

Lot 3 - Evaluation of ROP 2014-2020 interventions

Evaluation REPORT

April 2019

Theme 6. Stimulating regional mobility by improving road infrastructure

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Lot 3 - Evaluation of ROP 2014-2020 interventions

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**Theme 3. Supporting energy efficiency and promoting
carbon reduction strategies**

EVALUATION REPORT - FINAL VERSION

April 2019

DISCLAIMER

This report is the result of an independent evaluation conducted by the consortium led by Lattanzio Advisory Spa (Lead partner) and Lattanzio Monitoring & Evaluation Srl (Partner 2) on the basis of the contract concluded with the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration in September 2018.

The expressed opinions are of the consortium and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Contracting Authority, namely the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, nor of the Managing Authority for the Regional Operational Program 2014-2020.

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List of abbreviations

7R	7 regions, less developed regions: North-East, South-East, South Muntenia, South-West Oltenia, West, North-West, Center
CA	Contracting Authority
RDA	Regional Development Agencies
ROP MA	Managing Authority for the Regional Operational Program
NAPP	National Agency for Public Procurement
PA	Priority Axis
RRA	Romanian Road Authority
TA	Technical Assistance
EIB	European Investment Bank
ROP EO	Office for the Evaluation of the Regional Operational Programme
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECC	Evaluation Coordination Committee
CdS	Specifications/ Terms of Reference
EC	European Commission
CESTRIN	Center for Road Traffic Studies and Informatics
MC	Monitoring Committee
NCRIA	National Company for Road Infrastructure Administration
CSF	Common Strategic Framework
ESC	Evaluation Scientific Committee
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
DG	Directorate General
CR	County Road
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
IFI	International Financial Institutions
GPI	General Police Inspectorate

NIS	National Institute of Statistics
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investments
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
GTMP	General Transport Master Plan
UF	Unfinished projects (initiated by other types of funding)
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
IP	Investment Priority
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MEP	Multiannual Evaluation Programme
SUMP	Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans
NRDP	National Rural Development Programme
LDNP	Local Development National Programme
OP	Operational Programme
BIOP	Big Infrastructure Operational Programme
ROP	Regional Operational Programme
SUERD	European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
TEN-T	Trans-European Transport Network
ATU	Administrative Territorial Unit
EU	European Union

1. Executive summary

This evaluation report presents the progress and performance achieved in the management and implementation of the interventions financed under the 2014-2020 Regional Operational Programme (ROP) - Priority Axis 6 during the period 01.01.2016 - 31st December 2018, as resulted from the carried out evaluation activities.

1. Conclusions

- Both the development and modernization of the county roads, as well as the access to the TEN-T corridors and, implicitly to the cities and municipalities, continue to be of great and very high relevance for the beneficiaries;
- Preliminary prioritizing at regional level the projects for the modernization of the road infrastructure represents a success factor for PA 6, at this has permitted to create a favorable framework for their early preparation;
- By implementing the projects contracted until 31.12.2018, the ROP will contribute by about 16% to the reduction of the share of non-modernized roads from total county roads at national level until 2023;
- With 172 financing proposals submitted by the date of this assessment in all regions and all types of projects, covering the ERDF budget allocated in proportion of 282%, the calls for proposals have reached their purpose. The degree of coverage of the financial allocation through the contracted budgets is of 165.8%, until 31.12.2018, whilst payments amount to 463.2 million lei, that is about 9.6% of the total non-reimbursable allocation at PA level;
- Until de cut-off date, the contracted projects did not cover all the regions and / or project types, while the SUERD and BI are still under evaluation. Up to the time of drafting the report, 16 contracts were signed;
- The contracted projects will determine a significant impact on the increase of the accessibility of the rural and urban areas located near the TEN-T network and on reaching the targets of the result indicators related to the Specific Objective;
- In the case of the less developed regions (including ITI), the degree of contracting of the ERDF eligible budget until 31.12.2018 (169.2%) and the structure of the contracted projects creates the premises for achieving the assumed objectives. SMIS data shows that 106 financing applications were submitted by 36 County Councils. Thus, the total values for the results and achievement indicators are expected to be achieved by 2023;
- The lack of projects contracted until the reference date of the study in the Bucharest-Ilfov region (developed region) indicates a high risk regarding the achievement of the targets assumed for this category of region;

- According to the information provided by the beneficiaries, the rate of response to the calls launched was influenced by the difficulty of respecting the delivery terms determined mainly by the strict requirements regarding the proof of the property status, especially the first call, but also by the successive modifications of the applicant's guidelines and the high technical complexity and the large number of forms / documents required;
- Government Ordinance 30/2018 regarding the establishment of measures in the field of European funds and for the completion of some normative acts had positive effects on the degree of contracting and the attainment of the targets assumed for the results and output indicators, by consecrating the takeover mechanism for ROP financing 2014-2020 of the projects initiated by other types of financing and whose degree of maturity is minimum as regards the stage of works contract (unfinished projects - NF);
- The long duration of procedures for the procurement of works and the low capacity of the construction companies (from the financial and human resources point of view) are the main risk factors regarding the achievement of the established objectives.
- The decision to take on ERDF funding for projects initiated through other sources (unfinished projects) had a positive impact on:
 - The level of payments made from the total non-refundable allocation;
 - The final number of projects contracted at national level;
 - The dynamics of contracting ERDF budget at national level;
 - The value of the amounts reimbursed;
 - The number of modernized km contracted, representing 28.9% of the total modernized km contracted until 31.12.2018;
 - The number of inhabitants benefiting from the improved transport infrastructure, with a contribution of 19.82% of the total population at national level benefiting from improved transport.
- The important contribution of the unfinished projects contracted is mainly due to the fact that they were in an advanced stage of the works, and the applicant's guidelines have answered the needs of the applicants and have not undergone changes across different stages of the procedure.
- MySMIS, managed at the MFE level still needs adjustments, in view to become an effective tool within the process of progress monitoring.

Recommendations

- a. Recommendations regarding the reduction of the evaluation duration for the financing applications related to projects in this phase (BI, SUERD, ITI, 7R):
 - Increasing the number of people involved in the evaluation of financing applications;

- Early launch of the process of purchasing the evaluation services by the IBs and / or hiring the evaluators for a fixed term.
- b. Recommendations regarding the reduction of the contracting duration
 - The introduction in MySMIS of appropriate framework contracts for PA 6;
 - Marking in MySMIS the latest version of the documents (results after multiple clarifications and updates) in order to consolidate the set of contractual documents;
 - Increasing the number of persons involved in the contract elaboration process.
- c. Recommendations on increasing the speed of transmission of Payment Requests / Reimbursement Requests
 - Consultation and consideration of the beneficiaries' requests regarding the elimination of requirements related to annexing the documents that do not change during the period between two Reimbursement Requests (RR) submissions, as well as accepting scanned documents before the creation and numbering of the RR file;
 - Updating the procedures according to the result of the consultations.
- d. Recommendations on improving the use of MySMIS
 - Uploading progress reports by beneficiaries directly to MySMIS;
 - Optimizing the functioning and use of MySMIS, in order to eliminate the need to send documents on paper (i.e. documents related to the procurement procedures);
 - Creating the possibility of accessing documents from different modules of the MY SMIS application, in order to eliminate multiple uploads of the same document;
 - Conducting a survey among the beneficiaries regarding the problems encountered in using MySMIS;
 - Organizing training sessions on the use of MySMIS by RDA addressed to the beneficiaries of funds in order to promote a unitary working method, as well as to avoid the introduction of inconsistent or incorrect information;
 - Reviewing the module related to the introduction of updates MySMIS in order to reduce the work-load for the ROP IBs staff;
 - The MA ROP shall assess the information entered in the SMIS regarding projects in terms of their accuracy and completeness.
- e. Recommendations regarding the next programming period
 - Improving the relevant legislative framework for reducing the duration of the tabulation process, modification of the government decision on the certification of the

public domain owned by the ATUs, government decision on the classification of roads, modification of the Water Law allowing the County Councils to carry out construction work on bridges in the riverbeds and reducing the duration of the elaboration of the ANEVAR report in the cases in which the expropriation for the cause of public interest is necessary.

- Clarifying the aspects concerning the property at the level of the County Councils;
- Prior consultation of the beneficiaries regarding the content of the applicant's guidelines in order to define a clear and easy-to-fill content of the application form, especially as regards the sections related to the budget and the procurement plan;
- Establishing the necessary documents for the financing application (property titles, permits, etc.);
- Clearly establish the categories of eligible and non-eligible expenses;
- Avoiding modification of the guidelines between different calls;
- Organizing training sessions on the content of the applicant's guidelines, how to interpret the eligibility criteria, the content and how to fill in the application form, the classification of the expenses in eligible and ineligible expenses or lessons learned from the previous programming period.
- Including the unfinished projects on the eligibility list from the first calls, in order to ensure an increased value of the volume of expenses starting with the first year of programme implementation.
- Improving the legislation on public procurement regarding the establishment of selection criteria to support the participation in the procurement procedures of bidders with the appropriate technical and financial capacity and the faster resolution of the appeals.
- Initiating the process of identifying and prioritizing projects at regional level for the next period.
- Beneficiaries shall launch the public procurement procedures related to the implementation of the projects, as soon as possible, as condition for resolution.
- Ensuring the continuity of the modernization process along the entire route of the roads included in the priority project portfolio, by encouraging stronger partnerships between the County Councils in the same region and the approach of interregional projects.

2. Existing situation

Investments under the Priority Axis 6 aim at the Thematic Objective 7 - Promoting sustainable transport systems and removing bottlenecks in major network infrastructures, through two investment priorities:

- 6.1 - Stimulating regional mobility by connecting secondary and tertiary nodes to TEN-T infrastructure, including multimodal nodes; specific objective: increasing the accessibility of rural and urban areas by upgrading road transport infrastructure to connect to the TEN-T network, in coordination with regional development plans;
- 6.2 - Developing and improving environmentally-friendly (including low-noise) and low-carbon transport systems, including inland waterways and maritime transport, ports, multimodal links and airport infrastructure, in order to promote sustainable regional and local mobility; specific objective: increasing the accessibility of the Danube Delta area by modernizing the river passenger transport.

The inclusion of the investment priority 6.2 under Priority Axis 6 was approved by the European Commission with the Implementing Decision dated 16.10.2018.

The indicators set at the priority axis level and their target values are:

- Result Indicator: Persons benefiting from improved transport, Number of persons:
 - Increase from 4.025 million persons in 2013 to 5.150 million persons in 2023 in less developed regions;
 - Increase from 131,000 persons in 2013 to 149,000 persons in 2023 in more developed regions.
- Output indicators:
 - Length of newly built roads connected to TEN-T, km - 5 km by 2023 for less developed regions;
 - Length of rebuilt or upgraded roads connected to TEN-T, km - 2,055 km by 2023 for less developed regions and 20 km by 2023 for more developed regions.

For the period 2014-2020, a non-reimbursable amount of approx. 8.38 billion euro was allocated to the ROP, of which 6.86 billion euro (including the performance reserve) represent the EU's support through the ERDF, and 1.53 billion euro the national contribution (national budget, local budgets)¹. PA 6 benefits from a significant amount of the ERDF financial resources allocated to the ROP (around 885.4 million euro representing 12.91% of EU total support for ROP 2014-2020).

The investments proposed for financing are addressed to both the less-developed regions of Romania (North-East, South-East, South Muntenia, South-West Oltenia, West, North-West and Centre) in order to recover the development gaps, and to the more developed regions (Bucharest-Ilfov), to exploit their competitive potential. Separate financial allocations are foreseen for ITI and SUERD.

By 31st December 2018, the information extracted from the unitary IT system (SMIS) indicated that under Priority Axis 6, within the investment priority 6.1, 172 applications for funding were submitted, corresponding to a total non-reimbursable budget of 13.4 billion lei. Of these, 106 projects were approved and contracted, with a total non-reimbursable

¹ Values according to the ROP 2014-2020, revised version approved on 16 October 2018 by EC Decision no. C (2018) 6889

budget of 8.0 billion lei. 102 projects are under implementation in less developed regions and 4 in the Danube Delta ITI region. None of the contracted projects was completed. After the reference date (31st December 2018) and by the time of writing, 16 contracts were signed, of which 8 were SUERD contracts, 2 contracts in the ITI region, 3 contracts in the South Muntenia region, 2 in the West region and 1 contract in the Bucharest-Ilfov region, totalling 1,218.1 million lei.

