Group 2009

Main results of the Evaluation Working Group 2009

Main results of the Cost-Benefit Analysis Working Group 2009

Main results of the Communication / SMIS Working Group 2009

Communication

National Communication Strategy for Structural Instruments in Romania 2007-2013

OP DAC Communication Plan

SOP Transport Communication Plan 2007-2013, second version

SOP IEC Communication Plan 2007-2013

SOP HRD Communication Plan POS DRU 2007-2013

SOP Environment Communication Plan 2007-2013

OPTA Communication Plan 2007-2013

ROP Communication Plan 2007-2013

Communicators Forum Minutes, 29/06/2009

SMIS-NSRF Working Group Conclusions, 27/02/2009

SMIS-NSRF Working Group Conclusions, 09/032009

Training

Training needs assessments for EU Structural Instruments 2009-2011

Report on up-dating the training needs at the level of the institutions created for the IS absorption, 2010-2011

Training Plan 2010

Training Mechanism for Structural Instruments

Organisation and Functioning Regulation TWG, 10/09/2008

OPTA Procedures 2009

Procedures Manual for OPTA Implementation 2007-2013

Procedures Manual for OPTA Implementation modifications

Annex B3-Projects modifications

Annex B5-Irregularities

Annex B6-Payments certification

Annex B.1-Application for financing

Annex B.2-Financing decision

Annex B.4-Reimbursment claim

Annex C1.3-Storage and archiving

Annex D-Risk Management

Annex E1-Help-desk function

Annex E2.2-Procedure for the SI projects implementation

Annex E3-Contracting procedure

Annex E4-ALOP public procurement procedure

Annex E5-Filing and archiving public procurement file

Annex F-Preventing Financial Control

Annex G-Accounting

OPTA Procedures 2008

Procedures Manual for OPTA Implementation 2007-2013

Annex B1-Projects evaluation

Annex B2-Contracting

Annex B3-Modification

Annex B4-Operations verification

Annex B5-Irregularities

Annex B6-Certification

Annex C1.3-Storage and archiving

Annex D-Risk management

Annex E2.2-Implementation activity

Annex E3-Contracting procedure

Annex E4-Invoices and payments verification

Annex E5-Filing and archiving public procurement file

Annex 7 – In-depth Analysis – SI Coordination Structures Eligible for OPTA Support

The coordination structures for SI at horizontal level in Romania could be mapped in a graphical form as seen below:

Figure 9: The Coordination of SI Implementation

As far as **hierarchical coordination** is concerned, a National Coordination Committee (NCC) for the SI[105] was created at the highest governmental level. According to the legislation, the NCC provides the strategic correlation of EU-funded interventions. NCC members are coordinating ministers of ACIS, of the Payment and Certification Authority and MAs of the OPs. The Prime Minister chairs the president of NCC. In exerting its attributions, the NCC can propose to the Government measures for enhancing the implementation of the SI. NCC meetings take place every 3 months[106].

For **operational correlation**, a Management Committee for Coordinating the SI (MCC)[107] was created. This entity is headed by the Director General of ACIS and identifies the potential problems and obstacles that may interfere with the process of implementing the SI. It also establishes the technical, procedural and institutional measures that do not involve a higher decision-making level and keep the NCC informed of the political and legislation measures that are necessary. The members of the MCC are high-level officials within the MA for the OPs, the PCA and the AA. The MCC is the main instrument for solving coordination and shared problems (including the TA-related ones as reported by CCTA). MCC meetings take place each month.

Under the auspices of the MCC, a number of WGs were created in order to address coordination needs specific to various TA domains, The WGs' meetings take place as often as necessary to solve all the problems emerging within a cross-institutional coordination.

The **Evaluation Working Group** (EWG) – coordinates the process of establishing structures, systems and

[105] *Created in 2004, but refreshed from a legal point of view by HG nr. 457/2008 concerning the institutional framework of coordination and management of the structural instruments.*

[106] *In practice, at top governmental level, NCC was replaced with weekly cabinet meetings under the name of - Inter-ministerial Group for Monitoring the Community Funds Absorption.*

[107] *Idem.*

procedures concerning the evaluation of SI-funded programs, and implies the following responsibilities:

- Provides the NSRF/OP level evaluations coordination and submits to MCC/NCC enhancement measures based on the evaluation results;
- Generates the functioning pattern of evaluation on NSRF and OPs level;
- Ensures a good cooperation between all evaluation units at MA level, supporting know-how exchanges and best practice developments in evaluation implementations;
- Provides strategic guidance for MA evaluation units concerning their activity;
- Provides common evaluation standards and monitor their implementation for NSRF/OPs evaluation;
- Supports with opinions the Evaluation Central Unit (ECU) in its activity' of developing a Romanian evaluation culture and a professional evaluation community.

