

## 4.6 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
<b>Strategic Issue No. 1: Consequences of the Crisis for OP Strategy and Implementation</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Interim Evaluation reports all perceive the crisis as having very significant implications for the respective OPs, and particularly for the progress of their implementation;</li> <li>▪ the causation channels through which the crisis affects OPs is complex and multi-faceted, and not always self-evident. It includes obvious areas such as lack of public resources and capacity and access to finance, but also more complex influences through reduced asset values and declining demand on domestic and export markets;</li> <li>▪ the assessments of the impact of the crisis are generally negative, and Interim Evaluations do not see any upsides. An exception is ROP which highlighted the potential for reduced infrastructural contract prices;</li> <li>▪ with exceptions, Interim Evaluations generally do not see the crisis as having strategic affects on the OPs, but rather as hindering implementation. Exceptions are Administrative Capacity and HRD where some more strategic implications are highlighted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The crisis generally hinders progress and particularly actual implementation and absorption. Therefore all possibilities to enhance absorption need to be considered in the present context;</li> <li>▪ TA has a particular potential in this regard, so it is disappointing to note that OPTA, ACD and TA Priority Axes are making slow progress themselves, due partially to the crisis but also for other procedural and administrative reasons;</li> <li>▪ it would not appear necessary to review the Strategy of the NSRF or most OPs fundamentally, although there are some cases where this may be necessary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>R(a) All options to speed up absorption need to be considered within the existing objectives and operating rules of the NSRF and OPs;</li> <li>R(b) use TA to more proactively support actual and potential beneficiaries;</li> <li>R(c) use TA to outsource OP management and technical functions in cases of scarce internal capacity and bottlenecks, e.g. provision of advisory service to applicants, assessment of applications, aftercare of successful applicants.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic Issue No. 2: Relevance, Efficiency and Effectiveness of OP Strategies</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ After a slow beginning at the commencement of the NSRF period, OPs have generally made very significant progress in launches, application receipt and processing, approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the poor performance of the OPTA and Priority Axes is disappointing since these should be providing the solutions to many of the other implementation difficulties rather than being</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>R(d) Develop a “demand-led” framework for reallocations now, based on areas of need that could absorb additional funds rather than reactively seeking destinations for</li> </ul>

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<p>and in many cases also contracting. A process of incremental improvement has been relatively successful across the OPs;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ OP progress is, however, variable, with a number of OPs relatively successful and some much less so. Relatively successful ones are ROP, SOP, SOP-HRD and SOP-ENV, and relatively less successful OPTA, ACD and SOP-T;</li> <li>▪ the pattern within OPs is also variable, and all OPs contain some relatively slow Priority Axes. Performance at Priority Axis level also in turn tends to reflect variable performance at KAI level;</li> <li>▪ ultimately, across all OPs the actual level of absorption is quite low and very far behind NSRF and OP 2007-10 targets in this regard.</li> </ul>	<p>implementation obstacles themselves;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the view reflected in most Interim Evaluations is a relatively optimistic one. It is that the current pace of absorption will now gradually increase and that its current low level is partially a reflection of the timing of the Interim Evaluations;</li> <li>▪ alongside a continued process of procedural improvement, the time has probably arrived when consideration of significant reallocations within the NSRF should also be considered. It would be better that this be done on a planned proactive basis, rather than on an ad hoc reactive one.</li> </ul>	<p>unspent monies on an ad hoc basis;</p> <p>R(e) identify a number of PAs and operations, preferably large ones, which have the potential to absorb significant amounts of additional funding, and which also meet other criteria in terms of usefulness, potential impact, avoidance of deadweight, e.g. local roads<sup>27</sup>, SMEs, third-level research. An obvious starting point is existing relatively high-absorption PAs;</p> <p>R(f) consider inclusion in OPs of some potential expenditure areas that are not already part of the NSRF, e.g. eligible non-cofinanced transport projects in SOP-T, the Justice sector in ACD;</p> <p>R(g) undertake targeted promotion to likely potential applicants;</p> <p>R(h) remove money from operations which are currently <b>not launched</b> or <b>not performing</b> because of fundamental obstacles to their implementation which have not yet been addressed, by a certain deadline, e.g. end-2010;</p> <p>R(i) prioritise improved functioning of TA at NSRF and OP level as a potential enabler of absorption across the NSRF and OPs. An extensive range of detailed recommendations in this regard are contained in the OPTA Inter Evaluation Report (see Appendix 1 for summary);</p> <p>R(j) appoint “OP-level monitors” to advise/support MC/MAs at NSRF and OP</p>

