The approach adopted is also a flexible one with a view to meeting the unforeseen issues that are inevitably encountered in an evaluation of this scale. For example: although the ToR for the evaluation requires a largely programme implementation perspective until the end of 2009, we took into account certain contemporaneous changes that have occurred in the management and administration of the programme so as to avoid redundancy in our ultimate recommendations. Furthermore, in the absence of an integrated data set across the various components of the programme we invested heavily in building a comprehensive database with a view to accurately and robustly describing the programme's evolution over the period in question. In that regard we worked with the client within the available resources (to include, for example, financial resources, available expertise and time) to ensure as much flexibility in our approach as possible in order to deliver a quality product.

We were also highly participative in our approach and provided the opportunity (as set out in some detail in the following sub-section) for the inclusion of as many 'voices' and perspectives as possible in our research through interview, group work and survey work.

1.4 Methodology[4]

The methodological approach adopted for the evaluation is comprehensive and is detailed below under the following headings: Literature Review; Building and Analysis of a Programme Database; Interviews and Consultation; Survey Work; and Group Work.

Literature Review

Given the nature of the evaluation and its emphasis on the management and administration of the SOPHRD, our literature review used the programming and related documents heavily. This included the Operational Programme itself, the FDI SOPHRD, Guidelines for Applicants, Information and Publicity Materials and other sources such as the official website of the MA

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[4] A summary of the overall methodological approach to the Interim Evaluation of the SOP HRD is provided in tabular form in Annex 1. In that regard it is worth noting that through our fieldwork we met with in excess of 230 people on a face to face basis over the course of the evaluation (through interview and group work) and also built in the views of 325 contracted project promoters and 126 unsuccessful applicant promoters (through survey) thereby providing the evaluation with a very strong and robust evidential base.

(www.fseromania.ro). It also took into account related documents such as Corrigenda issued by the MA. For background purposes and context we also referred, for example, to the NDP and the NSRF.

In order to respond to questions regarding the ongoing relevance of the priorities set out in the SOPHRD and questions regarding external factors that may impinge on the ongoing implementation of the programme, we referred to a range of documentation that addresses the socio-economic context in Romania (e.g., World Bank, OECD and European Commission papers) as well as documentation referring specifically to the labour market context (e.g., Labour Force Surveys published by the National Institute of Statistics). Other documents such as the report of a Systems Audit carried out by the European Commission in 2009 and a report published on behalf of the NGO Coalition for Structural Funds (Emergency Call for Structural Funds, 2010) were also taken into account.

Building and Analysis of a Programme Database

We invested a significant amount of time in building and subsequently analysing a Programme Database with a view to ensuring we had an integrated, robust and comprehensive picture of the programme to work with. This was necessary for a number of reasons. For example, data relating to various aspects of the programme are held in different forms and in different places and do not necessarily 'speak' to each other for a range of technical and other reasons (e.g., data relating to applications for funding is maintained in one form and system whereas data relating to the contracting of ultimately successful project applications is held in another form and system). It was also the case that certain data were not entered into the relevant databases whatsoever. In these instances we worked from the offices of the MA with paper files and transferred relevant data to our database.

The integrated database that was built over the course of the evaluation pulls all of the various available sources together and allows for orderly tracking and analysis of the roll out of the processes and systems that underpin the management and administration of the programme over

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the course of the reference period for the evaluation. In short, the database has served the evaluation through ensuring accurate and verifiable reporting on the rollout of the programme[5].

Interviews and Consultation

Throughout the evaluation we engaged in ongoing and detailed engagement and consultation with the MA. This involved consultation with a range of personnel through informal contact (for example, in relation to technical issues regarding data) to more formalised interaction with the Programming and Evaluation Unit staff. Our engagement with the MA also involved, for example, work with physical files in the offices of the MA and interviews / meetings regarding various aspects of the role of the MA (e.g., information and publicity, monitoring, contracting)[6]. We also met with personnel from the MA as a group to discuss a wide range of issues regarding the management and implementation of the programme.