The coverage of the financial allocation through the contracted budgets by 31st December 2018 is of 165.8%; the payments made amounted to 463.2 million lei, representing approximately 9.6% of the total non-reimbursable allocation at the Priority Axis level.

The main beneficiaries are the administrative territorial units, as administrator of the road transport infrastructure of county interest. According to the competences related to the investment objective's elements, partnerships were created for the implementation of the projects, between the local public administration authorities (ATU counties and ATU city/ town/ municipality).

The distribution of the contracted value is balanced at the level of the 36 counties having projects in implementation (Annex 12, table 1), only Bistrița-Năsăud county (8.6%) and Cluj county (7.6%) having contracted projects whose totalled budget represents more than 5% of the total.

3. Phases of the study

A. Specialized literature

In the view of the World Economic Forum, infrastructure is one of the twelve pillars of competitiveness defined as "the set of institutions, policies and factors that determine the level of productivity of a country"². A good quality infrastructure is a determinant factor for

² <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/09/what-is-competitiveness/>

the localization of economic activities and for their development. For this reason, the annual Global Competitiveness Review developed by the World Economic Forum includes country scores on the quality of different infrastructures, based on users' perceptions. The Global Competitiveness Report 2018 mentions Romania in a steady position as compared to the previous year, according to the global competitiveness index (52nd out of 140 states), 66th in terms of road infrastructure connectivity index, 113th in terms of quality of road infrastructure and 18th in terms of road infrastructure density.

There is a significant number of studies and reports in the literature that investigate the relationship between the quality of transport infrastructure, on the one hand, and general economic growth and level of development, on the other. To determine the nature and meaning of this relationship, the approaches involved both qualitative and statistical analyses to identify the level of correlation between different measures and indicators.

However, the report "Infrastructure in the EU: Developments and Impact on Growth" (European Economic Occasional Papers 203, EC, December 2014) notes that there are few studies on the relationship between infrastructure and economic development in EU countries, and with reference to the new EU member states mentions the research carried out in Poland by Rutkowski (2009).

Within the same report, four ways in which infrastructure can have a positive impact on economic growth are identified. Firstly, energy and transport are used as inputs into the production function of enterprises and, therefore, directly or indirectly influence production costs and, ultimately, their competitiveness from an international and national perspective (Pradhan and Bagchi, 2013). Secondly, infrastructure investments can stimulate capital accumulation by providing opportunities for its development (Kirkpatrick, 2004). Thirdly, it can stimulate aggregated demand by increasing spending on construction and maintenance operations (Wang, 2002; Esfahani & Ramirez, 2003, Pradhan, Bagchi, 2013). Finally, it can induce other investments by providing positive signals to key sectors of the economy (Fedderke and Garlick, 2008).

The researches did not lead to a common point of view regarding the extent of the impact that infrastructure development has on economic growth. Kamps (2005) analysed the impact of public capital on real GDP in 22 OECD countries and in most cases identified a positive relationship (Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Portugal and Spain). Jong A Pin and de Haan (2008) identified a positive relationship in Sweden, Finland, France and Greece as well as a negative relationship in Ireland, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Belgium and Spain. On the whole, however, road infrastructure is identified as a factor influencing economic growth.

Four major categories of effects are assigned to investment projects in transport infrastructure³ and are relevant for assessing their impact:

³ Ex-Post evaluation of major projects financed by the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund for the period 2000-2013, final report prepared for the European Commission by the Consortium made up of the Center for Industrial Studies (lead partner, Italy), Ramboll Management Consulting A/ S (Denmark), Significance BV (The Netherlands), TPLAN Consulting (Italy), June 2018

- Effects on economic growth (e.g. travel time, vehicle operating costs, service provider's revenue);
- Effects on the quality of life and well-being (e.g. safety and security, noise level);
- Effects on the sustainability of environmental aspects (pollution degree, gas emissions);
- Effects on social and territorial cohesion (distribution of income and benefits at social and/ or territorial level).

The Working Paper of the EC Evaluation Unit - External Services (Output and Impact Level Indicators - Road Sector, February 2009) presents a key set of effects and indicators covering the expected results and impact of the road support, starting from best international practices. The identification of the effects considers 5 large result areas: infrastructure, institutional reform, economy, environment and social aspects.

The study "Financial Instruments for European Transport Infrastructure" (European Parliament, 2012) reviews the main financial instruments that are used to finance investments in the European transport infrastructure and in particular the TEN-T network. They are presented and analysed as sources of funding: Member States budget at national or sub-national level; contributions paid from the EU budget, often in the form of grants for direct investment, capital contributions or operating grants; public policy banks - commonly known as international financial institutions (IFIs) - such as the EBRD or the EIB; commercial banks; the bond market; private equity (capital) and user charges. Even though the conclusions on the use of some of these instruments (the bond market, the public private partnership, user charges) are favourable, they remain reserved, requiring more detailed regulations.

B. Data Collection

The following categories of data were collected during the evaluation report drafting:

1. Quantitative data

The collected quantitative data aimed at collecting information on:

- *Set of indicators* - The data were collected in accordance with the Program Monitoring System (SMIS) records for each project in implementation under the investment priority 6.1. For the analysis, the data were integrated at both regional and national level.

- *Monitoring of the stages completed by 31st December 2018* - The information gathered from the Program Monitoring System (SMIS) provided relevant information for answering to evaluation questions such as:
 - Number of funding applications submitted by type of intervention and development regions;
 - Contracting degree by types of intervention and development regions;
 - The utilization rate of the ERDF eligible budget by types of intervention and development regions;
 - Impact of unfinished projects.

2. Qualitative data

Qualitative data were collected to supplement the information provided by the quantitative data. Such qualitative data were needed to evaluate:

- The extent to which the needs identified at the time of drafting the ROP 2014-2020 remain relevant;
- Beneficiaries' perception regarding the added value and sustainability of the registered effects from the perspective of the accessibility of rural and urban areas in proximity to the TEN-T network;
- The extent to which the funded interventions will lead to the improvement of road traffic on county roads with direct or secondary connection to the TEN-T network;
- Identifying lessons learned;
- The relevance of the findings resulting from the quantitative data analysis.

The following methods were used to collect qualitative data:

- Survey conducted through online questionnaire on 32 financing beneficiaries with reference to all the 106 projects contracted by the reference date, to which we received an answer on 90 of them;
- Carrying out 4 representative case studies;
- Organization of a focus group with the participation of the beneficiaries;
- Organization of a focus group with the participation of the stakeholders;
- Scenario analysis with stakeholders to assess the sustainability of the registered effects from the perspective of the accessibility of rural and urban areas in proximity to the TEN-T network;
- Performing an evaluation Brainstorming within focus groups;
- Interviews with the selected beneficiaries for the drafting the case studies and with the RDAs within which they are located;
- Organization of an experts panel.

C. Description of the methodology

The evaluation exercise was based on a solid methodological approach tailored to the specificity and nature of each evaluation question formulated in the Specifications.

The analysis model was constructed taking into account: documentary analysis, evaluability analysis, MEP recommendations as well as the lessons learned from previous evaluations and the long experience of the Provider and his team.

Given the current state of implementation of the interventions under Priority Axis 6, the model has analysed technical and financial progress and impact was estimated according to the scenarios defined with stakeholders and experts in the priority axis field.

The methods of data collection, processing, analysis and interpretation, including quantitative and qualitative methods, are described in the following Table.

Table 1 Methods of data collection, processing, analysis and interpretation

METHOD	DESCRIPTION
Research/ Documentary Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ It started in the debut phase of the evaluation process and continued throughout the implementation of the project. ■ Framework documents, programmatic and strategic documents, as well as a number of other relevant documents, cross-evaluation reports, etc. were analysed. The list of the analysed documents is presented in Annex 2. ■ The analysis of the documentation was a complex activity due to the very large amount of data and information that had to be processed in a relatively limited time.
Field research Qualitative research component Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ For an efficient use of the resources and of the time available at the data collection and analysis stage, it was agreed that the target group of the participants in the semi-structured interviews should be composed of the beneficiaries selected as case study protagonists and, respectively, the RDAs in whose area the beneficiaries are located. ■ They were conducted interviews with 5 beneficiaries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Buzău County Council- 2 participants; ○ Bistrița County Council - 2 participants; ○ Botoșani County Council - 1 participant; ○ Dâmbovița County Council - 2 participants; ○ Tulcea County Council - 1 participant. ■ They were conducted interviews with 4 RDA officers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ North-West - 3 participants; ○ North-East - 7 participants; ○ South-East - 4 participants;

METHOD	DESCRIPTION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ South-West Oltenia - 5 participants. ■ All the interviews were conducted on the basis of an interview guide specific to each interviewed category, covering a set of predefined questions on issues related to ROP 2014-2020 implementation. The content of the interview guides is presented in Annex 3; ■ The list of interviewees is presented in Annex 4 and the synthesis of the interviews in Annex 5.
<p>Field research</p> <p>Qualitative research component</p> <p>Focus Group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ According to the Specifications requirements, we organized: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1 focus group with beneficiaries of ROP-financed projects (Minute and synthesis in Annex 6) attended by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 10 persons representing Brăila County Council, Vâlcea County Council, Dâmbovița County Council, Bacău County Council, Covasna County Council, Harghita County Council, Gorj County Council; ▪ 3 MA representatives as observers; ○ 1 focus group with central level stakeholders (Minute and Synthesis in Annex 7), attended by 7 persons (North East RDA, South East RDA, ITI RDA, South Muntenia RDA, CESTRIN, CNAIR). ■ The methodology underlying this research method aimed at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Preparing the moderation guide for focus group with beneficiaries; ○ Drafting the questionnaire; ○ Preparing the moderation guide for focus group with stakeholders; ○ Drafting the questionnaire; ○ Developing the Sustainability Scenario to be discussed in the Focus Group with stakeholders; ○ Preparing the invitations for the participants; ○ Sending the agenda and the proposed work themes to be analysed during the event; ○ Running the focus groups according to the established protocol; ○ Transcription of discussions held during the event.

METHOD	DESCRIPTION
<p>Field research</p> <p>Qualitative research component</p> <p>Case Study</p>	<p>Four case studies were carried out on the following funding beneficiaries: Bistrița Năsăud County Council, Botoșani County Council, Dâmbovița County Council, Tulcea County Council.</p> <p>The methodology underlying this research method aimed at the following steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creating a database of possible projects; 2. Sizing the short list to 16 projects (15%) of the total contracted projects; 3. Creating the selection algorithm presented in Annex 8; 4. Drafting the short list of projects; 5. Selecting the projects for the case studies using the multi-criteria analysis; 6. Agreeing with the ROP MA the 4 case studies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bistrița-Năsăud County Council with the project Modernization of county road DJ172D: Mureșenii Bârgăului (DN17)-Lac Colibița-Colibița-Bistrița Năsăud (DN17)- (DN17) Josenii Bârgăului - Strâmba - Ilva Mică (DN17D) - Poiana Ilvei- Măgura Ilvei-Ilva Mare-Lunca Ilvei- Suceava county limit, Bistrița Năsăud County, LOT 2, LOT 3, LOT 4, SMIS code 117995; • Botoșani County Council with the project North-East Region - Strategic Road Axis 2: Botoșani-Iași code SMIS 112979; • Dâmbovița County Council - Rehabilitation and modernization of the road infrastructure in Dâmbovița County code SMIS 123471; • ITI Danube Delta - Tulcea County Council with the project Modernization of the regional transport infrastructure on Niculățel and Turda Sarichioi route, SMIS 115509; 7. Desk research regarding the selected projects; 8. Defining the Case Study structure; 9. Performing the interview with the beneficiaries in order to collect the other relevant data; 10. Carrying out the case studies.
<p>Qualitative research component</p> <p>Panel of Experts</p>	<p>The purpose of this panel was to validate/ invalidate a series of conclusions and recommendations that emerged from the evaluation process, as well as the scenarios analysis regarding the estimation of the sustainability degree of the registered effects from the perspective of the accessibility of the rural and urban areas located in proximity of the TEN-T network. The panel of experts consisted of 6 people representing</p>

METHOD	DESCRIPTION
	<p>consulting companies with experience in the field of transport and evaluation.</p> <p>In order to organize this panel, the following steps were taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Setting up the agenda for the event; ■ Defining the working themes; ■ Establishing a list of potential participants; ■ Sending the invitations; ■ Sending the agenda and the proposed working themes to be analysed by the experts; ■ Effective conduct of the event; ■ Transcript of the event (Synthesis of the discussions in Annex 9).
<p>Field research</p> <p>Quantitative research component</p> <p>Online survey based on questionnaires</p>	<p>The online survey based on questionnaires quantitative research component included the following steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Defining the target group. All the 106 projects contracted by 31.12.2018 were included in the target group. ■ Drafting the survey questionnaires. Considering the complexity of the proposed issues to be analysed, the questionnaire contained a set of questions, using a combination of question types, with a single variant or multiple choice variants. Where applicable, the target respondents had the possibility to introduce comments and explanations. The content of the Questionnaire is presented in Annex 10; ■ Validation of questionnaires; ■ Sending the link to fill in the questionnaire. All funding beneficiaries were informed by means of letters on the availability of the questionnaires and on the importance of participation by completing these questionnaires, followed by further communications via electronic mail. The questionnaire was applied by means of an electronic platform and could be accessed between 03.01.2019 - 18.01.2019 by all beneficiaries of ROP funding under PA6. The online questionnaire received 90 responses (85% response rate); ■ Data collection and aggregation. Survey data were mainly obtained through the CAWI (computer assisted web interviewing) method, via web without direct interaction with the interviewed subject responding to the questionnaire (SurveyMonkey platform was used); ■ Data processing; ■ Data interpretation and analysis. The analysis of the received answers is presented in Annex 11.

