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- **Activity IIIb.4** – An analysis of the complementarity of the projects financed by PA5 KAI 5.2. with the projects financed by the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) 2007-2013, but only those that target human resources in the rural areas.

1.4 Approach

This section gives an overview of how we approached the topics raised by questions and activities referred to in the ToR, i.e. how we operationalised the questions and linked them to the principal sources of information to be opened up and exploited for the purposes of the evaluation.

Effectiveness

Considering the issue of effectiveness (Activity IIIb.1), the main source of information had to be taken from the programme monitoring itself as this is the only place where indicator-related figures can be systematically found. The analysis of the monitoring data is undertaken to check the output and - as far as available - results on two levels of implementation:

- Level 1 – Administrative output in terms of calls launched, applications received and processed, contracts signed, and the on-going management of project follow-up – issues partially reflected in the indicator tables as “input-indicators”
- Level 2 – Project output /results – eligible activities implemented; in particular but not exclusively (as this depends on the type of activities) referring to participant involvement, and results produced according to funding agreements,

The administrative level check is considered relevant not alone in comparison with respective input indicators but also as a means of ‘putting things into perspective’. A single KAI cannot be fairly judged on its own performance alone but has to be considered in the context of overall implementation. Moreover, many aspects of the Level 1 output are subject to efficiency analysis under the Interim Evaluation of SOPHRD itself and, as such, do not present as a specific task under this Component 3b ad hoc evaluation; however, it has to be noted that there are potential (and actually reported) repercussions that can and do arise as a consequence of a less than efficient approach at Level 1 (as above). In that regard, efficiency



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issues arising can impact on implementation at Level 2 (as above) and can impede or even stop project implementation or, put another way, can directly act on effectiveness. These considerations must be taken into account in order to avoid overly-simplistic conclusions being drawn regarding project implementation in particular.

Regarding comparison of planned indicator target values and figures from financial and technical reporting it has to be taken into consideration that some of the target values refer to the whole programming period – thus a direct comparison of reported output of technical data with planning figures would be too simplistic without also taking into account the relative amount of funding that is at stake at this stage in the evolution of the programme. A weighted comparison of planned project output with real output will be necessary to arrive at a more realistic and balanced view.

Besides analysing figures and data, a coherence check of the relationships between objectives and types of action defined at the different levels of the programme also presents a way to identify systematic logic breaks that can impede successful implementation.

Finally, due to gaps and leaks in the system of monitoring as implemented to date we had to consider and to use beneficiaries as a relevant and complementary source. This allowed us:

1. To carry out validity checks against some of the monitoring data; and
2. To complement information that is not sufficiently standardised in the monitoring system.

Relevance

Regarding the relevance to the needs of target groups in the present socio-economic context (Activity IIIb.2) and the closely related ‘identification of new activities’ (Activity IIIb.3) we focussed on four types of information sources to get a view on socio-economic changes that have emerged and on their potential relevance to the validity of the current strategy when set against the needs of target groups:

- Socio-economic statistics and analyses referring to the situation in rural / urban areas and in (subsistence) agriculture;



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- Opinions and statements from the point of view of stakeholders;
- Opinions and statements from the point of view of beneficiaries; and – but to a relatively limited degree,
- Opinions from participants in measures.

When analysing the socio-economic context and related data, two issues have to be taken into account:

1. Not every change in the socio-economic context *per se* raises the need for adjustments - it may be the case that even drastic overall changes such as those associated with the current crisis will have only a limited impact on the appropriateness of a mid-term strategy as implemented under Structural Funds which operate in a 7 years programming period / cycle. This could arise if, for example, the crisis is transitory or if it simply shifted all parameters relevant to the strategy in the same direction but without significant structural effects.
2. The data arising from a socio-economic analysis provides a background that then has to be counter-balanced by expertise in the field. Detailed and sufficiently up-to-date data may not always be available for a specific geographical region or economic sector. It may not adequately represent the topic in question due, for example, to specific measurement concepts applied and potential bias therein. As such, it is necessary to also use broad expertise available through published work as well as data collected specifically for the purposes of the evaluation itself.

Assessing the needs of target groups and how they are matched / might be better matched is a complex issue:

- a) The needs have to be related to employment or in a broader sense to employability.
- b) The needs as such usually are simple and clear: getting a (new) job or keeping the old one, improving working conditions or earning a better income.
- c) In effect, the question is not as much about individual wishes but about existing conditions so that individual ambitions can be realised (supply and demand issues). In that regard the individual may not (and often is not) best placed to determine how s/he



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can overcome barriers to labour market reintegration, taking into consideration not only individual capability, capacity and disposition but also market demands and even formal conditions and restrictions that have to be respected.

