

Batch 3 - Evaluation of ROP 2014-2020 interventions

FINAL REPORT

Theme 12. Analysis of the ROP Implementation System

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EVALUATION REPORT

DISCLAIMER

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

The opinions expressed herein 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

IDA	Intercommunity Development Association
RDA	Regional Development Agency
MA OPTA	Managing Authority for the Operational Programme (OP) on Technical Assistance (TA),
MA OPAC	Managing Authority for the Operational Programme “Administrative Capacity”
MA OPHC	Managing Authority for the Operational Programmes “Human Capital”
MA POR	Managing Authority for the Regional Operational Programme
NAPP	National Authority for Public Procurement
ANCPI	National Land Registry Agency
PA	Priority Axis
LPA	Local Public Administration
TA	Technical assistance
UA	Urban Authority
OE ROP	Office for the Evaluation of the Regional Operational Program
ECC	Evaluation Coordination Committee
RDC	Regional Development Committee
CdS	Specifications
MC ROP	Monitoring Committee of the Regional Operational Program
CNDR	Regional Development National Committee
DG PA	Directorate General for Public Administration
DG Regional Development	Directorate General for Regional Development
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
FEDR	European Regional Development Fund
FESI	European Structural and Investment Funds
RDNF	Regional Development National Fund
LAG	Local Action Group
NIS	National Institute of Statistics
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investments
MDRAP	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
IB	Intermediate Body
TO	Thematic Objective
RDP	Regional Development Plan
MAEP	Multi-Annual Evaluation Plan
NLUP	National Land Use Plan
LDNP	Local Development National Programme
NRDP	National Rural Development Programme
OP EC	Operational Program Economic Competitiveness

ROP	Regional Operational Program
LDS	Local Development Strategy
ISSD DD	Integrated strategy for sustainable development of the Danube Delta
IUDS	Integrated Urban Development Strategy
GSG	General Secretariat of the Government
EUSDR	EU Strategy for the Danube Region
TAU	Territorial Administrative Unit

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Executive summary

This report includes the analysis of the ROP implementation system, with the following objectives:

- Analysis of the contribution of the ROP to the regional development process in Romania, through the corresponding institutional and legislative system;
- Analysing the capacity of the institutions involved in the implementation and management of the development strategies co-financed by European funds;
- Analysis of the extent to which the ROP contributes to strengthening the capacity of regional and local bodies to ensure the identification, prioritization, promotion and management of sustainable and regional impact projects.

The evaluation questions referred to the way in which the **responsibilities** regarding the achievement of the regional development policy objectives at central and local level were assumed and to the impact of the **decentralization** process on the regional and local institutional structures involved in the implementation of the ROP.

1. Findings and conclusions

- There are clear regulations in the field of regional development, which need to be adapted to the current institutional context: there are mentioned some national coordination structures (CNDR and the National Fund for regional development), which currently do not exist, but there are no inter-territorial or public private partnership structures (inter-community development associations, LAGs) that have a role in the processes of regional and territorial development;
- The current legislation is appropriate to allow the assumption the responsibilities related to the regional development policy, especially in the case of the ROP (ROP MA / IBs, delegated functions, organisation and functioning regulations and system procedures);
- There is the need for a clearer definition of the horizontal collaboration within the ROP MA / IBs departments under programme implementation, in view to reduce staff overload;
- The connection between central and local level (territorial needs) is regulated, but the strategic planning function at regional level requires clarification from the perspective of local needs and capacities;
- The actors involved at local level in the implementation of the ROP (ITI, LAG and UA structures) would assume new responsibilities in the implementation of the regional development policy and the decentralization process provided there is a formalized institutional framework and adequate financial resources. Participatory processes can enhance their capacity to assume responsibilities in strategic planning and implementation of the regional development policy;
- It is necessary to clearly define the national (MDRAP / MA ROP and other structures involved in the ROP system and in the management of FESI) and regional (CDR / RDA / county offices of RDAs) coordination relations throughout the decision-making process;
- Assuming joint responsibility of the ministries responsible for sectoral policies: the sectoral contribution to the regional development policy is not sufficiently formalized;
- The human, logistical and technical resources allocated to the MA ROP are below the needs (overload during peak periods), which urges the realization of a detailed needs' analysis in the next period;
- At the regional / ROP IBs level, human resources are adequate from all points of view (qualitative and quantitative); however, financial resources represent a challenge for the future, which must be addressed in parallel with ensuring the strategic function of covered by RDAs

representing the linkage between the central level and the territorial level of the regional development policy;