METHOD	DESCRIPTION
Field research	<p>The use of this method aimed at analysing the collected quantitative data at the level of a geographic entity, in order to identify possible territorial trends.</p> <p>The analysis methodology has gone through the following steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Structuring the quantitative database to allow regional integration; ■ Identifying the issues to be analysed in terms of regional distribution; ■ Elaboration of the analysis algorithm.
Quantitative research component	
Geo-statistical analysis	
Field research	<p>Matrix analysis has been used to define scenarios on the sustainability of impacts from the perspective of the accessibility of rural and urban areas in proximity to the TEN-T network.</p>
Quantitative research component	
Matrix analysis	

D. Limitations, constraints and solutions

For each identified risk, the impact of its solving actions was monitored during the evaluation process in order to identify, if necessary, additional actions to keep it under control.

The list of identified limitations and the way of solving them are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 List of identified limitations and how to resolve them

No.	Limitations and constraints	Solving modality
1	High workload of staff and/or reduced availability of the target groups	Constant and prior consultation of the actors to be involved in the evaluation activity, in order to plan their involvement in a conjunct manner and taking into account the commitments of each party.
2	Absence, high dispersion and/or inconsistency of relevant data and information	Applying alternative evaluation methods, based on qualitative surveys, online tools, the use of records and evidences from the MA/ RDA.
3	Low response rate at the online Questionnaire	Sending the online questionnaire to all funding beneficiaries within the PA 6.

No.	Limitations and constraints	Solving modality
		Extending the response time, contacting beneficiaries by email and telephone to encourage them to answer to the questionnaire.
4	Insufficient human and time resources for the optimal contract execution	Flexible approach to project management. Co-opting additional expertise in the evaluation team, without additional costs. Using internal computing methods and tools for archiving, combining, analysing and interpreting the data.

4. Analysis and interpretation

A. Collected data

According to the Specifications, the following evaluation questions have been defined:

Table 3 Evaluation questions

Evaluation question code	Question content
EG1	To what extent are the objectives of the ROP justified in relation to the socio-economic needs and to what extent can the progress observed be attributed to the intervention?
EG2	What is the progress made in implementing the program in relation to the objectives set?
EG3	To what extent have the interventions and the used instruments produced the expected effects by the date of the present report?
ES61	To what extent has the ROP contributed so far and will contribute to increasing the accessibility of rural and urban areas in the proximity of the TEN-T network and to achieving the targets of the related result indicators of the Specific Objective?
ES62	What types of interventions/ mechanisms have proven to be more effective at this stage of implementation and why?
ES63	What are the main lessons learned/ to be learned from the perspective of the logic of intervention and implementation (in terms of effectiveness) of the ROP Priority Axis?
ES64	What is the degree of sustainability of the registered effects from the point of view of the accessibility of rural and urban areas located near the TEN-

Evaluation question code	Question content
	T network promoted through ROP? (scenario analysis with beneficiaries and stakeholders)
EA61	To what extent will the financed interventions improve the road traffic on the county roads with direct or secondary connection to the TEN-T network?

In formulating the answers to each of the evaluation questions, information obtained through the following methodological tools was taken into account:

- Documentary analysis;
- Survey - with the participation of the beneficiaries;
- Interviews with beneficiaries;
- Interviews with RDA officers;
- Focus group with the participation of beneficiaries;
- Organization of a focus group with the participation of the stakeholders;
- Panel of experts.

The mechanism for collecting each data category through the stated methodological tools is presented in the following Table.

Table 4 Correlation of collected data with the evaluation questions

Evaluation question code	Collected data						
	Qualitative						Quantitative
	Survey	Interview		Focus Group		Panel of experts	Documentary analysis
		Beneficiary	Stake holder	Beneficiary	Stake holder		
EG1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
EG2	✓	✓	✓				✓
EG3	✓						✓
ES61		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
ES62		✓	✓			✓	✓
ES63			✓			✓	
ES64			✓	✓		✓	
EA61	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

B. Data analysis

1. EG1 Evaluation question - To what extent are the objectives of the ROP justified in relation to the socio-economic needs and to what extent can the progress observed be attributed to the intervention?

According to the strategic documents on ROP 2014-2020, the development needs identified as relevant for road infrastructure at regional level address the following main issues:

- Improving accessibility and increasing regional mobility;
- Developing and modernizing the county road network;
- Increasing road safety, in particular through investments dedicated to unmonitored road users (pedestrians and cyclists);
- Reducing areas with poor transport infrastructures at regional level;
- Ensuring access to TEN-T corridors and implicitly to cities and municipalities, increasing the mobility of labour force available in rural areas;
- Developing intermodal transport by ensuring the connectivity, through the county roads, of the economic potential areas with the railway stations and the Danube and maritime ports.

Contextual data

From the analysis of the data presented by the National Institute of Statistics, it emerges that also in 2017 Romania faced a high share of non-modernized roads in the total county roads. Table 5 shows this distribution by region. Figure 1 of Annex 12 shows for each county the share of non-modernized county roads.

Table 5 Distribution at the level of development regions of the share of non-modernized roads in total county roads

Development Region	2015			2017		
	Total county roads, km	Un-modernized county roads, km	% un-modernized county roads out of total	Total county roads, km	Un-modernized county roads, km	% un-modernized county roads out of total
North-East	5392	3249	60.30%	5387	3237	60.10%
South-East	4597	3531	76.80%	4595	2800	60.90%
South Muntenia	5737	4001	69.70%	5737	3780	65.90%
South-West Oltenia	4647	3080	66.30%	4650	3053	65.70%
West	4637	2529	54.50%	4678	2313	49.40%
North-West	5261	3973	75.50%	5237	3843	73.40%
Centre	4663	2521	54.10%	4454	2238	50.20%
Bucharest Ilfov	400	NA	NA	411	272	66.20%

Source: Evaluator's processing based on data collected from the National Institute of Statistics, TEMPO-TRN 139A Data Series

Even though in 2017, compared to 2015, a slight improvement can be observed, the overall share of un-modernized roads in total county roads is around 60%, a value that supports the objectives of ROP 2014-2020.

Compared to a total of 21,536.0 km of non-modernized county roads existing throughout the country in 2017 (according to NIS data), ROP 2014-2020 aims at contributing by 2023 with 5 km of newly built roads connected to the TEN-T and 2,075 km of reconstructed or upgraded roads connected to the TEN-T network. This will determine at the country level an envisaged impact of approx. 10%.

In addition to these general statistical data, in order to be able to identify to what extent the ROP objectives remain justified at the time of the evaluation, the consultants' team analysed the information obtained using the following tools:

- Online survey;
- Interviews with beneficiaries;
- Interviews with RDA officers;
- Focus group with beneficiaries;
- Focus group with stakeholders;
- Panel of experts.

Analysis of the data obtained from the online survey

The survey was conducted through an online questionnaire to which all funding beneficiaries within PA 6 were invited to answer, the research universe being represented by all the 106 projects contracted by 31st December 2018. The full content of the questionnaire is presented in Annex 10 and the analysis of the answers can be found in Annex 11.

90 completed questionnaires were received and a response rate of 85% was achieved. The high degree of relevance of the received answers is also supported by their distribution by development regions, similar to the number of contracted projects, as it can be seen in the following table.

Table 6 Respondents' distribution on Development Regions compared to contracted projects' distribution by 31st December 2018

Development Region	Survey answers		Contracts	
	No.	%	No.	%
1. North-East	6	6.7%	7	6.6%
2. South-East	17	18.9%	18	17.0%
3. South-Muntenia	6	6.7%	6	5.7%
4. South-West	12	13.3%	14	13.2%
5. West	9	10.0%	13	12.3%
6. North-West	28	31.1%	31	29.2%
7. Center	12	13.3%	17	16.0%
	90	100.0%	106	100.0%

37.8% of the beneficiaries participating in the survey are County ATUs, which develop projects individually, without other partners, the remaining 62.2% being county ATUs which, for the implementation of the contracts, formed partnerships with ATUs of some localities within the county (Annex 11, the question 2).

Respondents were asked to rank in order of importance the development needs as defined in the ROP 2014-2020. Table 7 shows the hierarchy of these needs in order of the importance perceived by the beneficiaries at the time of applying for funding.

Table 7 The hierarchy of development needs identified locally at the time of applying for project funding

The identified development need	Position
Ensuring access to TEN-T corridors and implicitly to cities and municipalities	1
Developing and modernizing the county road network	2
Improving accessibility and increasing regional mobility	3
Increasing the mobility of labour force available in rural areas	4
Increasing road safety, especially for pedestrians and cyclists	5
Reducing areas with poor transport infrastructures at regional level	6
Developing intermodal transport by ensuring the connectivity, through the county roads, of the economic potential areas with the railway stations and the Danube and maritime ports	7

At the same time, the analysis of the answers provided by the beneficiaries through the survey shows that the most of them consider that the needs identified are also relevant at the time of the evaluation (Annex 11, Question 10). Thus, more than 85% of the respondents believe that both the development and modernization of the county road network and the access to the TEN-T corridors and, implicitly, to cities and municipalities, continue to have a high and very high relevance.

As regards the extent to which the observed progress can be attributed to the intervention (Annex 11, Question 21), the vast majority of the beneficiaries who participated in the survey considers that the projects financed under the ROP 2014-2020 will contribute much and very much to: reducing the travel time of the targeted route (84.3% of the respondents), increasing passenger and freight traffic (78%), reducing the number of serious accidents on the route (71%), reducing public transport costs (62%) and to reducing the local pollution level (61%).

The share of the answers considering that project implementation will have a moderate impact on the above mentioned effects (35% in terms of reducing local pollution, 31% of public transport costs, 27% in reducing serious accidents) cannot be neglected, pointing out that, according to the respondents, the existence of a modernized road is not sufficient for their manifestation.

The beneficiaries' interventions, both in the interviews and within the focus group, highlighted the following aspects:

- The need for investments in county road infrastructure is greater than the available funding at present, and it regards county roads in their entirety, not just those directly or indirectly connected to the TEN-T; through the projects carried out in the last 4-5 years, only 10-15% of the modernization needs were covered;
- The budgets of the county councils are insufficient to sustain repairs and modernization works, and, under the impact of intense use and of the weather-related factors, the deterioration degree of the county roads gets deepen;
- Investment priorities/ financial allocations for interregional projects are needed, because, due to the on-the-ground configuration of the current infrastructure in the proximity of two development regions, in the current regional approach, they are not eligible and unjustifiably remain out of a sustainable modernization approach;
- Financing of projects for the reconstruction and modernization of road infrastructure will facilitate the economic growth or, at least, will stop the economic decline at regional and national level.

The analysis of the obtained data confirms the maintenance of the needs identified at the moment of drawing up the ROP and the close correlation between the objectives set at the priority axis level and the priorities assumed through the regional development plans and the National Regional Development Strategy.