Therefore we also had to mobilise the knowledge of the aforementioned stakeholders and beneficiaries regarding the ‘needs of target groups’. Beneficiaries are relevant in terms of establishing how they made or adjusted their planning to reflect existing needs and conditions and stakeholders, as representatives of target groups, are relevant in order to provide a counter-balance to potentially biased beneficiary views in a context of triangulation.

The issue of complementarity to funding under the National Rural Development Programme NRDP - HRD-related activities (**Activity IIIb.4**) has been tackled on two levels as follows:

1. Provisions taken to avoid overlapping of activities and to avoid competition and redundancy between two funding instruments – this aspect of demarcation was, in fact, the only one tackled within the respective programming documents of SOP HRD and NRDP.
2. Provisions taken to generate real complementarity in the sense of fostering synergies between the two programmes, both of which are active in rural areas. Under this heading we searched for any forms of an active coordination of those funding instruments whether at central, regional, or local level.

Apart from the search for synergy at programme and/or KAI levels it was also envisaged in the Inception Report to take into consideration the effects this might have at project level by creating a sample of such projects for closer investigation. This option would be triggered if we identified overlapping or if we identified strategies that actively fostered synergy at programme / KAI levels.⁴

⁴ Ultimately this option was not used as documentary analysis and fieldwork led to the conclusion that no evidence was found for overlapping or active synergy oriented strategies. Thus there was no sampling criterion (or need) for a sample based examination of how these factors operated or showed up at the level of projects.



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Summing up

For both questions desk-based work as well as field-work was envisaged to provide the evaluation with relevant information that then had to be compiled, interpreted and presented as preliminary findings for further discussion and counter-check. In that respect regular discussions with the members of the ESC (Evaluation Steering Committee) have provided an additional source of feedback, reflection, and, in certain instances, additional information.

All in all our approach had to be flexible with a view to meeting the issues encountered. For example, as initial evaluation findings began to emerge there were requests to further investigate certain issues and to shift our focus so as to encompass issues that may not have been initially made explicit in the ToR as was the case, for example, regarding the issue of complementarity between the SOP HRD and the NRDP.⁵ It was also the case that certain information that we expected to be available in standardised form through the monitoring system was not easily accessible in electronic form and had to be retrieved and constructed from paper files instead. This time-consuming task clearly involved additional input from the evaluation team.

1.5 Methodology

In implementing the approach outlined above, several instruments for information collection have been applied. The following tables show the Activities and respective methods for creating our information base i.e., the types of fieldwork applied in respect of each of the ‘stakeholder’ types:

⁵ Although the ToR requested a check of complementarity the term ‘complementarity’ was not further defined and so it had to be interpreted based on the use made of it in the OP in which case it clearly relates to ‘overlapping’. We elaborated on the interpretation of the term to cover the concept of ‘synergy’ as we considered it a specific issue of interest regarding strategy and relevance.



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	Official documents, materials	Other documents, materials	Project/financial data/information	Interviews	Focus Groups	Field visits
Effectiveness						
Activity IIIb.1 – An analysis of the degree to which the projects financed by PA5, KAI 5.2 contribute to the achievement of established PA5, KAI 5.2 objectives/ indicators.	N	-	N			
Relevance						
Activity IIIb.2 – An analysis of the activities established by FDI SOP HRD in comparison with the needs of the target groups within the present socio-economic context.	N	-	-	N	N	
Activity IIIb.3 – The identification of new activities that can be financed by PA5, KAI 5.2 and that answer the needs of the target group in the present socio-economic context.	N	N		N	N	N



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	Official documents, materials	Other documents, materials	Project/financial data/information	Interviews	Focus Groups	Field visits
<p>Activity IIIb.4 – An analysis of the complementarity of the projects financed by PA5 KAI 5.2. with the projects financed by the National Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, but only those that target human resources in the rural areas.</p>	N	-		N		



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2007-2013**Table 2** Types of fieldwork related to activity and addressees involved