In addition to the above we undertook a wide range of stakeholder interviews. In some instances these were one-to-one type interviews regarding overview issues pertaining to the Romanian economy and society more generally or overview perspectives regarding the SOPHRD itself (such as our meetings with the Minister for Education, the Director for Social Inclusion at the Ministry of Labour, the President of the Roma Agency or representatives of the FDSC). As part of our fieldwork we also conducted a series of interviews in each of the eight regions with employer, trades union and NGO representatives (i.e., about 24 stakeholder interviews across the regions). In addition we met with Directors at each of the National IBs and, during our fieldwork in the regions we also met with a range of personnel from each of the Regional IBs[7].

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[5] We are confident that the database will serve as a useful legacy and tool that can assist in the ongoing management of and reporting on the programme.

[6] We wish to acknowledge the considerable assistance and courtesy afforded us by all members of the MA team throughout the evaluation.

[7] We wish to acknowledge the assistance of the FDSC and the BNS in respectively nominating NGO and Trades Union representatives in each of the regions for interview and to also acknowledge the assistance of representatives of the Regional IBs who serve on the Evaluation Steering Group for this evaluation for helping to organise the meetings with the IBs in the regions and, in certain instances, for providing rooms for the hosting of Focus Group sessions with project promoters.

The interviews and consultation helped to inform and nuance the evaluation, to bring the considerable experience and perspective of the interviewees to bear on the exercise and thereby ensure a more rounded evaluation.

Survey Work

We conducted three surveys in pursuit of the objectives of the evaluation as follows:

- Online survey of SOP HRD beneficiaries;
- Online survey of Unsuccessful Applicants;
- Omnibus Survey – General Public.

The first two surveys sought, respectively, to establish the views and experiences of SOP HRD beneficiaries and unsuccessful applicants regarding a wide range of issues in relation to their engagement with the programme but, in particular, their experience of the application and selection processes. The first (online survey of SOP HRD beneficiaries) also sought to capture the views and experiences of project beneficiaries regarding the contracting and selection processes. In each case questions were posed in relation to each of the evaluation criteria (i.e., relevance, efficiency, effectiveness).

Details regarding these surveys are set out in Table 1 below and the Survey Questions for the respective surveys are provided at Annex 2 and Annex 3 respectively.

Table 1: Details of Surveys of Contracted Projects & Unsuccessful Applicants

Survey	Method	Population	No. Surveyed	No. Responses	% Response Rate
Contracted Projects	Online, population survey	617	617	356 (of which 31 incomplete)	57,7%
Unsuccessful Applicants	Online, random sample survey (20%)	1,619	327	153 (of which 27 incomplete)	46,8%

Source: SOP HRD Monitoring data and own data from survey

The results of these surveys were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS).

The Omnibus Survey was carried out in pursuit of one of the requirements under the *Effectiveness* criterion (Sub-task 1.3.1), which sought to identify, *inter alia*, the extent to which the information and publicity measures associated with SOPHRD were effective in raising the level of awareness amongst the general public of the opportunities for grants under SOPHRD and the role of the EU in supporting the programme. It was conducted between July 26th and August 12th at 97 locations and involved face-to-face engagement with 1,240 people constituting a representative sample of the population aged 14+ years of age. The survey responses were subsequently coded and input into an Excel file for analysis.

Group Work

We conducted Focus Group sessions with groups of promoters of (i) Strategic type projects and (ii) Grant type projects in each of the regions with a view to further exploring the issues covered in the population survey of contracted projects.