- ROP operational procedures comply with the requirements of the European regulations, as well as with the institutional framework and the agreements for the delegation of functions developed by the national legislation;
- The complexity of the 2014-2020 ROP also had an impact on the resources and organization of the RDAs. Compared to the previous period, there is a significant increase in the tasks related to other functions at regional level (development of offices at county level, establishment of IBs for PO EC, etc.), which demonstrates their ability to adapt and assume responsibilities related to complex objectives, which are issues that shall be taken into account for the future review of the relevant legislation;
- RDAs are the only entities that can sustain a strategic vision on regional development, exceeding administrative boundaries, for the benefit of all communities in the regions;
- ROP has significantly contributed to the development of the strategic planning capacity at the level of the potential beneficiaries. This aspect is emphasized especially within the integrated development mechanisms, where the newly created structures (Urban Authorities, ADI, ITI DD and LAGs) have the responsibility of prioritizing the interventions;
- The integrated territorial development mechanisms contributed to the identification and selection of the interventions, but also to the development of the partnership and support structures. ROP, based on the integrated strategies, adopted at the level of the local partnership, has also contributed to increase the decision-makers' capacity to identify and select the priority projects for the communities;
- The improvement of capacities' for ROP beneficiaries, local public administrations, has not been oriented until now towards the competences related to the decentralization process. Therefore, the contribution of the ROP to these processes is limited and indirect, being related to the improvement of the public services delivered by the local public administrations;
- The ROP's contribution to decentralization can only be reinforced under the conditions of adequate coordination of the ROP implementation system (i.e. through the accessing conditions) with the methodology and instruments adopted to facilitate administrative decentralization (i.e. quality and cost standards related to public services)
- Stronger synergy is needed with other complementary funding programmes and sources (i.e., by matching the priorities and content of actions aimed at building capacities according to the needs identified for the implementation of the ROP).

2. Recommendations

- Strengthening the coordination function of government policies, by establishing a strong link between them and the governmental responsibilities arising from the signature of the Partnership Agreement: for example, a mechanism for monitoring and alerting delays in fulfilling the "enabling conditions" at the beginning of operational programmes' implementation;
- Increasing the degree of responsibility assumed by the line ministries, regarding the contribution of national sectoral policies to the regional development policy;
- Given the increased importance of integrated territorial interventions, there is the need to review the legislation in the field of regional development. At this regard, it is recommended to initiate an institutional framework (working group) to substantiate the decisions of legislative review and coordination with other governmental initiatives (i.e., the National Fund for Local Development and the Code of Public Administration, approved on 26.06.2019). This institutional framework will include, without being limited to, the following institutions and departments: MDRAP, MA ROP, DG AP, DG Regional Development. This inter-ministerial working group shall have the role of analysing the impact of the regulations on the ROP implementation system (and, in general, EFSI).

- The legislative changes shall ensure:
 - the functionality of regional development policy coordination structures, with adequate financial resources, so that the regional development policy is not seen only through the ROP / ERDF perspective;
 - a close and strategic correlation at the level of governmental policies that are relevant to the regional development policy;
 - the fulfilment of the strategic role of connecting the central and the local level by the regional structures established by law, respectively the RDAs;
 - a strengthened role of the regional structures (RDAs) in the programming, monitoring and evaluation of the regional development policy at territorial level, establishing policy coordination mechanisms at top-down and bottom-up levels of competence, oriented towards achieving regional development goals , for the continuity of the functions that the RDAs perform, in addition to the tasks delegated in the ROP implementation system. The necessary resources could be provided by (re) operationalizing the National Regional Development Fund and / or any other financial system / mechanism (the National Local Development Fund or the national budget, on a special financing line). In any case, the source should be national and not related to the management of European funds (i.e. not the ROP TA axis), because the respective function would be related to a national policy and would not derive from the tasks performed within the ROP system (although the approach will obviously contribute to the improvement of this system);
 - the formulation of the regional development policy should be done on the basis of the spatial planning documents at national, regional, sub-regional level;
 - a stronger link between regional policy interventions and administrative decentralization processes, so that LPA projects have a greater and more direct impact on improving the delivery of public policies at local level.