<sup>27</sup> DG Regio Ex Post Evaluation Synthesis Report suggests removal of road improvements from post-2013 Cohesion Policy.

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		<p>level. Their role will be to proactively identify and support MC/MA to address bottlenecks and obstacles to implementation;</p> <p>R(k) review the operation of the existing project-level monitoring and audit activity with a view to ensuring a beneficiary-oriented and customer-focused support dimension;</p> <p>R(l) raise with the European Commission the possibility of treating the 2007-13 and 2014-20 periods as a single, seamless NSRF period from a strategic perspective.</p>
<b>Strategic Issue No. 3: Relevance of the Implementation Mechanisms</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ While there have been many difficulties implementation mechanisms a great deal of incremental improvement has also taken place. Interim Evaluation reports are generally positive about this, and in no case are radical alternatives to the current implementation arrangements proposed under the current round evident.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Major changes in implementation architecture at this stage in the NSRF would probably be counter-productive and disruptive. There is therefore little alternative but to maintain a process of continuous improvement, as signalled in the Romanian Government's mid-2010 proposals regarding NSRF implementation.</li> <li>▪ however, there is no reason why alternative structures cannot be considered in a post-2013 context. However, if this was to occur it would be desirable that investigation and planning in this regard begin now.</li> </ul>	<p>R(m) Retain focus on making the existing implementation structures more effective and efficient in 2007-13 period;</p> <p>R(n) if alternative mechanisms are to be considered for the next period, commence examination of these now, including looking in detail at approaches of other relevant Member States, how they have worked and why.<sup>28</sup></p>
<b>Strategic Issue No. 4: Potential for Upgrading the Impact of Investment</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Interim Evaluations took place at a time when there was relatively little experience of actual project implementation, as distinct from</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interim Evaluations as such are not explicitly informative on this topic;</li> <li>▪ however, considerable insight regarding how</li> </ul>	<p>R(o) Initiate independent quality examination of a sample of ongoing contracted projects using experienced development project</p>

<sup>28</sup> Relevant here includes in particular other relatively centralised public administration systems.

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<p>programme implementation. Hence, the issue of the impact of investment and how to improve this was not a very explicit focus of IEs;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ IEs generally examined this issue in terms of the quality of the project selection and appraisal mechanisms. There were considerable difficulties identified in some Interim Evaluations, notably ACD and HRD. However, these generally reflected effectiveness and efficiency, rather than the quality of the approved projects emerging from the appraisal and approval system;</li> <li>▪ Interim Evaluation comments on coordination were generally reasonably positive, in the sense that coordination mechanisms were identified and overt overlap and duplication is being avoided. However, Interim Evaluations remain more agnostic about the quality of actual practical coordination where this is necessary in terms of specific investments and the coordination of this;</li> <li>▪ the separate Ad Hoc Evaluation on beneficiary capacity explored the issue of obstacles to implementation within the beneficiaries, and identified a range of these, including both well-known procedural issues, but also issues of capacity and capability within the beneficiaries themselves.</li> </ul>	<p>impact might be improved is implicit in other parts of the Interim Evaluations;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a number of Interim Evaluations identify potential to provide more technical assistance to beneficiaries, particularly at the implementation phase;</li> <li>▪ given the absence of contact with actual successful beneficiaries in the Interim Evaluations, it is desirable to now initiate evaluations which address the issues of quality and implementation of the cohort of approved projects.</li> </ul>	<p>assessors;</p> <p>R(p) creation of more temporary Ad Hoc Working Groups to deal with specific coordination issues and blockages, e.g. other big delayed operations.</p>