EWG members are representatives of ECU, as well as every evaluation units at MA level.

1. The **Training Working Group** (TWG) – provides a coherent analysis of the training needs and coordinates the planning, monitoring and evaluation of the training programmes, implying the following responsibilities[108]:

- Developing and implementation of a Annual Training Plan, both for the newly-recruited and the existing personnel, by assuring a good cooperation among all entities involved in the UE funds management field;
- Assures the coherence of the projects proposed by the WG members with the training needs analysis results and with the existing annual training planning;
- Contributes to identify the standards and necessary requirements for providing an effective and efficient training system;
- Coordinates the monitoring of the UE funds management training.

FWG is composed of representatives of ACIS, MAs, AA and PCA.

2. The **Communication Working Group** (CWG) – provides the coordination of the information and publicity activities, and has the following responsibilities:

- Provides the communication coordination at SI level;
- Develops and implements coherently the National Strategy for Communication and the CPs of the OPs;
- Develops the visual identity manual for the SI;
- Develops the cross-institutional cooperation procedure (networking procedure) for the coordination of the communication activities;
- Correlates the implementation of the communication activities within the CPs of the OPs;
- Provides support in taking the decisions concerning the implementation of the CPs;
- Provides a functional mechanism of coordination regarding the communication process for the SI.

CWG members are the communication coordinators within the MAs as well as the ACIS communication representatives, the latter providing also the presidency and the secretariat for the WG.

3. The **SMIS Working Group** (SMIS WG) – provides the development and the coordination of the IT system for the management of the structural instruments (SMIS), and has the following objectives[109]:

- Takes part in the process of the SMIS user needs assessment;
- Approves the specific SMIS implementation requirements;
- Collects and analyses the parameters, reports, institutional structures, SMIS changes and developments;
- Provides know-how transfer related to SMIS field;
- Ensures a good cooperation between SMIS operational units within various institutional actors involved in SI implementation;
- Identifies the training needs and elaborates the training planning for SMIS.

[108] *Source: TWG Functioning and Organisation Regulations.*

[109] *Source: SMIS WG Functioning and Organisation Regulations.*

SMIS WG members are representatives of ACIS, PCA, AA and SMIS coordinators in MAs.

4. **The Monitoring Working Group** (MWG) – ensures the adequate coordination of the monitoring process of the OPs and facilitating a coherent approach and a common terminology in the monitoring and reporting activity, by exerting the following attributions[110]:

- Coordinating the setting up/ organization of the Monitoring Committees (MCs) for the OPs;
- Coordinating the drafting of the annual implementation reports (AIR);
- Analyzing the specific monitoring mechanisms that underline the critical aspects in the implementation of the OP (early warning system, the n+2/ n+3monitorisation rule, etc.), having in view the identification of the corrective measures in due time;
- Discussing the issue of horizontal themes;
- Ensuring an unitary monitoring framework at the level of the OP level by establishing a set of clear directions;
- Disseminating documents and information regarding the monitoring of the structural instruments drafted by the EC, by experts from other Member States or synthesis materials drafted by ACIS;
- Organizing specific training sessions on common interest issues for the monitoring of structural instruments;
- Identifying corrective measures in the process of monitoring the Operational Programmes in order to increase the implementation efficiency and informing the CMC/ MA heads about these.
- The MWG is organized by the MD within ACIS and is made up of representatives of the MA who have monitoring attribution at OP level. At the MWG reunions also take part representatives of the other directorates from ACIS and from ACP.

5. The **Cost-Benefit Analysis Working Group** (CBA WG) – responsible for the setting up of cost-benefit analysis capacity, with the following attributions[111]:

- Initiating and supervising the activities for the development of CBA capacity for investment projects requesting financing through structural and cohesion funds;
- Designing and updating the work plan for CBA WG;
- Elaborating and updating the National Guide for Cost-Benefit Analysis;
- Correlating the sectoral guides with the National Guide;
- Reports on the activity of CBA WG provided to the Management Committee for Structural Instruments and, through the latter, to the National Coordination Committee;
- Ensuring the exchange of experience and best practice in the field of CBA;
- Designing common standards for the cost-benefit analysis;
- Providing – proactively or at the request of other entities – points of view on legislation and procedural aspects concerning cost-benefit analysis.