It is also necessary:

- Developing the strategic coordination mechanisms at governmental level, which will bring sectoral policies closer to territorial needs, and this will be reflected in the regional development policy and specifically in the ROP;
- The methodological coordination by the GSG of the ministries in order to promote the processes of administrative decentralization;
- Reducing the complexity (measures / axes) of the ROP by concentrating the development objectives according to the priorities of the regional and sectoral development policy;
- Maintaining the institutional management system of ROP 2014-2020 in the next programming period, without new accreditations or other administrative procedures;
- Extending the participatory nature of programming by strengthening the role of regional structures, such as the Regional Planning Committees, RDAs and sectoral committees in the priority projects' identification phase;
- Ensuring the continuity of the ROP AM structures and capitalizing on the experience gained, avoiding reorganizations that destabilize the ROP implementation system;
- Carrying out an analysis of the horizontal functional relationships, both at the MA level and at the ROP IBs level, so that the support structures (i.e. legal departments, public procurement, county offices) help the implementation of the programme in a more systematic way, from the perspective of reducing the tasks at the level of DG AM / ROP IBs and systematizing the approval and decision-making process;
- Ensuring the correlation of ROP human and financial resources with the evolution of ROP allocation and structure, so that the organization of specialized services reflects the complexity of the programme;

- Providing adequate spaces and equipment for the functioning of the implementation system;
- Simplifying the procedures (reducing situations that require approval and / or validation, adopting a better information exchange system - ensuring the functionality of the "implementation" module within SMIS) but also by early involving actors at central and local level in planning priorities and respecting the implementation schedule for all;
- Assessing the work-load level taking into account the implementation processes, their duration and the expected work volume (i.e., number of projects submitted for contracting, number of expected reimbursement requests, etc.), at least quarterly;
- Analysing the opportunity of reintroducing the Implementation Framework Document, so that operational aspects of the programme implementation, detailing the selection and prioritization criteria, as well as the activities' eligibility conditions and the expenditures eligibility by types of interventions, can be defined from the beginning. In this way, the conditions would remain, as far as possible, in force throughout the implementation, and the predictability of the programme would be increased;
- Simplifying the contracting procedure in view to reduce the administrative burdens (i.e., inter-institutional agreements with entities responsible for issuing the necessary administrative documents in the contracting phase);
- Extending the adoption of the simplified cost option (in particular the flat rates option by cost lines), according to the proposed common regulation for 2021-2027;
- Ensuring the functioning of the implementation module within MySMIS;
- Defining a timetable for the preparation and launch of calls for project proposals and ensuring its effective implementation, so that the estimation of the necessary resources at system level is correct and the potential beneficiaries are able to prepare their projects in time;
- Continue the effort to strengthen the helpdesk function, including by involving support structures and organising it according to the ROP implementation processes;
- Analysing the information and training needs of potential beneficiaries, on strategic planning issues, project management, public procurement, etc. The analysis could be coordinated at national level (i.e. by DG AP / MRDAP or NACS) and could be facilitated by LPA (Local Public Administrations) associations;
- Supporting the LPA in order to increase their strategic planning capacity and their capacity to correlate local policies with financing programmes, especially among small towns;
- Allocating reserve resources (for example from the state budget and other government programmes) in order to cover the costs derived from the strategic planning activity of the LPA (i.e., exceeding allocations on specific objectives within PA 4, under the integrated approach) ;
- Promoting integrated territorial interventions based on the lessons learned from the 2014-2020 pilot exercise (LAG, urban authorities, ITI);
- Simplifying the conditions for accessing integrated interventions, at the same time strengthening the DLRC approach and the role of LAGs, by integrating local development strategies within integrated strategy for urban development and other strategic documents at territorial administrative unit level;
- Strengthening the role of the Urban Authorities in the urban development integrated strategy monitoring and evaluation phase;
- Urgently ensuring the functionality of the SMIS system to become a basic tool in simplifying the implementation processes. If all SMIS implementation modules were functional, they would reduce the volume and circulation of paper documents, thus minimizing administrative burdens for all parties involved (i.e., reimbursement documents are transmitted on paper and loaded scanned versions into the system, the monitoring module does not allow the issuance of reports useful for the purpose of monitoring, the different interfaces for the different types of users do not facilitate the process of supporting the beneficiaries in implementation).

