

2 Approach and Methodology

2.1 Description of the assignment (objectives and evaluation questions)

The objective of this evaluation done within ex-ante evaluation of the Partnership Agreement (PA) as defined in the Terms of Reference (ToR) was to answer to the evaluation specific questions regarding the assessment of the electronic systems ensuring the information exchange between the Romanian authorities and the beneficiaries (Question III.1) during the programming period 2014-2020:

III.1 Are there enough regulations and procedures in force for the data exchange required by the new regulations? To what extent are electronic systems comprehensive enough? 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, research options, data availability in due time, data security etc.)?

According to the ToR, the requirements have to be identified and included in the checklist tool for the electronic systems evaluation fundamental question above (Q.III.1).

2.2 Methodology

The evaluation of electronic systems for data exchange covered the last evaluation question of the current assignment – Q.III.1 – but following the same logic of evaluation as foreseen for major Question II.1, it has started with the launch of this project.

The methodology adopted combined documentary analysis with the most appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods, consultations and plausibility checks with all stakeholders and sector experts.

We started this part of evaluation with documentary analysis based on the new regulations issued by the European Commission, the procedures and regulations that are in force and the documentation on the electronic systems for data exchange. We added to results of the documentary analysis the information collected from interviews with administrators or coordinators of the analysed electronic systems.

We have gathered information on several information systems in place within different Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies. These systems are listed in the “Findings” section of this evaluation report. Therefore results of our evaluation contain information and analysis concerning the gathered data on those systems.

We have prepared an efficient checklist covering the full range of factors that are relevant to the Question related to electronic systems. The list covers: ease of use, reduced administrative burden, data aggregation, data quality, search options, data availability in due time, data security, etc. The completed checklists prepared by the experts for existing electronic systems are attached in the Annexes.

The full data collection needed for the completion of the checklist was achieved by additional tools like on-line questionnaires and a focus group similarly organised as for the administrative capacity evaluation (Q.II.1). Details of these tools can also be found in Annexes.

Based on the request of the contracting authority of this evaluation, concise update of the situation was done in December 2014. That update was foreseen as a quick exercise providing the units running the electronic systems with simple set of questions requesting them to answer in short period of time. That general though limited review of major changes and amendments introduced to those electronic systems since the first evaluation had been completed, based on few responses received [see annex 9].

Our methodology can be summed up:

- Documentary analysis – some of the main documents:
 - General EC Regulations;
 - Documents about e-Cohesion Regulation for 2014-2020;
 - Relevant Romanian legislation;
 - Previous evaluations, including references to electronic systems;
 - Documentation of existing electronic systems: presentation, users' manuals, technical documentation, procedures, etc.
- Check-lists;
- Online Questionnaires – 3 questionnaires were elaborated and published online to support filling in the checklists:
 - For beneficiaries (the questions related to electronic systems were incorporated within a common questionnaire used also for administrative capacity);
 - For authorities (regular users);
 - For authorities (coordinators or administrators of electronic systems);
- Interviews with administrators or coordinators of the electronic systems; (replicated for the second Intermediate report)
- Focus group – with representatives of all institutions managing various electronic systems.

For the update of the analysis, to elaborate the Second Intermediate Evaluation report on the electronic systems for information exchange, the coordinators of the major MISs have been interviewed, to find out about if any changes and updates occurred, rising from the development of defining and putting in place the 2014-2020 institutional and regulatory framework in Romania. Also the list of literature was reviewed to verify if any other new documents need to be analysed.

Methodologically, the update of the analysis used the information from previous analysis: the desk research and checklist, the conclusions of the in-depth interviews and the online questionnaires answered by both user and administrators of systems, which were validated through focus groups with representatives of beneficiaries and authorities of CSF fund. The findings from the first report were updated by interviews with system coordinators to elaborate the second report. However the findings validity has been verified with specific methods for data validation, as indicated in the technical offer and inception report, only in the first exercise, as their use would have been justified in case critical changes in the systems had been occurred.