

1. METHODOLOGY

1.1 Evaluation Background

1. As originally planned, the *ad hoc* evaluations within the frame of the contract aim 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. They further aim 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) +Nº 1083/2006¹.

Rationale

2. The *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. At NSRF-level, ACIS commissioned several evaluations under the project *Conducting Evaluations for the Period 2009-2010* implemented under the contract *Carrying out Evaluations during the Implementation of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) and the Operational Programme Technical Assistance (OPTA)*. One of the expected results of the project is a Synthesis Report (SyR), designed to synthesise the results of the individual Interim Evaluation Reports of the operational programmes (OPs). The preparation of the SyR started in June 2010, for completion in November 2010. Due to circumstances outside ACIS control, the Interim Evaluation reports for two OPs will not be ready in time for inclusion in the SyR schedule – Sectoral Operational Programme Environment (SOP ENV), due to the later commencement of the evaluation (in 2011) and Sectoral Operational Programme Transport (SOP T), because of MA dissatisfaction with the quality of efforts in 2009-10 to arrive at an adequate IE report for that sector.

4. Given the importance of these OPs in the NSRF (they encompass around 50% of the total value of the NSRF), and the likely distinct implications that the economic crisis may have for them, ACIS, with the consent of the respective MAs, decided to commission a separate 'horizontal review' of the infrastructure investment under these two OPs, in order to generate salient input into the SyR on this important topic. This Review constitutes the Second Ad Hoc Evaluation under the project referred to in the Preamble.

¹ Laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF).

1.2 Evaluation Design

5. The ToR (ref: **Annex 2**) stipulate as the overall objective of this review to analyse and draw out the implications of the economic crisis for progress, as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation across the two infrastructure-related OPs (ref: **Annex 3**) for, respectively, Transport and Environment.

6. Without being an evaluation as such, the review was intended to focus on the four evaluation criteria also addressed in the 2009 Interim Evaluations: relevance, consistency, effectiveness and efficiency. The evaluation questions (Q) addressing these criteria are the following:

Relevance

- **Q1** - The socio-economic analysis underlying the two OPs is based on indicators up to 2004/05. What important changes have occurred since then and are expected in the future?
- **Q2** - How do these changes in the socio-economic context affect the OP and its priority axes, in particular their relevance to Romania's investment needs. Is relevance reduced or increased by the crisis, and if so in what way?

Consistency

- **Q3** - Is the implementation to date of the Priority Axes within the OPs complementary with each other?
- **Q4** - Are the OPs and Priority Axes coherent with any recent major relevant national and international policy/strategies and investment programmes, including strategies to deal with the economic crisis?
- **Q5** - Are there overlaps in the implementation of the Priorities or operations within each OP and between these and other investments in the two sectors?

Effectiveness

- **Q6** - What is the actual implementation progress to the cut-off date? What is the gap between actual and planned progress? In particular, based on approaches to date and the likely project pipeline, what is the likelihood that the OPs will achieve their targets?
- **Q7** - Will the progress to date (and the rate of progress) lead to the achievement of the objectives of the Operational Programmes and Priority Axes?
- **Q8** - What are the internal and external factors contributing to the gap between actual and planned performance? Are these factors at policy and decision-making level, management and implementation level? What is the nature and extent of specific obstacles such as policy-making capabilities, structures of implementation bodies, lack of investment prioritisation, relationships within and between structures, lack of personnel, lack of skills, and other evident obstacles?
- **Q9** - How has the economic crisis affected implementation progress, negatively or positively? What are the specific effects involved, e.g. budgetary difficulties, personnel shortages? Is this similar or different across the two OPs and the Priority Axes?

Efficiency

- **Q10** - Is the management system² (managing authority, intermediary bodies, beneficiaries) functional and operating efficiently?
- **Q11** - How has the economic crisis affected efficiency, e.g. did it affect resources? Costs? Supply of services?

7. The evaluation was carried out on the basis of an evidence-based approach, taking into account the particularities of each of the two OPs addressed. For all evaluation questions the process of data collection was organised in two stages.

8. *First stage data collection* consisted of desk research. In accordance with the ToR (ref: **Annex 2**) and after the consultation with the evaluation stakeholders carried out during the evaluation kick-off meeting, the desk research included both the strategic documents for the two OPs, as well as more operational documentation (ref: **Annex 4**). Based on the secondary data collected during this stage, the evaluators drafted the data collection tool for the next stage.

9. *Second stage data collection* included interviews and two thematic workshops. Interviews were carried out with representatives of the two Management Authorities (MAs), of the Intermediary Bodies (IBs) for SOP ENV and relevant beneficiaries. There were eight interviews for SOP ENV and 5 interviews for SOP T. The list of the interviewees is presented in **Annex 5** and the Interview Guideline is in **Annex 6**.

10. The evaluators drafted the preliminary findings of the review based on the primary and secondary data collected. The preliminary findings were presented and validated in a thematic workshop organised for each OP, held on 27/10/2010 (for SOP ENV) and 01/11/2010 (SOP T). Representatives of the MAs, IBs (for SOP ENV) and beneficiaries attended the workshops.

² Management system means planning, launching the call, quality of the project applications (and reasons for rejection), timeliness of the selection procedures, Timeliness of contracting, timeliness of processing applications for reimbursement.