3. Lessons learned

- Participation and involvement of actors with attributions in the ROP implementation system at various levels of governance (vertically) and in various fields of activity (horizontal), as well as ensuring the integrated character of these are key aspects for the effectiveness of regional development policy. Only through an integrated approach, hierarchical coordination implemented from the bottom up, as well as through the accountability of actors at all levels as regards the formulation and implementation of development strategies, programs, plans and projects the success of regional development can be ensured;
- Actors at local level need continuous support in understanding and implementing the principles of balanced territorial development, including from the perspective of assuming the responsibilities related to administrative decentralization. For LPAs with low human and financial resources, this support shall include additional assistance, going beyond the administrative limits, in order to create the critical mass needed for the delivery of public services at the optimum level depending on the final beneficiaries, respectively the local communities. In this context, the association between local actors is essential to the success of the regional development policy;
- The regional level of governance needs to be strengthened to ensure the strategic vision and "catalysing" resources and potential at the local level from a regional perspective. The role of RDAs and other regional structures of partnership and associative type is essential and should be further exploited, in order to avoid dispersion of resources and fragmentation of results;
- The function of monitoring and evaluating regional development strategies shall be strengthened and closely linked to the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of governmental, sectoral, local and regional strategies and policies. This aspect can be assured only under the assumption that the line ministries assume their specific responsibility within the regional development policy, under the coordination of the MRDPA, as governmental structure responsible for the regional development policy;
- For these reasons, the main lesson learned from the evaluation of the 2014-2020 ROP implementation system is that in order to achieve the expected results, the regional development policy must go beyond both the local administrative limits and the ROP limits and become an integrated tool of all government policies, reflected at regional level.

Chapter 1. Current situation

Description of ROP 2014-2020

With a total allocation of 8.384 billion euros, of which 6.860 billion euros from EU contribution, the Regional Operational Program is the main instrument for financing the regional development policy in Romania, and the objective of the program is to achieve a balanced development of the territory and reduce the development gaps at the level of the eight regions of Romania. In accordance with the provisions of the European regulations, ROP Romania 2014-2020 contributes to the achievement of the eleven thematic objectives established in Article 7 of UE Regulation No 1303/2013 for the 2014-2020 programming period. Thus, according to the revised ROP 2014-2020 version, approved in October 2018, the Programme consists of 15 Priority Axes; these are correlated with the thematic objectives and the ERDF (EU contribution) allocations as follows:

Table 1.1 Description of ROP 2014-2020: priority axes, thematic objectives, allocations

Priority Axis (PA)	Thematic objective (TO) and investment priority (IP)	ERDF allocation (EU contribution) in euro	% of total
PA 1. Promoting technology transfer	TO 1 - Strengthening research, technological development and innovation	EUR 152,531,915.00	2.22%
PA 2. Improving the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises	TO 3. Increasing the competitiveness of SMEs	EUR 979,680,850.00	14.28%
PA 3. Supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy	TO 4 - Supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy	EUR 1,453,382,979.00	21.19%
PA 4. Supporting sustainable urban development	TO 4 - Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors TO 6 - Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency TO 9 - Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination TO 10 - Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning	EUR 1,178,829,788.00	17.18%
PA 5. Improving the urban area and preserving, protecting and sustainably capitalizing the cultural heritage	TO 6 - Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency	EUR 367,815,892.00	5.36%
PA 6. Improvement of regionally important infrastructure and sustainable transport systems	TO 7 - Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructure	EUR 885,387,985.00	12.91%
PA 7. Diversification of local economies through the sustainable development of tourism	TO 8 - Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility	EUR 99,737,299.00	1.45%
PA 8. Development of health and social infrastructure	TO 9 - Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination	EUR 348,117,301.00	5.07%
PA 9. Supporting the economic and social regeneration of disadvantaged communities in the urban environment	TO 9 - Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination	EUR 83,744,681.00	1.22%
PA 10. Improvement of the	TO 10 - Investing in education, training and	EUR	4.33%

Priority Axis (PA)	Thematic objective (TO) and investment priority (IP)	ERDF allocation (EU contribution) in euro	% of total
educational infrastructure	vocational training for skills and lifelong learning	296,702,128.00	
PA 11. The geographic extension of the system for property registration in the cadastre and land registry	TO 11 - Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration	EUR 253,430,885.00	3.69%
PA 12. Technical assistance	-	160,638,297.00	2.34%
PA 13. Supporting the regeneration of small and medium-sized cities	TO 9 - Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination	EUR 200,000,000.00	2.92%
PA 14. Creating the infrastructure of regional emergency hospitals	TO 9 - Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination	EUR 150,000,000.00	2.19%
PA 15. Initiative for SMEs	TO 3. Increasing the competitiveness of SMEs	EUR 250,000,000.00	3.64%

Source: evaluator's summary of the information contained in the ROP 2014-2020

Progress in ROP 2014-2020 implementation

The situation of the progress in implementation of the ROP 2014-2020 as of 02/04/2019¹ shows that at national level there are 3,572 projects contracted, respectively completed or under implementation (except for PA 12), amounting to 17.627 billion lei as EU contribution (about 3,843 billion euro), with payments to beneficiaries totalling about 2,475 billion lei (538 million euros, respectively).