2. EG2 Evaluation question - What is the progress made in implementing the programme in relation to the set objectives?

The specific objective of PA 6 is to: Increase the accessibility of rural and urban areas by upgrading the road transport infrastructure to connect it to the TEN-T network, in coordination with the regional development plans.

At the priority axis 6 level they were defined:

- A result indicator - the number of people benefiting from improved transport, which aims at:
 - Increasing by 18,000 the number of people in more developed regions (from 131,000 in 2013 to 149,000 in 2023);
 - Increasing by 1,125,000 the number of people in less developed regions (from 4,025,000 in 2013 to 5,150,000 in 2023);
- 2 output indicators:
 - The length of newly built roads connected to TEN-T, with a target value of 5 km by 2023 for less developed regions;
 - Length of rebuilt or upgraded roads connected to TEN-T, targeting 20 km for the more developed regions and 2,055 km for less developed regions.

In formulating the answers to this evaluation question, information obtained through the following tools was taken into account:

- Documentary analysis;
- Analysis of data registered in SMIS;
- Interview with beneficiaries;
- Interview with RDA;
- Questionnaire survey - with the participation of 85% of project beneficiaries.

Progress analysis according to SMIS information

According to the data available on the website www.inforegio.ro, the applicant's first guide for less developed regions was launched in consultation on 31st July 2015 and the eligibility and selection criteria were approved by Decision no. 3 of the Monitoring Committee in September 2015.

The establishment of strategic projects in line with EU requirements was done through the analysis of regional priorities and the issuing of Regional Development Council decisions, which lasted until 2016.

Following the approval of ROP 2014-2020 with more than one year delay and the need to prepare the implementation of the programme, the first call for projects was opened on 16 May 2016 and by 31st December 2018 under PA6 - IP 6.1. a total of 10 calls for project proposals were launched (the calendar of the calls is presented in Annex 12, Table 2).

2016												2017												2018											
M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12
				16	Call 218 - 7R					16																									
				16	Call 218 - BI					16																									
												6	Call 103 - 7R					13																	
												6	Call 104 - BI					13																	
														24	Call 114 - ITI										24										
															28	Call 205					28														
																								30	Call 261 - BI					2					
																								30	Call 367 - 7R					2					
																									14		16								
																										16		17							

Figure 1 Time distribution of calls

Thus, for the less developed regions (7R) and the Bucharest-Ilfov Region, 3 calls were launched, while for the ITI and SUERD regions only 1 call was launched, the financing applications submission period ranging between 1 year (call 114 addressed to ITI Danube Delta) and 3 months (calls 371 and 373 for unfinished projects).

The time distribution of the 10 calls was balanced throughout the period 2016-2018. Except for December 2016, at least 1 call was in progress in each month of the 2016-2018 period. The busiest months were July 2017 and July 2018 with 4 ongoing calls.

The distribution of the number of submitted and contracted financing applications by type of regions is summarized in Table 8.

Table 8 Distribution by type of region of the submitted and contracted Financing Applications

Region type	Submitted financing applications	Contracted financing applications	% of contracted applications from submitted applications
Less developed regions (7R)	141	102	72.3%
More developed regions (Bucharest-Ilfov)	1	0	0.0%
ITI	6	4	66.7%
SUERD	24	0	0.0%
Total	172	106	61.6%

Source: Evaluator's processing based on data collected from SMIS, reference date 31st December 2018

The analysis of the presented data regarding the distribution of the submitted financing applications by type of regions as well as of the contracted projects highlights the following:

- Financing applications were submitted by beneficiaries from all regions - less developed, more developed, ITI, SUERD;
- Projects contracted by beneficiaries in less developed regions account for 96% of the total of 106 contracted projects, with the difference up to 100% representing projects in the ITI area;
- No project addressed to the SUERD region was contracted by 31st December 2018, but 20 applications were in different stages of the evaluation and contracting process; the delay in contracting the SUERD projects was due to the long validation process of the priorities assumed in the applicant's guide by the Foreign Ministry (which manages the SUERD strategy) and to the decision to give priority to the contracting of the unfinished projects;
- By 31st December 2018, the contracting rate of the 172 submitted applications (calculated as a ratio between the number of contracted projects and the number of submitted applications) was of 61.6%.

Details of the contracting rate obtained as a result of the launched calls are summarized in Annex 12, Table 3.

From the point of view of the distribution of the contracting rate by development regions, calculated as a ratio between the number of contracted projects and the number of submitted applications, the synthetic analysis of the information existing in the SMIS database by 31st December 2018 indicates the following values:

- North-East Region 77.8%
- South-East Region 47.4%
- South Muntenia Region 27.3%
- South-West Oltenia 60.9%
- West Region 52.0%
- North West 96.9%
- Center Region 77.3%
- Bucharest-Ilfov Region 0.0%

The North West Region stands out with a contracting rate of 96%, in contrast to South Muntenia Region with a contracting rate of a little over 27%.

The contracting rate depends mainly on:

- Clarity and compliance of ownership documents;
- Beneficiaries' ability to respond to requests for clarification within the allowed time;
- Insufficient number of evaluators for technical and financial evaluation;
- Duration of procurement procedures for evaluation services conducted by RDAs.

Detailed data on the number of submitted applications, contracted projects and on the contracting rate are presented in Annex 12, Table 4.

The information registered in SMIS on the applications submission dates and on their contracting dates indicates that the first submissions occur in the 1st Quarter of 2017, while the first contracts occur in the 3rd Quarter of 2017. It is noticed that the 4th Quarter of each year concludes the cycle of the evaluation efforts made over the other quarters, being marked by a significant increase of the number of signed contracts. The 4th quarter of 2018 stands out with a leap of 41 signed contracts, all of which are unfinished projects.

Cumulative dynamics of Funding Applications submission and contracting is shown in Figure 2.

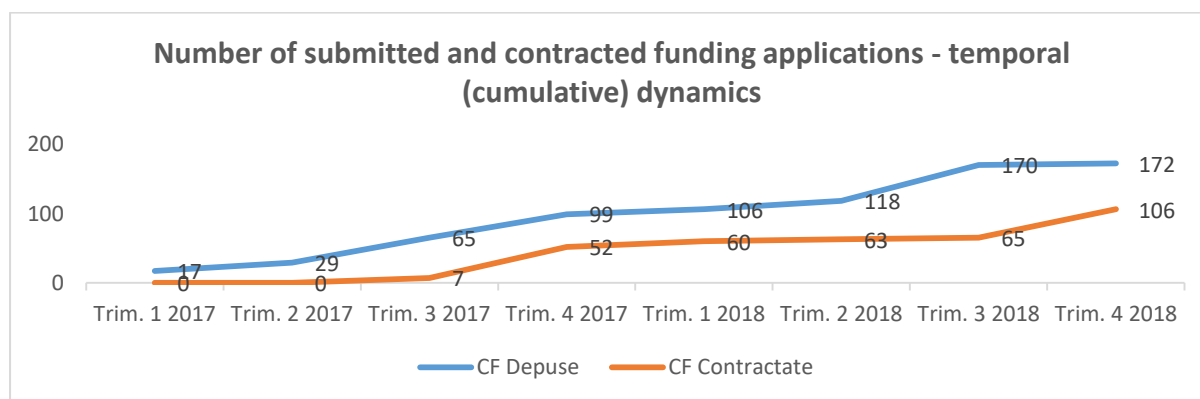


Figure 2 Cumulative dynamics of Funding Applications submission and contracting

According to the analysis of the existing data in the SMIS regarding the contracting of the ERDF budgets allocated through the ROP 2014-2020, the contracting rate of the ERDF allocation at national level was of 169.2% (by 31st December 2018). The distribution of the ERDF eligible budget contracting rate by regions is as follows:

- North- East 183.6%
- South-East 189.8%
- South Muntenia 96.9%
- South West Oltenia 259.9%
- West 129.8%
- North - West 447.0%
- Center 245.3%
- BI 0.0%
- ITI 40.7%
- SUERD 0.0%

The North-West Region stands out with a contracted value of 447% compared to the allocated budget (unfinished projects included). On the opposite side, there is the South Muntenia region which, compared to an allocated amount of 488.7 million lei, contracted 473.7 million lei, representing 96.9% of the amount allocated under the ROP 2014-2020.

The lack of contracting of the ERDF budget in the Bucharest-Ilfov Region and in the SUERD area by 31st December 2018 is due to the fact that the applications for funding submitted within this type of regions were still under evaluation-contracting process. After the reference date (31st December 2018) and up to the report elaboration date, 8 SUERD contracts worth 505.2 million lei and 1 contract in the Bucharest-Ilfov region totalling 61.9 million lei were signed.

The contracting rate of the ERDF budget is influenced by:

- The number of financing applications accepted for contracting in each region;
- The value of the contracts determined by the length of the county roads proposed for modernization;
- The nature of the proposed works.

The synthetic result of the analysis of the data existing on SMIS regarding the contracting of the ERDF budgets allocated through ROP 2014-2020 is presented in Annex 12, Table 5.

Analysis of the implementation progress according to the results of the online survey

The processing of the information provided by the participants through the Online Questionnaire shows that about half of them declare that they are still in one of the stages of the public procurement process of the works execution contract (or design and execution of works, as the case may be). Thus, it is noted that by 31st December 2018:

- In the North-West Region, it was registered the highest percentage (75%) of projects in which work contracts were awarded and are in progress;
- At the opposite end, the South-West Region and the West Region account for only 33% of respondents who declare that they have assigned procurement contracts and works are ongoing.

The delay in the award of works contracts and consequently in the start of works is determined by at least the following causes:

- Delays in contracting/ finalizing technical projects drafting due to both the cumbersome execution of the procurement procedures and the insufficient capacity of the design firms;
- The length of the bid evaluation process in case of a high number of tenderers;
- Duration and coherence of the documentation evaluation process by NAPA;
- Legislative changes, e.g. the obligation to use the model of contractual agreement provided by Government Decision no. 1/2018, which led to the replacement of the site master services foreseen in the Feasibility Study and in the financing application with the services provided by the supervisor, with a higher degree of complexity and which could not be financially estimated at the date of the application's submission; this situation may cause the risk of having no tenderer for the supervisor services;
- Duration of the resolutions of appeals made by the participants in the award procedure.

Details on the description of the stages of the procurement process as well as of the stage of each of the investigated regions are given in Annex 11, Questions 6 and 7.

When asked about compliance with project planning, it came out that:

- 47% of the beneficiaries who participated in the survey only partially agree that the activities envisaged by the Project are running according to the schedule;
- over 80% consider that the level of the costs related to the activities carried out for the implementation of the project fits into the approved budget;
- the vast majority (over 90%) strongly agree with the assertions that:
 - The results envisaged within the Project will be achieved;
 - The indicators proposed under the Project will reach their targets;
 - The sustainability of the project's effects is guaranteed.

The summary of the answers regarding the compliance with project planning is presented in Annex 11, Question 22. Survey participants identified the following factors that influence project planning compliance:

- Factors with a positive action:
 - Ensuring a sustainable cash flow by accessing the legally accepted pre-financing;
 - Capacity and homogeneity of the project management team;
 - Good collaboration with ROP IB and ROP MA.
- Factors with a negative action:
 - The cumbersome execution of public procurement procedures;

- Legislative changes;
- Contractors' low capacity and lack of seriousness (design and construction companies);
- Lack of qualified staff.

The data collected through the Online Questionnaire is supported by qualitative data obtained through interviews with the beneficiaries, interviews with RDA officers and focus group with beneficiaries.

3. EG3 Evaluation question - To what extent have the interventions and the used instruments produced the expected effects up to the present report?

The investments in the regional transport infrastructure under the priority axis 6 of the ROP 2014-2020 aim at the following effects:

- Economic growth of the areas with low level of connectivity to the TEN-T network;
- Increasing the mobility level of people and goods;
- Easier and faster access of the population living in rural areas and small towns to health, social and educational services providers from large municipalities;
- Increasing the population's adaptability to regional and/ or local labour market needs;
- Increasing transport capacity on TEN-T connections by ensuring, through the county roads, the connectivity of economically potential areas with railway stations and Danube and maritime ports; reducing travel time, and indirectly leading to the development of trade, including the external one, and to the increase of the served territories' competitiveness;
- Increasing the travel speed, the carrying capacity and the road safety for all road users (especially for pedestrians and cyclists), as well as the resilience to extreme weather conditions.