Evaluation activity	Addressees	Interview	Focus group	Fieldwork
Activity IIIb.1 – An analysis of the degree to which the projects financed by PA5, KAI 5.2 contribute to the achievement of established PA5, KAI 5.2 objectives/ indicators	MA	X		
	MA NRDP			
	IB SOPHRD NAE	X	X	
	Project beneficiaries KAI 5.2	X		
	Other stakeholders	X		
Activity IIIb.2 – An analysis of the activities established by FDI SOP HRD in comparison with the needs of the target groups within the present socio-economic context	MA	X		
	MA NRDP			
	IB SOPHRD NAE	X	X	
	Project beneficiaries KAI 5.2	X	X	
	Other stakeholders	X		
Activity IIIb.3 – The identification of new activities that can be financed by PA5, KAI 5.2 and that answer the needs of the target group in the present socio-economic context	MA	X		
	MA NRDP			
	IB SOPHRD NAE			
	Project beneficiaries KAI 5.2	X	X	X
	Other stakeholders	X		
Activity IIIb.4 – An analysis of the complementarity of the projects financed by PA5 KAI 5.2. with the projects financed by the National Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, but only those that target human resources in the rural areas.	MA	X		
	MA NRDP	X		
	IB SOPHRD NAE	X		
	Project beneficiaries KAI 5.2	X		
	Other stakeholders	X		



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Desk work:

- The analysis of the planning documents regarding internal coherence of goals and activities planned throughout the hierarchy of the PA and KAI. This took into consideration general goals, main operational objectives and indicative operations as well as indicators defined to control the progress and success of implementation. This kind of analysis is a core element for a coherent description of intervention logic;
- The analysis of the respective planning documents focusing on areas of potential overlapping between measures of the NRDP and SOP HRD;
- Check of the SOP HRD regarding socio-economic data used to provide a rationale base for the strategy chosen; and
- Research for and analysis of properly updated information (analytical documents as well as data) to be used as an evidence base for the required assessment of relevance in the current socio-economic context.

Analysis of monitoring data from applications submitted to contracts signed

- Completing the set of monitoring data has been an issue throughout the whole evaluation process and the respective draft reports. Most of the gaps we encountered have been addressed although some remain. Although the evaluation team applied significant levels of effort (including extraction of data from the paper files) to gather what we deemed to be necessary data not all gaps could be addressed. It should be noted, however, that in this instance those gaps in the monitoring materials is a structural or system issue and not an issue of the willingness and/or readiness of individual officers in the relevant positions to cooperate with the evaluation team.
- In particular, some information relevant under this Component, e.g. referring to type of activities and the aspect of target areas of projects is not available in a sufficiently precise and unambiguous form through the monitoring system and, as such, we eventually had to complement the data available with additional standardised information gathered from beneficiaries. This holds in particular for:



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- Categorisation of projects by their main activities, a categorisation assigned based on direct interrogation of project promoters and implementing bodies respectively, using a set of predefined categories for selection;
- Attribution of projects implemented to more clearly defined target regions than we can find in the ActionWeb database, up to now the only source available for describing projects.⁶

Both aspects have been taken into consideration when designing the on-line survey for the contracted projects.

Fieldwork

We performed two sets of fieldwork relevant for the evaluation of KAI 5.2, related either to the whole SOP HRD or specifically dedicated to issues of KAI 5.2

1. Overall SOP HRD⁷

- Face to face interviews with national IBs and national stakeholders;
- Focus group meetings in the regions with beneficiaries based on a random sample of projects;
- Group meetings in the regions with staff from regional IBs; and
- An online survey with all contracted projects under SOP HRD

2. Specific to KAI 5.2⁸

- Interview with the MA NRDP;

⁶ There is information in ActionWeb regarding the regional assignments of projects but this information is not directly usable and needs great effort in transformation and standardisation. Currently it is an open editable text-field with a mixture of regions, towns, counties (județ), localities – including towns in other member states and also free text comments. Also the spelling of names of Romanian localities is not standardised. All in all 40,000 entries for about 6,000 applications had been made and when comparing this bulk of information with other project related information on type of region (national, urban and rural, rural etc.) we found problems of coherence.

⁷ The related material (interview questions, questionnaires, and sample-lists) is presented under Component 1

⁸ The respective material is in the Annex 5 to this report.



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- Interviews with beneficiaries from a selection of KAI 5.2 projects, both strategic and regular grant projects including a limited number of interviews with participants;⁹
- Interviews with national stakeholders on rural area issues (AGROSTAR, ACoR – Association of Communes of Romania);
- An informal expert exchange with a representative from the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, Directorate for Employment Affairs and Wages.

⁹ The list of projects for these interviews is in Annex 6.