The analysis of the indicators referring to the number and amount of the contracted projects, as well as to the amount of the payments made to the beneficiaries shows that the situation of attracting ROP funds at regional level allows to identify three categories of regions for each indicator: the "above average" category, which includes the regions with a very high level of each indicator analysed; "average" category, which includes regions with similar values, over a relatively small range (which we called "amplitude class") and relatively balanced performances at the level of all indicators; "below average" category, which includes regions with relatively lower values than other regions and a relatively lower performance. Annex 5.2 presents a set of three maps² illustrating the result of this subdivision into categories, and the following graph shows the contribution of each region to the total value of each indicator.³

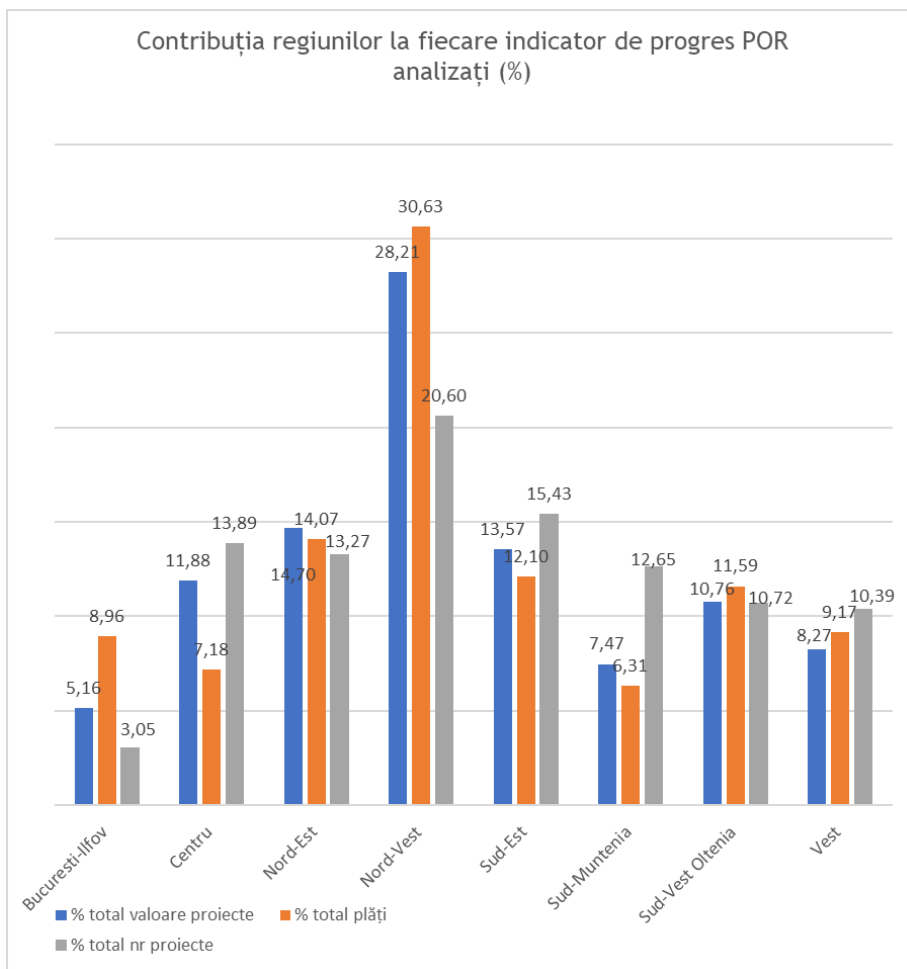
Thus, the North-West region is noted as the leading region, with the number of projects, amounts of projects and payments made higher than the rest of the country, concentrating between 30% and 20% of the total value by country for each indicator. The North-East, South-East and South-Muntenia regions are an "average" group of regions, with the rest of the regions showing relatively lower progress, especially in terms of payments to beneficiaries.

Figure 1: Regions' contribution to ROP progress indicators (total axes) (%)

¹ Data provided by the Project Monitoring Service within the MA ROP. Centralization may differ from the situation at the regional level, due to time gaps in the real-time SMIS registration of updated information on the contracted projects.

² For details of the methodological aspects related to the preparation of these maps, see Chapter 2.c.

³ The database, namely the processing of SMIS data, is also found in Annex 5.2.