In order to assess the extent to which interventions and tools have produced the expected effects, the information obtained from the Integrated Management Information System was compared to the intermediate targets in the performance framework set for 2018:

- For less developed regions:
 - 110 km rehabilitated/ upgraded;
 - Total amount of eligible expenses in the accounting system of the Certifying Authority: € 289,411,765;
- For developed regions:
 - 3 km rehabilitated/ upgraded;
 - Total amount of eligible expenses in the accounting system of the Certifying Authority: € 1,250,000.

According to the data existing in SMIS, by 31st December 2018, 106 projects were contracted out of which:

- 59 projects in less developed regions;

- 43 unfinished projects in less developed regions;
- 4 projects in the ITI area.

According to the information from the ROP MA's monitoring system, at the end of 2018, of the 106 contracted projects,

- 81 completed the Technical Project stage;
- 52 completed the stage of works contracts assignment;
- 45 are in the execution phase, 43 of which are unfinished projects.

The analysis of the data existing in SMIS regarding the state of the payments made at national level by 31st December 2018 for projects contracted under PA6 (presented in Annex 12, Table 7) leads to the finding that they accounted for 9.6% of the total non-reimbursable allocation.

Compared to the target assumed under the performance framework for 2018, i.e. 289.4 million euro of eligible expenditure in the accounting system of the Certifying Authority, its value at 31st December 2018 was of 499.6 million lei (107.37 million Euro) indicating that the target was met by 37.1%.

The low value of the payments is due to the fact that the projects, except for the unfinished ones in the less developed regions, are in the early stages of implementation, when the carried out activities are mainly procurement procedures and possibly the elaboration of the technical project (whose weight in the total eligible costs cannot exceed 10%).

The detailed situation of payments made for the less developed regions shows that the coverage of the total non-reimbursable allocation varies between 1.1% in the North-East region and 9.7% in the South-West Oltenia region, the North-West region being a notable exception with a percentage of 66.8%.

This is mainly due to the fact that 18 of the 43 unfinished projects contracted at national level were contracted in the North-West region, projects which had a positive impact on the volume of the payments made.

From the point of view of physical progress, although the information from the MA's monitoring system leads to the conclusion that the modernization of about 200 km of county road was completed by the end of 2018, this achievement was not registered in the national monitoring system because the documentation necessary for the takeover of the works by the beneficiaries wasn't completed.

Under these conditions, the intermediate target (for the year 2018) of 110 km rehabilitated/ upgraded for the less developed regions and 3 km newly built for the developed regions (Bucharest Ilfov), assumed through the Performance Framework, was not reached, with no modernized or newly built road km reported.

The absence of physical achievements makes the evaluation of the extent to which the interventions and used instruments produced the expected effects to be premature at the time of the evaluation report.

4. ES61 Evaluation question- To what extent has the ROP contributed so far and will contribute to increasing the accessibility of rural and urban areas in the proximity of the TEN-T network and to achieving the targets of the related result indicators of the Specific Objective?

The contribution of the projects contracted through PA6 of ROP 2014-2020 to increasing the accessibility of the rural and urban areas in proximity of the TEN-T network is evaluated by analysing the existing information in SMIS regarding:

- The number of people who will benefit from improved transport;
- The length of county roads to be upgraded/ rehabilitated.

Given the current implementation state of the contracted projects, we cannot talk about an effective contribution so far.

The analysis of the existing data in SMIS on the population who will benefit from the access to the TEN-T corridors through the modernized secondary infrastructure, following the finalization of the contracted projects, (by 2023) indicates a number of 2,986,829 inhabitants. Their distribution by regions is:

- North- East 429,692 inhabitants
- South-East (includes ITI) 471,040 inhabitants
- South Muntenia 270,453 inhabitants
- South-West Oltenia 482,207 inhabitants
- West 431,420 inhabitants
- North-West 534,634 inhabitants
- Center 367,383 inhabitants

The differences between regions are due to the different degree of urbanization at county level, to the number of localities and inhabitants registered in the localities crossed by the county roads included in the project and it is obvious that it is not a controllable variable.

Compared to the target of 1,125,000 inhabitants assumed under the Performance Framework for less developed regions, the 2,986,829 inhabitants who will benefit from improved transport as a result of the projects implementation represent a 265% overrun.

According to the NIS, in 2017 the total county roads which needed to be modernized reached 21,536 km. The projects contracted by 31st December 2018 are going to modernize 3,509.9 km by the end of 2023, thus ROP contributing to the reduction of the modernization needs by 16.3%. At the level of each region, the contracting of the submitted financing applications will lead to the decrease of the following modernization needs:

- North East 16.2%
- South East 7.9%
- South Muntenia 6.1%
- South-West Oltenia 16.1%
- West 10.5%
- Northwest 28.6%
- Center 18.7%

These differences are mainly determined by:

- The number of projects contracted at the level of each development region;
- The number of county roads km identified as eligible;
- Clear ownership status of the lands related to the investment.

Compared to the target of 2,075 rehabilitated/ modernized km assumed through ROP 2014-2020, the value of 3,509.9 km represents an achievement degree of 169.5%.

5. ES62 Evaluation question - What types of interventions/ mechanisms have proven to be more effective at this stage of implementation and why?

For the implementation of Priority Axis 6, the following types of interventions were defined by the ROP:

- Projects dedicated to the modernization of roads in less developed regions (seven development regions - 7R);
- Projects dedicated to the modernization of roads in the most developed regions, namely Bucharest Ilfov (BI);
- Projects dedicated to the modernization of roads in the Danube border regions (SUERD);
- Projects dedicated to the modernization of roads in the ITI Danube Delta area.

The total ERDF budget allocated is of **4,119.8** million lei (Inforeuro December 2018). Each type of project benefits from a distinct allocation of the ERDF budget as follows:

- 7R3,104.9 million lei;
- BI 49.5 million lei;
- ITI 347.8 million lei;
- SUERD 617.6 million lei.

For the contracting of the ERDF eligible budget allocated in the period 2016-2017, a number of 5 calls were opened. Each call was dedicated to a specific type of region. Synthetic information on the calls launched during 2016-2017 period is presented in Annex 12.

At the end of 2017, of the 110 submitted funding applications, 63 projects were contracted, with a contracting rate of 57.3%. The predictability analysis of the total amount of the reimbursement requests as a result of the 63 contracted projects, issued in early 2018, indicated that there was a risk of decommitment at the end of 2018.

The Emergency Ordinance no. 30 from April 2018 concerning the establishment of measures in the field of European funds and the completion of normative acts, established the mechanism for taking over for financing the projects initiated by other types of financing, whose maturity is minimum at the stage of works contract called unfinished projects (UF). As a result of this opportunity, during 2018, out of the 4 calls launched under Priority Axis 6, 2 were dedicated to the unfinished projects, i.e. projects initiated by other types of financing and currently in the phase of works execution.

Throughout 2018:

- The contracting process was not finalized for any of the financing applications submitted within the calls dedicated to BI and 7R;
- 43 projects were contracted through the 2 calls for unfinished projects.

Under these conditions, by 31st December 2018, a number of 106 contracted projects were reported, of which 43 are represented by the unfinished projects. These projects were all projects dedicated to less developed regions.

Although the contribution of the unfinished projects to the total contracted ERDF budget is lower than their numerical share (they are mainly projects with low values), due to their advanced implementation stage they contributed significantly to the level of payments within the PA6.

Thus, from the ERDF eligible budget of 6,829.6 million lei contracted for the less developed regions (7R), 1,264.9 million lei (18.5%) are covered by the unfinished projects. At the national level, the contracting rate of the ERDF allocated budget of 4,119.8 million lei is of 169.2%.

As regards the contribution to the payments made, the situation at the end of 2018 is as follows:

- The total non-reimbursable allocated budget is of 4,850.5 million lei;
- The total value of payments is of 463.26 million lei;
- The total amount of payments for UF projects is of 419.98 million lei;
- The share of the value of UF projects' payments in total payments is 90.65%;
- The total non-reimbursable budget used excluding UF projects is of 0.89%;
- The total non-reimbursable allocated budget used including UF projects' payments is of 9.6%.

From the analysis of the submitted data it is noted that the decision to take over the financing, through the ROP 2014-2020 PA6, of the projects initiated by other forms of financing led to the increase of the payments rate from 0.89% to 9.6% of the total non-reimbursable allocation. It also had an impact on the contracting dynamics of the budgets allocated to each region.

The evaluation of contracted projects' effectiveness in terms of the impact of each type of project on the modernization needs at regional level can only be achieved in the South East Region, because, at this time, it is the only one that includes different types of projects (7R and ITI).

Thus, at the level of the South East Region, from the 2,800 km of county roads which need to be modernized (according to NIS), 420 km will be modernized through 7R projects type and 79.47 km (15% of the total of 499.96 modernized km at the level of the region) will be modernized through ITI projects type.

The contribution of the contracted projects to the reduction of the length of the non-modernized county roads, represented by the share of the length of the roads that will be

upgraded in the total length of the non-modernized roads at regional level (values for 2017, according to NIS), is presented in Figure 3 and in Annex 12, Table 8.

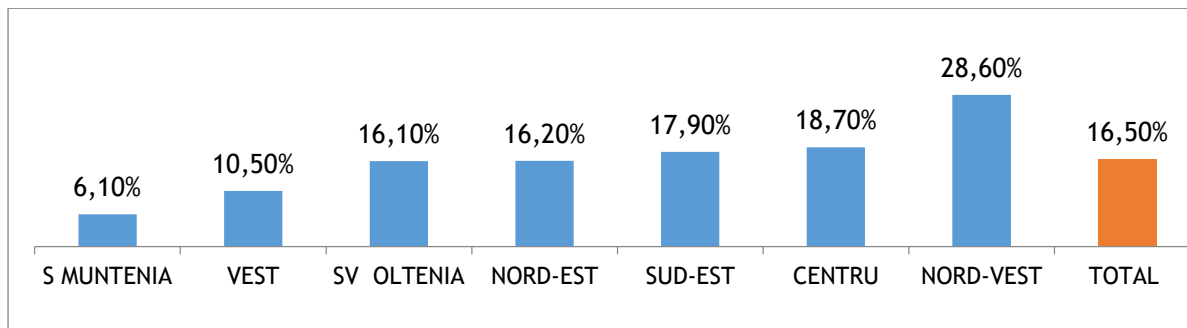


Figure 3 Contribution of the contracted projects to the modernization of the county roads

It is worth mentioning the North-West region, where the contracted projects will have a contribution of 28.6% to the reduction of the county roads which need modernization, i.e. 173.3% compared to the national average of 16.5%. On the opposite side there is South Muntenia region with a contribution of only 6.0%, i.e. 39.9% compared to the national average of 16.5%.

The national distribution of the total length of 3,509.6 km of county roads that will be upgraded through the ROP 2014-2020 PA6 projects, by types of interventions, is presented as follows:

- 7R projects type 3,430.5 km;
- BI projects type 0.00 Km;
- ITI projects type 79.47 km;
- SUERD projects type 0.00 Km.

Of the 3,430.5 nationally upgraded km through 7R projects type, 30% (1,016.2 km) will be upgraded through projects initiated from other funding sources (unfinished projects). The 3,430.5 km upgraded through 7R projects type represent 97.73% of the 3,509.9 modernized km at national level.

The share of the upgraded km through unfinished projects contracted in less developed regions (7R UF) out of a total of 3,509.9 km modernized at national level is of 28.95%, and the share of km modernized through 7R UF projects out of the total of 3,430.5 km upgraded through 7R projects type is of 29.62%.

From the perspective of the number of inhabitants who will benefit from improved transport, Figure 4 presents the synthesis of the existing data in SMIS integrated at regional level.

