Executive Summary

This report presents results of evaluation of the electronic systems used within implementation of various Operational Programmes of the 2007-2013 programming period, in Romania. This evaluation has been concluded within ex-ante evaluation of the Romanian Partnership Agreement – a document prepared on 31 May 2013.

The evaluation aimed at answering to three questions:

1. Are there enough regulations and procedures in force for the data exchange required by the new regulations?
2. To what extent are electronic systems comprehensive enough?
3. To what extent do electronic systems meet the elements in the checklist to be drafted by evaluators (ease of use, reduced administrative burden, data aggregation, data quality, search options, data availability in due time, data security, etc.)?

Used methodology included documentary analysis with the most appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods, consultations and plausibility checks with all relevant stakeholders and sector experts:

- Documentary analysis: EU Regulations; Romanian regulations; previous evaluations; documentation of electronic systems, in total 29 documents have been reviewed (see annex 8);
- Check-lists containing 9 areas of analysis have been developed for 7 electronic systems that were analysed (see annex 1);
- 3 online Questionnaires have been disseminated. The one for beneficiaries has been sent by email to over 9440 respondents, out of which 661 replied. The questionnaires for authorities, both for regular users and for coordinators and/or administrators of electronic systems have been sent by official letter to all MAs and IBs (67 institutions), and the link was further distributed inside the organisations to relevant users and coordinators/administrators of electronic systems for data exchange. As a result of this process, the project received 175 answers from users of electronic systems and 69 from coordinators/administrators. (see annex 2);
- Interviews with 17 administrators or coordinators of the electronic systems from 8 institutions were held (see annexed 3 and 4);
- 2 Focus groups – with 17 representatives of all institutions managing various electronic systems and also with 17 representatives of CSF funds beneficiaries were held (see annexes 5, 6 and 7).

The following were the main conclusions of the evaluation responding to the three questions above:

<u>Conclusions related to the requirements of the new EU Regulations and the existing national legal and procedural framework</u>

All key pieces are in place vis-a-vis the national legal framework that should support the fulfilment of the e-Cohesion requirements – they are regulated by the Romanian laws relating to: electronic signature, archiving of electronic documents, electronic time stamping of documents and protection of personal data.

Conclusions related to comprehensiveness of existing electronic systems

In terms of fulfilling minimum requirements stemming from the new Regulations of the European Commission for the programming period 2014-2020, the only area of concern remains the specific e-Cohesion requirement – for "full implementation of the electronic data exchange between beneficiaries and authorities". At present, with the existing electronic systems, this area is practically uncovered (and therefore needs focus of the Romanian authorities). The exceptions are few and extremely limited.

The MySMIS system that was developed recently and that has just undergone the testing stage, promises to solve most issues of that problem. For the current 6 Operational Programmes the system was designed with and for, MySMIS would fulfil entirely the e-Cohesion requirements.

Conclusions related to compliance of the electronic systems with the checklist

As a general image, the electronic systems are in place, they fulfil the minimum requirements, but they do require improvement of quality. From the technical point of view, all the systems prove to be satisfactory, with only few particular exceptions where improvements are required.

The area where most of the systems disappoint relates to satisfying the users' needs:

- All the systems need to improve their portfolio of predefined reports, in order to produce those reports their specific users need. Especially, SMIS lacks mostly of the predefined specific reports required by its users, depending on their individual and specific needs.
- All systems would benefit of a major revision in terms of features/functionality and data content as such to become more user oriented.

Recommendations are also split along those three main evaluation questions:

Recommendations for ensuring the coverage of the e-Cohesion minimal requirements

1. Finalising the implementation of MySMIS for the 6 current OPs it was designed for:
    a. The highest levels of management in each relevant Ministry have to be aware of the requirements and support the implementation process of the necessary changes in order to fully fulfil the requirements.
    b. All IT services from the various involved bodies (Ministries, MAs, IBs, etc.) should coordinate and cooperate at all times. That requires establishment of a working IT group, which would meet regularly to discuss and exchange information on joint implementation of the systems in their respective institutions.
    c. Each institution involved in the process should make appropriate changes in their internal working procedures in order to ensure effective implementation of the new system.
    d. Training of users – there is a need for assuring constant long-term schedule of training of users for any IT system, including series of trainings for beneficiaries (it can be financed from OPTA).
    e. Last but not least, ensuring the full package of IT services and resources for the new system (including system administration, help-desk, data operators and

technical maintenance) – it requires financing of those services, with necessary manpower and budgets.

2. Extending MySMIS in the area of ETC
   Further software development for MySMIS is needed. The solution could be either an upgrade of existing MySMIS, or a copy of MySMIS completely modified to fit the ETC requirements.

3. Covering the minimal requirements for SOP HRD
   Extending MySMIS to cover also the specific needs of SOP HRD and replacing ActionWeb with MySMIS.

Recommendations for improving the existing electronic systems used by the authorities

All systems should undergo a major revision, which may be required anyway in order to update the electronic systems to the specific elements of the future programming period:

1. Improvement of the portfolio of predefined reports, in order to produce those reports that the users need. SMIS needs mostly that improvement.
2. Improvement of features/functionality and data structures, in order to become more user-oriented. All systems should try to provide more useful features for their users, allowing them to save working time while using the systems and to reduce the risk of human errors.
3. SMIS and MIS-ETC should be improved in their user interface (at least for the most important or complex forms currently userd) in order to provide: easier understanding, better overview of data in the system, easier retrieving of needed data, etc.
4. SMIS, ActionWeb and MIS-ETC should ensure enough control mechanisms to allow timely identification of errors existing in the system.
5. SPCDR should revise its mechanisms of validation in order to cover all relevant input data in a reliable manner.
6. Improvement of mechanisms for help-desk and technical assistance for SMIS and ActionWeb is necessary, in order to reduce the rate of minor incidents and to improve the response time in case of incident (at all levels where the system is used).

General recommendations for all electronic systems

1. Ensuring continuous software development support, especially for MySMIS, SMIS and MIS-ETC (which could be brought under the same ownership as SMIS in order to concentrate the efforts):
   a. Quick repair of software deficiencies claimed by the users.
   b. Improvement of support provided to the various programmes, especially for their specific needs.
   c. Quick update to the changes in the real world environment.

2. Ensuring continuous training of all users:
   a. Introductory training for new users (to be repeated every certain periods of time).
   b. Second training for existing users, for refreshing knowledge on less obvious features (needed for more complex systems).
   c. Advanced training for specific categories of users (advanced features of the system and methods of solving certain complex tasks).