Source: Evaluator's processing of SMIS data on 02/04/2019

The overall situation at regional level does not show significant differences at county and local level, as well as at axis level. These territorial differences may be due to differences in various resources and existing priorities (eg. the counties that have concentrated investments under Axis 7 are those with particularly high tourist potential, which form true tourist clusters in Suceava, Constanța, Vâlcea and Maramureș areas), as well as, in general, to different starting conditions (eg. regional disparities highlighted in numerous national strategic documents, starting with the Partnership Agreement 2014-2020), which imply a greater or lesser capacity for preparation and implementation of projects with European funding. Other factors that may affect the absorption capacity of the funds at local and regional level, determining conditions more or less favourable to making the investments, include: the existence of a less saturated construction market; existence or lack of cadastral documents; complementarity with other local initiatives (projects complementary to other levels of governance) that facilitate project implementation; difficulties related to public procurement procedures (such as contesting the results, cancelling the procedures for reasons beyond the control of the Contracting Authority etc.); a more or less dynamic economic context and so on.

The counties with the largest number of projects contracted are: Cluj (267), Constanța (180), Bihor (154), Timiș (146) and Argeș (142), and those with the highest value of projects (EU funding) are Cluj (1,743,073,821 lei), Bihor (1,036. 340,777 lei), Bistrița-Năsăud (951,079,707 lei) and Bucharest (818,318,099 lei). The counties of Argeș, Constanța and Timiș concentrate much lower EU funding values in relation to the number of projects under implementation

(respectively, Argeș 363,317,674 lei, Constanța 597,566,618 lei and Timiș 455,538.668 lei), probably due to the incidence of the projects with lower average values, contracted under PA 2.

With regard to the differences by priority axis, they are highlighted in the following table:

Table 1.2: Number of projects contracted per PA

Priority Axes	Number of contracted projects	Counties with the largest number of contracted projects
Priority axis 2	2,463	Over 100 projects in the following counties: Argeș, Constanța, Cluj, Brașov, Dolj and Timiș
Priority axis 3	400	86 projects in Bucharest, 26 in Hunedoara County; between 10 and 19 projects in Bacău, Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Caraș-Severin, Cluj, Galați, Harghita, Ilfov, Maramureș, Neamț, Sălaj, Satu Mare, Sibiu Counties
Priority axis 4	26	10 projects in Bihor County, 6 in Cluj County, 3 in Galați County and 3 in Bistrița-Năsăud County
Priority axis 5	235	Over 10 projects in Cluj, Iași, Neamț, Prahova, Suceava Counties
Priority axis 6	103	12 projects only in Cluj County, the rest being between 1 and 7 projects/county
Priority axis 7	30	6 projects in Constanța County and 4 projects in the counties of Suceava and Vâlcea
Priority axis 8	92	Over 5 projects in Bacău, Botoșani, Iași, Timiș and Vaslui Counties
Priority axis 10	214	69 projects only in Cluj County and over 19 in Bihor (45), Bistrița-Năsăud, Maramureș and Satu Mare Counties
Priority axis 12	16	15 at regional level (IB POR) 1 at national level (MA ROP)
Priority axis 13	5	4 in Bistrița-Năsăud County

Source: Evaluator's processing of SMIS data on 02/04/2019

There are no projects under implementation in PA 1, PA 9, PA 14 and PA 15 (PO SMEs). Also, PA 12 concerns the regional level (RDAs) and national level (MA ROP), and PA 11 is implemented at centralized level through the contract signed with ANCPI (National Land Registry Agency).

With regard to the value of the projects per Priority Axes, the situation as of 02/04/2019 was as follows:

Table 1.3: Value of the contracted projects per PA

Priority Axes	The value of contract projects (EU contribution, lei)	Counties with the highest value (EU contribution) of contracted projects
Priority axis 2	Lei 2,593,269,750	Over 130,000,000 lei in the counties of Constanța (213,848,932 lei), Brașov and Argeș
Priority axis 3	Lei 2,625,780,029	728,608,464 lei in Bucharest, 383,866,232 in Cluj County and over 100,000,000 lei in Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud and Iași
Priority axis 4	Lei 869,324,418	395,731,507 lei in Bihor County and 335,434,563 lei in Cluj County
Priority axis 5	Lei 2,082,537,549	Over 100,000,000 lei in Cluj, Suceava, Iași, Dolj and Argeș Counties
Priority axis 6	Lei 6,965,961,413	Over 500,000,000 lei in Bistrița Năsăud and Cluj Counties, and about 340,000,000 lei in Sălaj County
Priority axis 7	Lei 393,096,622	98,243,847 lei in Constanța County and over