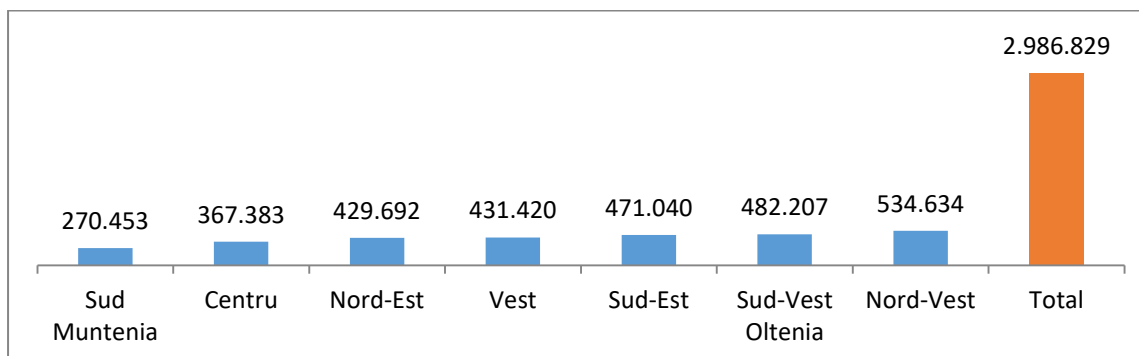


Figure 4 Regional distribution of the number of inhabitants benefiting from improved county transport

Figure 4 shows the North-West region with 534,634 inhabitants benefiting from improved transport, i.e. 17.9% of the total following the projects contracting. On the opposite side, there is the South Muntenia region with 270,453 inhabitants benefiting from improved transport, i.e. 9% of the total. The contribution of the unfinished projects to the total of 2,986,829 inhabitants benefiting from improved transport at the national level is of 19.8% (592,129 inhabitants). The differences between development regions are due to:

- Different degrees of urbanization,
- The number of localities crossed by the modernized road and
- The different number of inhabitants resident in each locality traversed by the modernized road.

From the perspective of evaluating the effectiveness of the tools used, it can be stated that:

- As regards the contracting rate of the financing applications, the unfinished projects in the less developed regions were the most efficient. The registered contracting rates are:
 - 95.5% for 7R UF projects type;
 - 66.7% for ITI projects type;
 - 56.7% for 7R projects type;
 - No project for the SUERD area was contracted.

The high contracting rate of unfinished projects was possible because the status of the property was clarified and documented, and the applicant's guide did not change from one call to another.

- From the perspective of the ERDF budget contracting rate, the 7R projects were the most effective. The contracting rate of the ERDF budget is the following:
 - 179.2% for 7R projects type;
 - 40.7% for ITI projects type;
 - 40.7% for 7R UF projects type;

- As regards the number of modernized km, the 7R projects are more efficient than the 7R UF projects type. Thus, out of a total of 3,509.9 modernized km at national level:
 - 2,424.3 km through 7R projects (69% of the total of 3,509.9 modernized km at national level);
 - 1,016.2 km through 7R UF projects (28.95% of the total of 3,509.9 modernized km at national level).
- From the perspective of the number of inhabitants who will benefit from improved transport, 7R projects are more efficient than 7R UF projects. Thus, from the 2,986,829 inhabitants who will benefit from improved transport:
 - 2,344,176 inhabitants benefit through 7R projects type;
 - 592,129 inhabitants benefit through 7R UF projects type;
 - 50,524 benefit through ITI projects type.
- From the perspective of the total value of payments, 7R UF projects were the most effective due to the advanced stage of the works and hence, implicitly, of the expenditures. Thus, the total value of the expenses related to 7R UF projects is of 419.98 million lei, i.e. 90.5% of the total payments made.
- From the perspective of the indicator number of inhabitants/ modernized km, the 7R projects type are more efficient than the 7R UF projects type. Thus,
 - 7R projects type register 967 inhabitants/ km;
 - 7R UF projects type register 583 inhabitants/ km;
 - ITI projects type, even if they address a distinct territory, i.e. the Danube Delta, have proven to have a significant efficiency in relation to the potential projects in this area;
 - The contribution of ITI projects type to the 499.96 modernized km in the South East Region is of 15%.

The analysis of projects' effectiveness from the predictability perspective of the achievement of the targets assumed at the priority axis level indicates, at the evaluation date (31st December 2018), that:

- The 43 contracted projects of 7R UF type are in various stages of the execution of works, being likely to be completed in the foreseen calendar;
- Of the 59 contracted projects of 7R type, only 9 signed the works contracts and are in various stages of the works execution, being likely to be completed in the foreseen calendar;
- None of the 4 projects contracted in the ITI area has signed the works contracts.

The presented data indicate that 7R UF projects, as they are fully in the works phase, show greater effectiveness than the 7R projects from the predictability perspective of achieving the targets related to the result and output indicators.

The Decisions of the Regional Development Councils established strategic priorities for county roads, priorities related to Romania's Transport General Master Plan and to the

Regional Development Strategies. The maps presenting these priorities at the regional level (drafted by the Regional Development Agencies) are presented in Annex 13 and the centralized situation in Annex 14.

The analysis of the priorities set for Phase 1 in relation to the existing data in the integrated information management system by 31st December 2018 indicates a significant effectiveness of the contracting process of projects defined as strategic, 82% of which are financed by the ROP.

6. ES63 Evaluation Question - What are the main lessons learned/ to be learned from the perspective of the logic of intervention and implementation (in terms of effectiveness) of the ROP Priority Axis 6?

By processing the information generated by:

- Online Survey;
- Interviews with beneficiaries;
- Interviews with RDAs;
- Focus group with beneficiaries;
- Focus group with stakeholders.

The following causal relationships were revealed:

1. The submission process of the 172 financing applications was influenced by:
 - a. The relatively late launch of the first calls for projects;
 - b. The long time required to obtain definitive Land Book Extracts for areas covered by the investment may lead to missing the deadline for the submission of the financing application;
 - c. Excessive rigidity in requesting documents from the funding application at the first call;
 - d. The request to sign in the original each page of the application for funding at the first call;
 - e. Insufficient clarity of the applicant's guide and the numerous subsequent changes;
 - f. The relatively high degree of complexity of the application forms;
 - g. Lack of training on MySMIS operation;
 - h. HelpDesk services fail to explain/ detail the information provided by the applicant's guide or to interpret particular issues. The answers provided are not assumed so that for specific, legal answers it is necessary to consult the MA or the Ministry;
 - i. The response time of the HelpDesk to the potential beneficiaries' requests was higher than the expectations of the beneficiaries;
 - j. Obtaining the necessary permits and endorsements (CNAIR, electricity, gas, telephony, Romanian Railways, Environment, Romanian Waters, etc.) requires high durations and costs, especially as their period of validity is limited and the

- delays in the evaluation and contracting process determine the need to renew them;
- k. The difficulty of uploading into MySMIS the large number of forms and the difficulty of completing them;
 - l. Difficult and cumbersome way to work with the MySMIS procurement module.
2. The duration of the evaluation process is influenced by the following causes:
- a. Successive changes in the applicant's guides between calls;
 - b. Dynamics of MA's instructions;
 - c. Low number of clarification questions allowed by the procedures;
 - d. Low number of people involved in the process of evaluating the applications for funding;
 - e. Insufficient technical and financial experts;
 - f. Cumbersome execution of the procurement procedures for the evaluation services at the RDA level.
3. The duration of the funding applications' contracting was influenced by the following causes:
- a. MySMIS doesn't contain the specific contract types for PA 6;
 - b. Low number of staff involved in contracts development.
4. The quality of the implementation is directly related to:
- a. Capacity of the beneficiaries to monitor and verify the providers;
 - b. Technical and financial capacity of the providers to comply with the submitted offer;
 - c. Taking into account the risk of delay in the implementation of the Procurement Plan;
 - d. The contracting modality of the design and execution services. The joint contracting of the design services and of the construction works leads to shortening the acquisition period, to strengthening the designer's responsibility in the execution stage and to a faster reaction of the designer if on the field there are situations different from the projected ones;
 - e. Taking into account the possibility of legislative changes regarding labour costs in estimating the budgets of works and service contracts.
5. The compliance with the budgets assumed in the funding applications is subject to the following causes:
- a. The relatively long time between the submission of the financing application and the start of the works, determined by the duration of the evaluation-contracting process, the duration of the procurement procedures and the duration of the design process;
 - b. The costs related to the renewal of the necessary permits and endorsements (CNAIR, electricity, gas, telephony, Romanian Railways, Environment, Romanian Waters, etc.) following their expiration in the period elapsed between the application's submission and the start of the works;
 - c. Effect of inflation on costs;
 - d. Legislative changes to labour costs.

6. The efficiency of the financial reporting process and submission of reimbursement requests/ payment requests is determined by the following causes:
 - a. The use of the MySMIS Module regarding the Financial Information generates difficulties due to differences between the introduced values and those resulting from the automated calculation process. Such differences (0.01 lei) must be adjusted by addendum and require in some cases the issue of new County Council decisions;
 - b. The differentiated access to MySMIS of the implementation team members (technical/ financial), in terms of allocated rights, makes it difficult for them to coordinate on certain activities;
 - c. The impossibility to distribute the scanning effort in time due to the requirement of scanning each document only after having prepared and numbered the entire package of documents attached to the reimbursement request/ payment request;
 - d. The requirement to attach to each reimbursement request/ payment request bulky documents that are identical at each submission.
7. The execution of the procurement plan according to the planning is influenced by:
 - a. Repeated changes of the public procurement legislation;
 - b. Appeals process in court;
 - c. The level of training of the contracting authorities staff in the preparation of the tender documentation;
 - d. Long time required by ANAP to send comments on the awarding documentation.
8. The progress in implementing the ROP 2014-2020 was influenced by the following causes:
 - a. Dynamics of the funding applications' submission;
 - b. Duration of the funding applications' evaluation;
 - c. Contracting duration;
 - d. The duration of the procurement process of design and execution services;
 - e. Submission speed of the reimbursement requests/ payment requests.

7. ES64 Evaluation question -What is the sustainability degree of the registered effects from the point of view of the accessibility of rural and urban areas located near the TEN-T network promoted through ROP? (scenario analysis with beneficiaries and stakeholders)

In formulating the answer to this question, the information collected from the following sources was analysed:

- Online Survey;
- Focus group with stakeholders;
- Panel of experts.

As a result of the collected data processing, it emerged that the participants consider that the sustainability of the impacts from the perspective of the accessibility of the rural and

urban areas in proximity to the TEN-T network promoted through the ROP can be assessed using the following criteria:

- Economic development of the areas crossed by the modernized county roads;
- Reducing the travel time;
- Increasing the travel speed and the carrying capacity;
- Increasing road safety for all road users (especially for pedestrians and cyclists) and resilience to extreme weather conditions;
- Increasing mobility of people and goods in the project area;
- Easier and faster access of the population living in rural areas and small towns to health, social and educational services providers from large municipalities;
- Increasing the population's adaptability to regional and/ or local labour market needs;
- Increased transport capacity on the TEN-T network connections by ensuring the connectivity, through the county roads, of the economic potential areas to the railway stations/ Danube and maritime ports.

The focus group discussions with stakeholders agreed that the sustainability of the effects is conditioned by a set of **External** and **Internal Factors** to the implementation of the project. Thus, according to the participants, the two sets of factors are as follows:

External factors

- Dynamics of the socio-economic development of the area;
- Dynamics of population migration in the area;
- Dynamics of inflation rate;
- Legislative changes that induce changes in labour costs;
- Budget allocations from the centralized state budget to the County Councils;
- The need for further works through further interventions that affect the quality of roads (e.g. Modernization of water/ utility networks).

Internal factors

- The quality of the materials used and of the works executed by the constructor;
- The ability of the constructors to assume their subsequent guarantee obligations;
- The capacity of the constructors to fit into the contracted budgets;
- County Councils' budget allocations to ensure sustainability of the investment;
- Capacity of the project implementation team;
- Clear and firm content of the works/ services contract;
- The cooperation with ROP IB and ROP MA.

Discussions revealed that some external factors, through their influence on some of the internal factors, essentially influence the sustainability of the results. Thus, it was discussed the influence of the external factor "Inflation rate dynamics" on the internal factors:

- The capacity of the constructors to fit into the contracted budgets;
- County Councils' budget allocations to ensure sustainability of the investment.

If the inflation is not varied or it has minor variations, the prices for materials and utilities remain constant and, as a result, it is more likely that the costs sustained by constructor fit into the contracted budgets. In conditions of prices stability, the County Council's capacity to predict and allocate the necessary budgets in order to ensure maintenance and repairs over the life of the investment increases.