The WG CBA members are representatives of ACIS, MAs fot SOP Transport, SOP Environment, ROP and SOP Increasing Economic Competitiveness (SOP IEC). Other experts may be invited to participate in CBA WG meetings, depending of the specific analysis domains. CBA WG was not very active in 2009, as the launch of the TA project meant to specifically support its activity through OPTA was postponed to 2010.

6. The **Future of the Cohesion Policy Working Group** (Cohesion WG) – focused on defining Romania's position concerning the future of the CP at EU level, as well as on providing information regarding the position of other Member States. This WG was active throughout 2009 and became inactive once Romania's official position was adopted.

7. Furthermore, two more working groups were initially organised: Implementation/Manuals WG & Financial Management and Control WG. These two WGs met only at the beginning of the programming period and can be considered inactive.

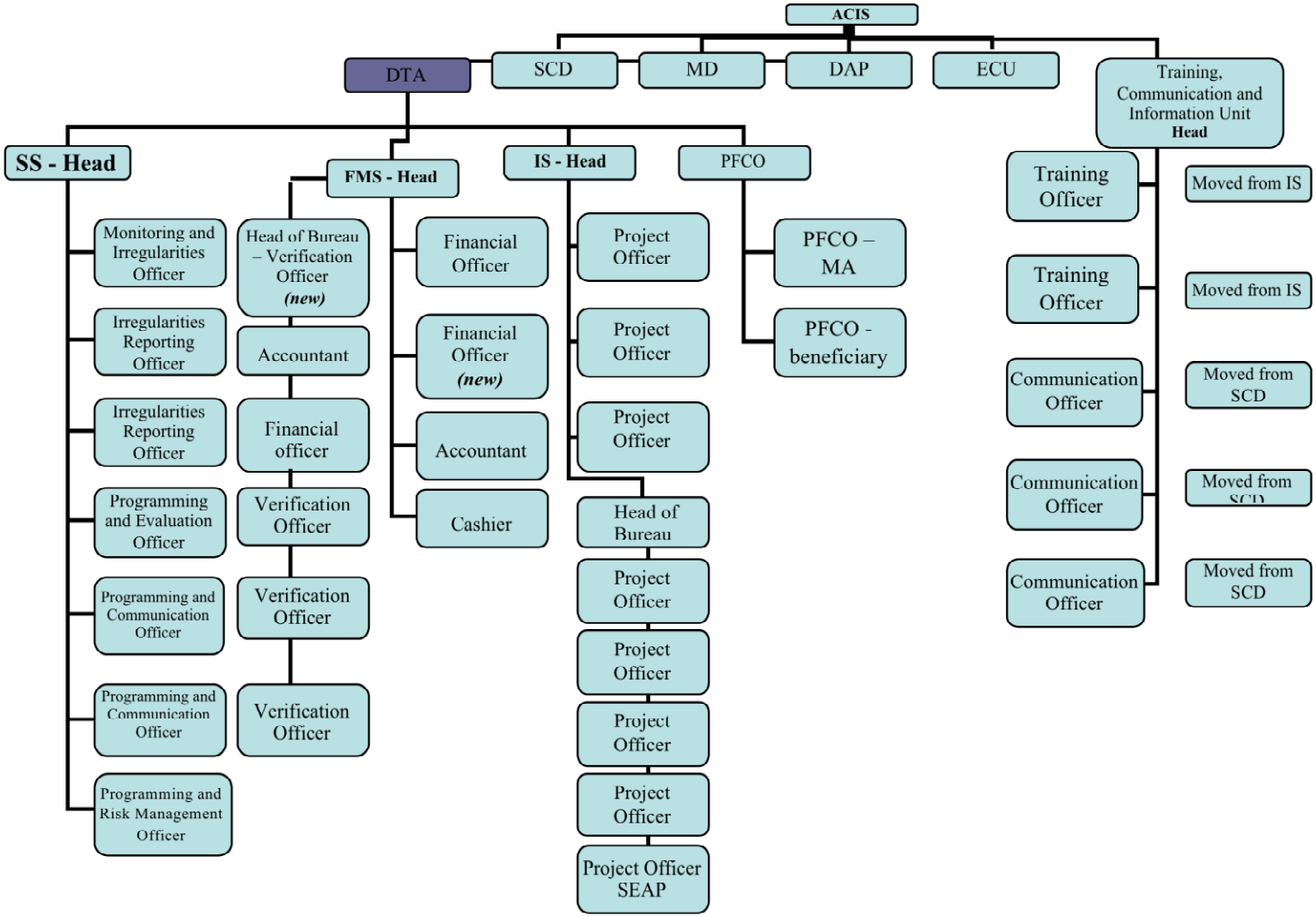
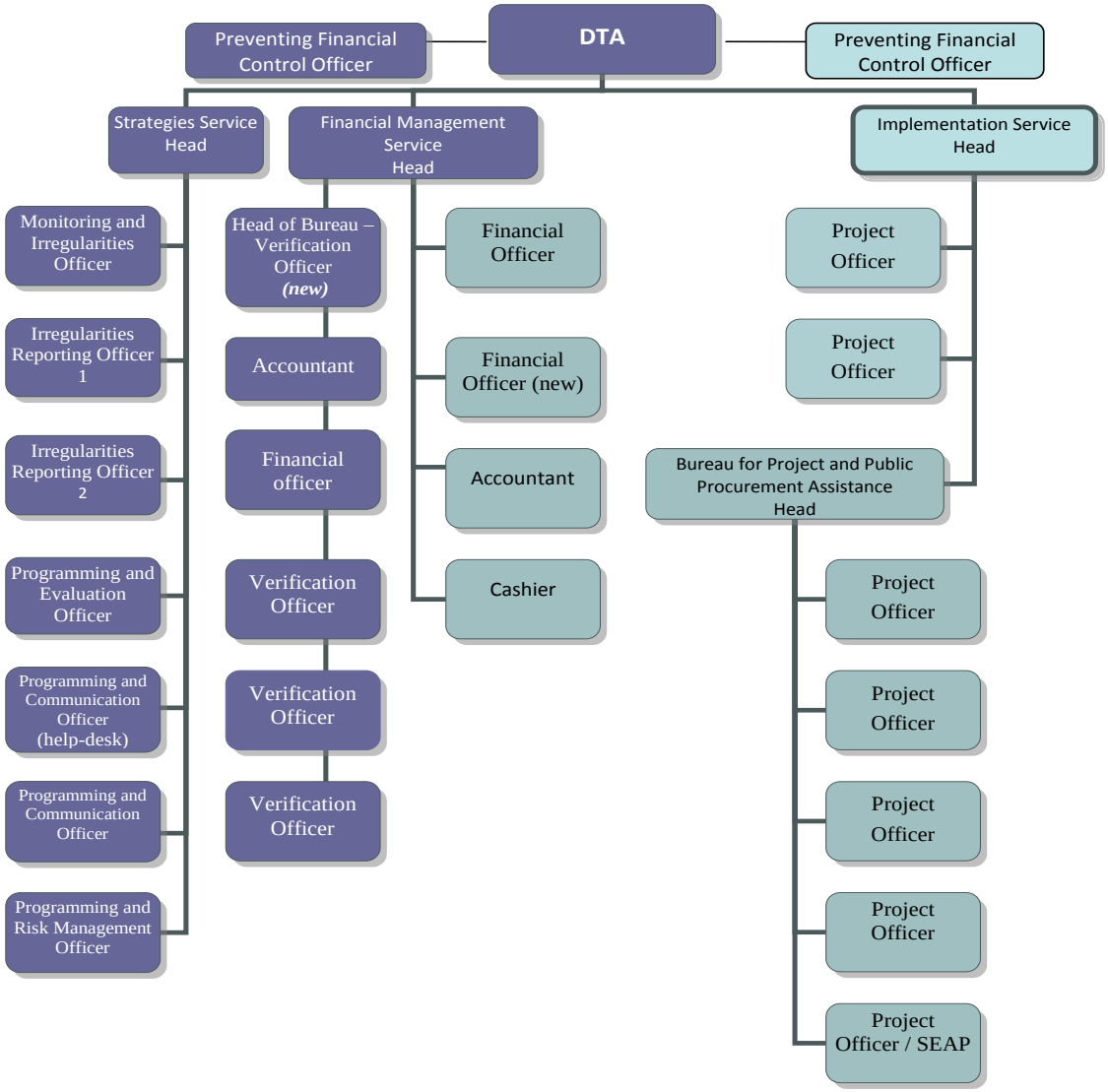
As a procedure, the conclusions and the recommendations of all the WGs are brought to the MCC/NCC

[110] *Source: MWG Functioning and Organisation Regulations.*

[111] *Source: CBA WG Functioning and Organisation Regulations.*

attention, and are taken into consideration for the strategic and operational improvements of SI implementation. The activity of MCC, CC AT and of all WGs is eligible for OPTA support.

Annex 8 – Proposed Organizational Chart - ACIS



Annex 9 – Proposed Organizational Chart - DTA