We aimed to engage with about 10 Strategic and 10 Grant aided projects in each region to ensure national coverage in our approach. In the case of all projects the location of the project was associated with the address of the applicant. In the case of the Strategic projects selected for participation using the contact address of the applicant, our review of the database of contracted projects showed a very heavy concentration of such contracted projects in the Bucharest-Ilfov region and a limited number in almost all other regions. In that respect (as can be seen in Table 2 below) we invited practically all of the strategic projects in regions outside Bucharest to participate in the Focus Group sessions and we invited a random sample of those located in the Bucharest region itself:

Table 2: Strategic Projects (contracted) Invited to & Attending FG Session, by Region

Region Code	Region	No. of Projects	No. (%) of Projects Invited to FG Session		No. People (Projects) Attending FG Session
01	Nord-Est	25	19	76%	27 (15)
02	Sud-Est	10	8	80%	6(4)
03	Sud	12	10	83%	7(5)
04	Sud-Vest	8	8	100%	7 (4)
05	Vest	13	13	100%	16 (9)
06	Nord-Vest	29	13	45%	10 (7)
07	Centru	11	11	100%	6 (6)
08	Bucureşti-Ilfov	200	13	7%	8 (7)
	TOTAL	**308**	**95**	**31%**	**87 (57)**

Source: SOP HRD Monitoring data and own data from survey

In the case of Grant type projects (see Table 3 below) there is, once again, a concentration of contracted projects in the Bucharest-Ilfov region, but there are also more Grant type contracted projects in the regions. In this case, we selected a random sample from each region noting that we excluded projects financed under PA4 from our sampling; due to the fact that contracted projects financed under PA4 (Modernisation of the Public Employment Service) had already been heavily engaged with as part of the parallel *Ad Hoc Evaluation of the Public Employment Service*.

Table 3: GRANT Projects (contracted) Invited to & Attending FG Session, by Region

Region Code	Region	No. of Projects	No. (%) of Projects Invited to FG Session		No Attending FG Session
01	Nord-Est	43	11	26%	11 (8)
02	Sud-Est	33	11	33%	10 (7)
03	Sud	26	13	50%	10 (7)
04	Sud-Vest	36	12	33%	15 (6)
05	Vest	28	14	50%	14 (9)
06	Nord-Vest	25	13	52%	11 (9)
07	Centru	39	13	33%	7 (5)
08	Bucureşti-Ilfov	79	12	15%	6 (5)
	TOTAL	**309**	**99**	**32%**	**91 (50)**

Source: SOP HRD Monitoring data and own data from survey

1.5 The Structure of the Report

The remainder of the report is structured as described below. In the case of Chapters 2 to 4, Conclusions and Recommendations are provided at the end of each chapter. Final comments as well as Overarching Conclusions and Recommendations are detailed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2 explores the issue of relevance following the sequence of the sub-tasks and the evaluation questions posed in the ToR. In that regard the chapter opens with the significant question regarding the ongoing relevance of the OP priorities in the current socio-economic context before moving on to look at more technical aspects of the programme to include the relationship between Indicative Operations and Operational Objectives, the relationship between Eligible Activities and Indicative Operations and then the relationship between Indicators and Objectives. The penultimate section of the chapter looks at the extent to which the selected projects are relevant in the context of the monitoring system. The chapter closes with specific conclusions and recommendations associated with each of the evaluation questions under the relevance criterion.

Chapter 3 explores the issue of efficiency through the sub-task and related evaluation question posed in the ToR taking into account processes, system and financial management and the financial status of the programme. In the first instance we describe (through an analysis of the database developed for the evaluation) the output of the programme between November 2007 and December 2009 (taking into account the various calls for proposals, project evaluation and selection, project approval and contracting and project monitoring and expenditure). We then briefly describe the system and resources in place before dealing with each of the specific issues mentioned in the evaluation question (e.g., application, evaluation, monitoring and so on) taking on board the fieldwork we have carried out for the interim evaluation as described above. The chapter closes with specific conclusions and recommendations associated with each of the evaluation questions under the efficiency criterion.

Chapter 4 explores the issue of effectiveness following the sequence of the sub-tasks and the evaluation questions posed in the ToR and, as such, the chapter deals with Information and

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Publicity, Help-desk support, Application and Assessment, Monitoring and Indicators and the Horizontal principles. We also address the question of the external and internal factors that have impacted, continue to impact and will impact on the implementation of the programme in the future. The chapter closes with specific conclusions and recommendations associated with each of the evaluation questions under the effectiveness criterion.

Chapter 5 presents some *Over-Arching Conclusions and Recommendations* and final comment.