

1. METHODOLOGY

1.1 Evaluation Background

1. As originally planned, the *ad hoc* evaluation aimed to provide policy decision makers and programme managers with relevant information and credible analysis on particular aspects of the progress made in the implementation of the NSRF and the OPTA. It further aimed to identify main lessons learned during the first years of implementation, highlight best practices and contribute to the strategic reporting requested by Article 29 of Council Regulation (EC) Regulation N° 1083/2006¹.

Rationale

2. *Ad hoc* evaluations are designed to address a need for knowledge on operational or other issues identified in the course of the implementation of the NSRF and OPs. This *ad hoc* evaluation did not therefore form part of the annual evaluation plan drawn up by ACIS, but was commissioned specifically.

Focus and perspective

3. Since the coverage of the *ad hoc* evaluations under the contract is broad and unspecified, the first step was to define its scope and focus. The *factors* which guided the assessment of the needs of *ad hoc* evaluations were the following: changes in national and European policies, major bottlenecks in implementation, preparation of the next programming period, cross-cutting issues (concerning more than 2 MAs), focus on internal aspects of the system or on the beneficiaries, practical relevance and immediate applicability by stakeholders in the short term. The process of needs assessment included documentation review and interviews with the main stakeholders. A total of eight interviews were carried out with managers and evaluation staff at ECU/ACIS and managers at five MAs (those for OP DAC, SOP IEC, SOP T, ROP, SOP HRD). The desk review mainly included the most recent Monitoring Committee Minutes of the OPs and the Indicative Lists of Evaluations planned by ECU and the MAs.

4. Based on the above-mentioned factors a *tentative list of ad hoc evaluations* was drafted. Most of the stakeholders consulted in the matter preferred an analysis of the capacity of SI beneficiaries (both public and private).

1.2 Methodological Approach

1.2.1 Evaluation Theory

5. The theory of this evaluation was driven by an international approach to the conceptualisation of capacity development practice according to which a country's wider objective of reducing the socio-economic gap compared with other EU Member States is achieved by processes through which individuals and organisations obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own objectives. That is why, during the analysis of NSRF progress, the capacity of SI beneficiaries became one of the key issues of concern.

6. For the purpose of this evaluation, **beneficiary capacity** encompasses the following components:

- (i) Project management capacity – beneficiaries' capacity to manage the project in such a way as to achieve the results and define an "exit-strategy" from early stages of project implementation;

¹ Dated 11 July 2006.