		30,000,000 lei in Bihor, Suceava and Vâlcea Counties
Priority axis 8	Lei 1,031,576,753	Over 100,000,000 lei in Bacău and Timiș Counties
Priority axis 10	Lei 938,617,563	Over 100,000,000 lei in Bihor, Neamț and Cluj Counties
Priority axis 12	Lei 336,305,403	258,212,144 lei at regional level 78,093,259 lei at national level
Priority axis 13	Lei 82,923,354	69,913,781 lei in Bistrița-Năsăud county

Source: Evaluator's processing of SMIS data on 02/04/2019

With regard to the amount of the payments made to the beneficiaries, the situation differs slightly from the total value of the expenses incurred by contracting the projects, the amount of the payments made representing on average only 14% of the expenses incurred.

Once again, the overall situation, on the totality of the priority axes, shows that Cluj County concentrates the highest value of the payments made to the beneficiaries, followed by the Municipality of Bucharest, Bistrița-Năsăud County and Bihor County.

The following table briefly presents the situation of payments per priority axis, highlighting the counties with a higher concentration thereof, which allows to note that the Municipality of Bucharest is among the ones with the greatest financial progress, mainly due to the completion of the projects under the Priority Axis 3.

Table 1.4: The amount of the payments made for the projects under implementation by PA

Priority Axes	Value of payments (EU contribution, lei)	Counties with the highest amount (EU contribution) of payments made to beneficiaries
Priority axis 2	Lei 678,569,946	Over 48,000,000 lei in Dolj and Timiș Counties
Priority axis 3	Lei 237,338,043	217.447.565 lei in Bucharest
Priority axis 4	Lei 166,412,964	77,628,448 lei in Bihor County and 43,134,494 in Cluj County
Priority axis 5	Lei 185,304,517	Between 14,000,000 and 17,000,000 lei in Argeș, Buzău, Dolj and Iași Counties
Priority axis 6	Lei 433,391,487	Between 51,000,000 and 174,000,000 lei in Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud and Cluj Counties
Priority axis 7	Lei 14,587,508	8,377,862 lei in Constanța County and 2,809,231 lei in Suceava County
Priority axis 8	Lei 540,346,339	Over 55,000,000 lei in Bacău and Timiș Counties
Priority axis 10	Lei 218,838,939	81,446,307 lei in Neamț County and over 20,000,000 lei in Bihor, Cluj, Dolj and Maramureș Counties
Priority axis 12	Lei 185,351,781	152,677,758 lei at regional level 32,674,022 lei at national level
Priority axis 13	N/A	

Source: Evaluator's processing of SMIS data on 02/04/2019

The evolution of payments to beneficiaries at county level is not always uniform and it may happen that counties with a good endowment of funds, respectively a high value of contracted projects, are behind with payments to beneficiaries, while counties with smaller endowments are well advanced with payments. In addition, this aspect can also be observed at axis level: in the same county, some axes are more efficient than others in terms of effectiveness of fund absorption, but may be less efficient in terms of project contracting rate (expenses accrued, but not yet made). The reasons for this situation are multiple and depend on factors such as: the

maturity of the projects at the time of submission, respectively the stage of preparation of the technical documents; difficulties possibly encountered when starting the project, such as the regime of land ownership where the investment and the public procurement procedure are carried out; the beneficiary's ability to ensure the co-financing of the investment, etc.

ROP implementation system: the main actors of the system

According to the national legislation⁴, the **Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration (MDRAP)** is the managing authority for the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020, and the **Agencies for Regional Development (RDA)** fulfil the function of intermediary bodies for the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020.

Other bodies relevant to the functioning of the ROP implementation system are:

- At the central level:
 - **Certification and Payment Authority (CPA):** Ministry of Public Finance (MFP)
 - **Audit Authority:** Court of Auditors
 - **Monitoring Committee ROP 2014-2020.**
- At territorial/local level:
 - **The urban authorities**⁵, functional structures, within the county residence municipalities, which have the responsibility of fulfilling the attribution of prioritization of project files, functioning as intermediary bodies of secondary level based on Delegation Agreements for prioritizing the project files proposed for financing within the Priority Axis 4 - Supporting sustainable urban development of the Regional Operational Programme 2014 - 2020;
 - **Associations for Inter-Community Development**, which are set up and operate in accordance with the Administrative Code. In particular, the IDA ITI Danube Delta is mentioned, an association with legal personality, of private law and of public utility, established for the purpose of implementing the ITI mechanism within the jurisdiction of the 38 Territorial Administrative Units (TAUs) included in the Integrated Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Danube Delta (ISSDDD).
 - **Local Action Groups**, established and functioning according to the law regarding the definition and implementation of Local Development Strategies, within the mechanism of community-led local development (CLLD).