If the investment is properly completed and maintained, then we can take into account the impact it will have on some of the factors that define the expected changes as a result of the project implementation, ensuring the sustainability of such effects as:

- Reducing the travel time;
- Increasing the travel speed and the carrying capacity;
- Increasing road safety for all road users (especially for pedestrians and cyclists) and resilience to extreme weather conditions.

The external factor "Socio-economic dynamics of the area" has a direct impact on the dynamics of jobs. If the socio-economic dynamics are positive, the dynamics of the jobs available in the project area are positive and we can appreciate that the ROP investment can contribute to increasing the adaptability of the population in the project area to the needs of the labour market from regional and/ or local level. At the same time, a positive socio-economic dynamics can contribute to increasing the revenues to the County Council budget, thus increasing its ability to provide the necessary budget to cover the maintaining costs of the investment, leading to a direct impact on the sustainability of the effects with regard to:

- Reducing the travel time;
- Increasing the travel speed and the carrying capacity;
- Increasing road safety for all road users (especially for pedestrians and cyclists) and resilience to extreme weather conditions;
- Increasing mobility of people and goods in the project area.

In order to analyse the sustainability of the expected effects, for each of the External and Internal Factors, 3 scenarios were defined and agreed with the participants:

- Optimistic;
- Realistic;
- Pessimistic.

The results of the discussions on the scenarios for each external and internal factor are presented below:

Table 9 External factors influencing sustainability

No.	External factor	Optimistic	Realistic	Pessimistic
1	Dynamics of the socio-economic development of the area	Development	Stagnation	Regress

No.	External factor	Optimistic	Realistic	Pessimistic
2	Dynamics of population migration in the area	Returns to the residence areas/ home	Does not leave the residence areas/ home	Migrates to other areas
3	Dynamics of the inflation rate	Decreasing	Relatively stable	Increasing
4	Legislative changes that induce changes in labour costs	There are no significant changes	Changes in labour costs that do not destabilize the Constructor	Changes in labour costs that destabilize the Constructor
5	Budget allocations from the centralized state budget to the County Council	The allocation covers the needs to continue the activity at the optimum level	The allocation does not cover the needs, but the County Council mobilizes additional sources to ensure the continuity of the activity at a minimum level	The allocation does not cover the needs to ensure the continuity of the activity
6	The need for further works through further interventions that affect the quality of roads (e.g. Modernization of water/ utilities networks)	The road was not damaged	The damages have been properly fixed by the one who generated them	The damages have not been fixed/ have been inadequately fixed by the person who produced/ generated them

Table 10 Internal factors influencing sustainability

No.	Internal factor	Optimistic	Realistic	Pessimistic
1	The quality of the materials used and of the works executed by the constructor	Good quality materials and works	Issues that have been fixed over time	Non-compliant materials and works
2	The capacity of the constructors to assume their subsequent guarantee obligations	There are no problems	Minor/ common problems	Major issues that endanger the operation
3	The capacity of the constructors to fit into the contracted budgets	Fitting in the initial budget through firm	Deviations below 10-20% predicted and notified in advance	Repeated/ substantial undetectable in

No.	Internal factor	Optimistic	Realistic	Pessimistic
		budget discipline and cost control	Changes in the initial budget as a result of external factors and the conclusion of addendum	time and un-notified deviations Contract blocking, delays, penalties, termination
4	County Councils' budget allocations to ensure sustainability of the investment	It fully covers the road maintenance costs	It covers the minimum maintenance costs	Does not cover road maintenance costs
5	Capacity of the project implementation team	All members have experience in implementing European projects	Some members have experience in implementing European projects/ the team partly has specialized external support	Team members are new to this activity/ inappropriate consulting support
6	Clear and firm content of the works/ services contract	The contract is clear, firm, symmetrical, the parties fulfil their obligations in a timely manner	Minor ambiguities that can be resolved amicably	Disputes and litigation that need to be resolved by court or administrative tribunal
7	Collaboration with RDA IB and ROP MA.	Smooth collaboration	Minor difficulties that have been resolved	Difficult collaboration

Participants agreed that the identified factors influence sustainability in equal proportion.

Thus, by integrating the scenarios for each set of factors, the following scenarios for the expected effects' sustainability after the completion of the investment are obtained.

Table 11 Scenario Matrix

		External factors		
		Optimistic	Realistic	Pessimistic
Internal factors	Optimistic	Very High	High	Vulnerable
	Realistic	High	Under control	Vulnerable
	Pessimistic	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Unsustainable

As a result of the discussions and on the basis of the available information and the participants' experience, the following scenarios were agreed for each of the internal and external factors.

Table 12 Result of the sustainability scenario analysis

External factor	Scenario	Internal factor	Scenario
Dynamics of the socio-economic development of the area	OPTIMISTIC	The quality of the materials used and of the works executed by the constructor	REALISTIC
Dynamics of population migration in the area	REALISTIC	The capacity of the constructors to assume their subsequent guarantee obligations	PESSIMISTIC
Dynamics of the inflation rate	REALISTIC	The capacity of the constructors to fit into the contracted budgets	REALISTIC
Legislative changes that induce changes in labour costs	REALISTIC	County Councils' budget allocations to ensure sustainability of the investment	PESSIMISTIC
Budget allocations from the centralized state budget to the County Council	REALISTIC	Capacity of the project implementation team	REALISTIC
The need for further works through further interventions that affect the quality of roads (e.g. Modernization of water/ utilities networks)	PESSIMISTIC	Clear and firm content of the works/ services contract	REALISTIC
		Collaboration with RDA IB and ROP MA.	OPTIMISTIC
SCENARIO:	REALISTIC	SCENARIO:	REALISTIC

The outcome of the scenario analysis indicates that the sustainability degree of the impacts regarding the accessibility of rural and urban areas located near the TEN-T network promoted through the ROP is in the UNDER CONTROL scenario, in the context of the external and internal factors considered.

8. EA61 Evaluation question - To what extent will the financed interventions improve the road traffic on the county roads with direct or secondary connection to the TEN-T network?

The quality of road traffic is influenced by the combined action of three main factors: the quality of road infrastructure, vehicles involved in traffic and users (drivers, passengers, pedestrians). The existing statistical data show an increase in the use of road infrastructure and the reduction of the traffic safety level. Thus, between 2015-2017:

- the number of registered heavy vehicles increased by 13.9%, as did the volume of transported goods;
- the number of passenger cars increased by 16.3%, the number of transported passengers by 18%;
- the number of people injured in traffic accidents increased by 8.9%.⁴

At the time of the evaluation, the county transport infrastructure is insufficiently modernized and characterized by: poor condition of the road, reduced carrying capacity, weight restrictions on the bridges, lack of safety elements resulting in low transport speeds, increased waiting times in traffic and reduced traffic safety.

The extent to which funded interventions will lead to improved road traffic can be evaluated from the perspective of the conditionality relationship between the nature of the changes determined by the completion of the contracted projects and the quality of road traffic. That is why the evaluation started from the set of expected changes in the transport infrastructure as defined in the ROP:

- Eliminate deficient areas in terms of transport volume and quality and meet the movement needs of citizens and goods;
- Develop intermodal transport by ensuring the connectivity through the county roads of the economic potential areas with the railway stations and the Danube and maritime ports, leading to the improvement of the trade and the increase of the regional competitiveness;
- Ensure that road safety is as good as possible for all road users (especially for pedestrians and cyclists) and for the protection of the environment.

It is expected that there will be a strong causal relationship between the expected results following the completion of the investments and the set of expected changes, a relationship which, through the carried out analysis, was identified as shown in the following table.

⁴ Source: Evaluator`s data processing from the NIS website, TEMPO database, TRN103B, TRN105B, TRN135A, TRN137A.

Table 13 The relationship between the expected change and the undertaken actions

Expected results following the completion of the investments	Expected change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensuring connectivity of the county roads with the TEN-T corridor; ■ Ensuring the technical parameters corresponding to the road category (travel speed, carrying capacity); ■ Planning intersections with national and/ or communal roads; ■ Rehabilitation of level crossings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Eliminating deficient areas in terms of transport volume and quality and meeting better the movement needs of citizens and goods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensuring connectivity of the county roads with the TEN-T corridor; ■ Facilitating access to railway stations and airports; ■ Facilitating transport to urban areas and between localities in the county/ region; ■ Facilitating transport to and from tourist resorts, cultural attractions, etc.; ■ Facilitating access to schools and medical services; ■ Facilitating the distribution of the products of local producers/ economic operators to urban centers and/ or other areas of the county/ region/ country; ■ Facilitating the supply of materials, equipment and products from the sale areas; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Developing intermodal transport by ensuring the connectivity through the county roads of the economic potential areas with the railway stations and the Danube and maritime ports, leading to the improvement of the trade and the increase of the regional competitiveness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increasing the safety of citizens by building pedestrian crossings with multivoltage lighting; ■ Construction of public transport stations along the county road; ■ building bicycle tracks; ■ Installing vertical and horizontal road signalling ■ Applying longitudinal markings and signalling indicators; ■ Mounting the guardrails ■ Reducing the noise level; ■ Construction of pluvial water collection and flood prevention systems; ■ Protecting the road against the effects of meteorological phenomena; ■ Planting tree alignments to improve the effects of wind and the CO2 level. ■ Lowering fuel consumption and emissions by ensuring a steady running speed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensuring that road safety is as good as possible for all road users (especially for pedestrians and cyclists) and for the protection of the environment

Expected results following the completion of the investments	Expected change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Drainage of rainwater and reduction of flood risk ■ Avoid landslides by consolidating the slopes ■ Construction of footbridge discharge channels. 	

From the presented table, it can be noticed that the actions undertaken through the financed projects can determine the expected changes regarding the improved road traffic, mainly targeting the quality of the road infrastructure by:

- Improving technical parameters;
- Increasing the safety level of traffic participants;
- Ensuring sustainability.

It is also expected that upgraded county roads will become alternative routes for freight and passenger vehicles, thus contributing to reducing bottlenecks in major network infrastructures, increasing transport capacity on TEN-T connections and reducing travel time.

C. Findings from data analysis

Evaluation question code	Findings
EG1	<p>The vast majority of respondents to the Online Questionnaire believe that the needs identified at the time of writing the Funding Application remain relevant.</p> <p>The information provided by the online survey on maintaining the relevance of the identified needs at the time of writing the Application for Financing is supported by the opinions of the participants to the Interviews, the Focus Group and the Panel of Experts.</p> <p>The vast majority of respondents to the Online Questionnaire believe the completed projects will have the expected impact.</p>
EG2	<p>By the evaluation date, 172 Financing Applications were submitted at national level, of which 106 were contracted.</p> <p>The coverage of the financial allocation through the budgets of the contracts signed by 31st December 2018 is at a reasonable level, with the ERDF budget contracting rate at national level being of 169.2%.</p> <p>According to the responses received from 90 of the 106 participants to the online survey on the state of the project:</p>

Evaluation question code	Findings
	<p>4.4% are still in the process of preparing the awarding documentation; 6.7% are at the stage of endorsement of the awarding documentation; 11.1% are in the publishing stage of the award procedure; 3.3% are having the award procedure suspended or contested; 10.0% are in the tender evaluation stage; 2.2% are in the stage of the works contracting; Only 51% awarded the works contract.</p> <p>The distribution of submitted and approved financing applications by type of region is:</p> <p>Less developed regions - 141 submitted financing applications, 102 contracted, contracting rate of 73.3%; Bucharest-Ilfov - 1 application for financing submitted, not contracted, contracting rate 0%; ITI - 6 financing applications, 4 contracted, contracting rate of 66.7% SUERD - 24 Funding Applications submitted, 0 contracted.</p> <p>The share of contracted projects in total submitted applications ranges from 96.9% in the NW region to 27.3% in the South Muntenia Region.</p>
EG3	<p>For less developed regions</p> <p>The total amount of eligible expenses in the Certification Authority's system by 31st December 2018 was of 499.6 million lei (approx. 107.37 million Euro), i.e. only 37.1% of the 289.4 million Euro target envisaged for 2018 through the Performance Framework; The total number of rehabilitated/ upgraded km reported in SMIS is 0.00 km compared to the 110 modernized km target in the less developed regions assumed under the Performance Framework ROP 2014-2020 for 2018.</p> <p>For more developed regions (Bucharest Ilfov):</p> <p>The total amount of eligible expenses in the accounting system of the Certification Authority is 0.00 lei (0.00 Euro) compared to the target of 1,250,000 Euro, assumed under the Performance Framework of ROP 2014-2020 v 5.3; The total number of newly built km reported in SMIS is 0.00 km compared to the 3 km target assumed under the Performance Framework of ROP 2014-2020 for 2018.</p>

Evaluation question code	Findings
ES61	<p>The total number of inhabitants that will benefit from roads rehabilitated/ upgraded through the contracted projects is of 2,986,829.00 inhabitants compared to the target of 1,143,000 inhabitants assumed under the performance framework.</p> <p>The number of km contracted for rehabilitation/ upgrading is of 3,509.9 km compared to the 2,075 km target.</p> <p>By finalizing the contracted projects, the share of the non-modernized roads from the total county roads will be reduced by 16% at the level the whole country.</p>
ES62	<p>Of the 106 projects contracted at national level by 31st December 2018, 43 (40.6%) are unfinished projects.</p> <p>The total ERDF eligible budget contracted at national level is of 6,971.23 million lei, i.e. 169.2% from the allocation.</p> <p>The total non-reimbursable budget contracted at national level is of 8,039.71 million lei, i.e. 165.8% from the allocation</p> <p>Of the total of 6,971.23 million lei ERDF total eligible budget contracted at national level, 18.1% (1,264.90 million lei) represents the value of the ERDF eligible budget for unfinished projects.</p> <p>The unfinished projects had a major impact on the amount of the reimbursements. Thus, out of the total reimbursed budget of 463.25 million lei, 90.65% (419.98 million lei) represent payments made to unfinished projects.</p> <p>The decision to take over the financing, through the ERDF, of the projects initiated by other forms of financing led to the increase of the absorption rate from 0.89% to 9.6%.</p> <p>By contracting the Financing Applications, a number of 3,509.9 km of county roads will be modernized, reducing by 16% the number of km which needs to be modernized at national level.</p> <p>Of the total of 3,509.9 rehabilitated km</p> <p>3,430.5 will be rehabilitated through 7R projects type; 79.5 km will be rehabilitated through ITI projects type; The SUERD projects type and Bucharest Ilfov did not contracted any project by the reference date, being still under evaluation;</p>

Evaluation question code	Findings
	<p>Of the total of 3,430.5 km rehabilitated through 7R projects type, 1,016.2 km (28.9%) will be rehabilitated through the 7R UF projects type.</p> <p>Of the total of 2,986,829 inhabitants benefiting from improved transport at the national level, the number of benefiting inhabitants through the 7R projects type is of 2,936,305.</p> <p>Of the total of 2,986,829 inhabitants benefiting from improved transport at the national level, 592,129 (19.82%) inhabitants represent the contribution of the 7R unfinished projects.</p>
EA61	The undertaken actions and the expected results following the implementation of the contracted projects lead to the expected results according to ROP 2014-2020 PA 6, Investment Priority 6.1

5. Conclusions, recommendations

A. Conclusions

Following the analysis of the collected data, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The objectives of the ROP 2014-2020 Priority Axis 6 are still justified in relation to the existing socio-economic needs in the 8 development regions. More than 85% of the online survey respondents believe that both the development and modernization of the county road network and the access to the TEN-T corridors and, implicitly, to cities and municipalities, continue to have a high and very high relevance.
2. The preliminary prioritization at regional level of road infrastructure modernization projects is a success factor for PA6 and it has created a favourable framework for their early preparation.
3. In the case of less developed regions (including ITIs), the contracting of the ERDF eligible budget by 31st December 2018 (169.2%) and the structure of the contracted projects create the premises for the achievement of the envisaged objectives. The analysis of the existing data in SMIS shows that 106 financing applications submitted by 36 County Councils have been contracted. Thus, the concluded contracts foresee the achievement by 2023 of the following total values of the result and output indicators:
 - 2,986,829 persons who will benefit from improved transport compared to the target of 1,125,000 persons envisaged through ROP (265.5% fulfilment of the target assumed under the Performance Framework);
 - 3,509 km of reconstructed or upgraded TEN-T connected roads compared to the target value of 2,055 km set by the ROP (169.5% achievement of the target assumed under the Performance Framework).
4. The lack of contracted projects, by the reference date, within the Bucharest-Ilfov development region (more developed regions) signals a high risk in reaching the targets for this region category, namely 18,000 people benefiting from improved transport and 20 km of rebuilt or upgraded TEN-T connected roads by 2023.
5. According to the information received from the beneficiaries, the response rate for the launched calls was influenced by the difficulty of meeting the deadlines mainly due to:
 - Strict requirements regarding the proof of property status, especially at the first call;
 - Successive changes of the applicant's guidelines;
 - High technical complexity and large number of requested forms/ documents.
6. Government Emergency Ordinance 30/2018 regarding the introduction of measures in the field of European funds and the completion of normative acts has had positive effects on the contracting level of the allocated ERDF eligible budget and on the achievement of the targeted result and output indicators, by establishing the mechanism for taking

over for financing, through ROP 2014-2020, projects initiated by other types of financing and whose degree of maturity is minimal, at the stage of the works contract (UF unfinished projects).

7. The relatively late start of the ROP, accompanied by delays caused by the need to clarify the ownership regime and by the execution of the procurement procedures for design and execution, resulted in the failure to meet the physical and financial targets for 2018 set by the performance framework. Thus,
 - The process of entrusting works contracts is delayed; by the end of 2018, out of 106 contracted projects, less than half were in the execution stage, respectively 45 of which 43 are unfinished projects;
 - The target of 289,411,765 Euro, assumed through the Performance Framework for 2018, regarding the total amount of eligible expenditures in the Certification Authority's system, is fulfilled in a proportion of 37.1%;
 - The intermediate targets regarding 110 modernized in km less developed regions and 3 modernized km in the more developed regions under the 2018 performance framework were not achieved, with no modernized road km reported. The information from the MA's monitoring system leads to the conclusion that the modernization of about 200 km of county road was completed by the end of 2018, but this achievement was not registered because the documentation necessary for the takeover of the works by the beneficiaries wasn't completed.
8. The high duration of the procurement procedures for works contracts and the low capacity of the construction companies (both financially and as regards the labour force) represent the main risk factors for achieving the set objectives for the following period.
9. By implementing the projects contracted by 31st December 2018, the ROP will contribute by about 16% to the reduction of the share of the non-modernized roads from the total county roads at the national level by 2023.
10. Project calls reached their target; by 31st December 2018, 172 funding applications were submitted for all development regions and for all types of projects, the total ERDF requested budget covering 282% of the ERDF allocated budget.
11. The coverage of the financial allocation through the contracted budgets is of 165.8%; the payments made by 31st December 2018 amounted to 463.2 million lei, representing approximately 9.6% of the total non-reimbursable allocation at the Priority Axis level.
12. By 31st December 2018, the contracted projects did not cover all regions and/ or project types, SUERD and BI project types being still under evaluation. In the period between the reference date and the date of the report, the following were signed:
 - 8 SUERD contracts totalling 505.2 million lei;
 - 1 Bucharest Ilfov contract, worth a total of 61.9 million lei.

13. The contracted projects will have a significant impact on increasing the accessibility of rural and urban areas in the proximity of the TEN-T network and on achieving the targets of the related result indicators of the Specific Objective.
14. The decision to take over and finance from the ERDF the projects initiated from other sources (unfinished projects) has had a positive impact on:
- The level of payments made from the total non-reimbursable allocation;
 - The final number of projects contracted at national level;
 - The dynamics of contracting ERDF budgets at national level;
 - The value of the reimbursed amounts;
 - The number of modernized contracted km, representing 28.9% of the total modernized km contracted by 31st December 2018;
 - The number of inhabitants benefiting from improved transport, with a contribution of 19.82% of the total population at national level benefiting from improved transport.
15. The important contribution of the unfinished contracted projects is mainly due to the fact that:
- The works were in an advanced stage;
 - The Applicant's Guidelines responded better to the needs of the applicants and did not undergo any changes.
16. The Integrated Management Information System managed by the Ministry of European Funds still requires adjustments to meet the demands of all users, thus becoming an effective tool in monitoring progress.

Recommendations

The analysis of the causal relationships identified as a result of processing the collected information highlights the following recommendations:

1. Recommendations on increasing the implementation level of the ROP 2014-2020

- a. *Recommendations for reducing the duration of the financing applications' evaluation for projects in this phase (BI, SUERD, ITI, 7R):*
 - i. Increase the number of persons involved in the evaluation of funding applications;
 - ii. Earlier launch of the procurement process of evaluation services by the IB and/or hiring temporary evaluators.
- b. *Recommendations for shortening the contracting period*
 - i. Introduce into MySMIS appropriate framework agreements for PA6;
 - ii. Highlight in MySMIS the latest version of the documents (resulted after multiple clarifications and updates) in order to facilitate the consolidation of the set of contract documents;
 - iii. Increase the number of people involved in the contract preparation process.

c. Recommendations for increasing the submission speed of Payment Requests/ Reimbursement Requests

- i. Consultation with beneficiaries and consideration of their requests (mentioned in interviews and sample survey) regarding the waiver of the requirement to attach documents that do not change between the submissions of two Reimbursement requests and the acceptance of the document scanning before the reimbursement request file has been prepared and numbered;
- ii. Update procedures according to the outcome of the consultations.

2. Recommendations on how to use MySMIS more efficiently

- i. Upload of progress reports by the beneficiaries directly on MySMIS;
- ii. Optimize the way MySMIS works so that it is no longer necessary to submit documents on paper (especially documents related to the procurement procedures);
- iii. Create the possibility to access documents between different application modules, in order to eliminate the need for multiple uploads of the same document;
- iv. Run a poll among beneficiaries on the issues encountered in using MySMIS;
- v. Change MySMIS operating procedures in order to solve the problems reported by the beneficiaries;
- vi. Transpose the experience gained in the use of MySMIS by the RDAs in training sessions addressed to the beneficiaries regarding MySMIS operating modalities, in order to ensure a unitary operation and avoid the input of inconsistent or uncorrelated information;
- vii. Review the way updates are introduced into MySMIS, in order to reduce the workload on ROP Intermediate Body staff;
- viii. The ROP MA's analysis of the projects related information entered in the SMIS, in terms of their accuracy and completeness.

3. Recommendations on the future programming period

- a. Recommendations to ensure a high rate of response to the launched calls
 - o Improve the relevant legislative framework in order to:
 - Reduce the duration of the tabulation process;
 - Amend the Government Decisions regarding the attestation of the public domain owned by ATUs;
 - Modify the Government Decision on roads classification;
 - Amend the Water Law so as to create a framework enabling the County Councils to carry out construction works on bridges over riverbeds;
 - Reduce the preparation time of the ANEVAR report (National Association of Authorized Evaluators in Romania) in cases where the expropriation for public utility reasons is necessary.

- Clarify all aspects of ownership at County Council level;
- Prior consultation of beneficiaries on the content of the applicant's guidelines in order to define a clear and easy-to-use content of the application forms, for the sections regarding the budget and the procurement plan;
- Unequivocally establish the list of documents to be attached to the application (ownership titles, permits, etc.);
- Clearly establish the eligible and non-eligible costs categories;
- Avoid the substantial change of guidelines between calls;
- Organize training sessions on:
 - Content of the applicant's guidelines;
 - How to interpret the eligibility criteria;
 - Content and how to fill in the submission forms;
 - Classify the expenditure into eligible and non-eligible costs;
 - Various issues emerged from discussions with participants or lessons learned from the previous programming period.
- Transpose the experience gained by the RDAs on the use of MySMIS in training sessions on how to use the platform, in order to shorten financing requests uploading time on MySMIS.
- b. Include unfinished projects on the eligibility list from the first calls, in order to ensure an increased expenditure since the first year of programme implementation.
- c. Improve public procurement legislation so that:
 - to allow the establishment of selection criteria able to support the participation in the procurement procedures of tenderers with appropriate technical and financial capacity;
 - to create a framework for faster resolution of the appeals;
- d. Initiate the process of identifying and prioritizing projects at regional level for the next period.
- e. Earlier launch by the beneficiaries of the public procurement procedures related to the implementation of the projects, with resolute condition.
- f. Ensure the continuity of the modernization process along the entire route of the roads included in the priority project portfolio, by encouraging partnerships between County Councils in the same region as well as interregional projects.