Also, another key player of the system are the **beneficiaries of the ROP**, which can be, as the case may be: Territorial Administrative Units (municipalities, cities, communes, counties); public institutions with attributions in the fields of financing (research institutions, educational institutions etc.), small and medium-sized enterprises, etc.

Annex 5.2 illustrates through a graphical representation the main actors and strategies / programmes / plans relevant to the smooth functioning of the entire FESI and ROP system, taking into account the complementarity between sectoral strategies and programmes, the levels of governance (national, regional and local), as well as the bottom-up approach and partnership principle within FESI in accordance with European regulations. Thus, the graph shows the centrality of the Regional Development Plans in the construction of the regional development policy, as well as the connection with the other local strategies, which are bottom-up generated, according to the local needs. Also, the graph highlights the top-down approach of programming European funds under the Partnership Agreement and the essential contribution of

⁴ GD no. 398/2015 (amended by DECISION no. 904 of November 29, 2016)

⁵ Established according to the provisions of Article 7 (4) of Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013.

the line ministries in defining the national strategic directions, which are also found in the regional development policy at national level. Finally, we note the transversal presence of non-governmental actors, members of the partnership structures that are set up at various stages of strategic programming and planning at all levels of governance.

The ROP implementation system is part of the wider framework for the implementation of European Structural and Investment Funds, according to the Partnership Agreement signed between the Government of Romania and the European Union for the 2014-2020 programming period. Therefore, it can be analysed as a system itself, but this broader coordination framework is likely to influence its functionality. In particular, in the implementation of the Partnership Agreement with the European Union, each line ministry plays a central role, being responsible for sector policies, as well as to fulfil the ex-ante conditionalities established by the European Commission to ensure the necessary conditions for an efficient and effective use of ESI funds. These conditions are related to political, strategic and regulatory frameworks, as well as to sufficient administrative and institutional capacities at the level of public administration and stakeholders implementing ESI funds.⁶

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/ro/policy/what/glossary/e/ex-ante-conditionalities

Chapter 2. Stages of the study

a. Description of the methodology

Taking into account the objectives of the evaluation and the two evaluation questions regarding the **regional development policy** and the **decentralization policy**, a set of hypotheses has been formulated, which take into account the strategic objectives of these policies, related to:

1. ROP implementation and ensuring EU funds absorption, respectively the capacity of structures to assume the responsibilities deriving from the institutional and normative system;
2. Increasing the capacity of local public administrations to formulate sectoral policies at local level in order to provide services closer to the citizen and more appropriate to the local context.

The assumptions related to EQ 1 are formulated as follows:

Assumption 1.1: The ROP implementation system is based on a set of clear and appropriate normative acts for assuming responsibilities by the structures involved.

Assumption 1.2: The allocation of human and material resources (eg. financial and logistical) necessary for the functioning of the ROP implementation system is adequate at the level of MA, IB and even at beneficiary level.

Assumption 1.3: The actions generated by the operational procedures are functional to an adequate absorption of the funds, being appropriate to the context and simple to apply (adequate administrative burden for the management structures and beneficiaries).

The assumptions related to EQ 2 are formulated as follows:

Assumption 2.1: The ROP contributes to the institutional and skills development from the perspective of regional decentralization, including by setting strategic objectives to exploit the potential in several priority sectors and regional identity, by collaborating with the relevant actors in the territory.

Assumption 2.2: ROP contributes to the increase of the functionality of decision-makers at local (TAU) and community (IDA, LAG) level.

Due to the nature of the evaluated theme, a **model of interpretative and participatory type** was adopted, based on the application of the methods described in the following:

Organization and implementation system analysis
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The evaluation team applied a hybrid method, based on combining McKinsey's 7S method with the Lean Six Sigma (simplified) method for organizational analysis, in conjunction with the analysis and definition of a plan to improve the ROP implementation processes, which were selected together with the institutions involved.

Through this hybrid method, the organizational diagnosis is enriched by an **in-depth analysis of processes** (hard component of 7S model) and **human resources** (soft component of the 7S model), according to the Lean Six Sigma approach, with the objective of identifying the critical moments of processes and defining a consistent improvement plan that takes into account the available inputs, estimated outputs and outcomes in terms of performance, as well as the ability of organizations to effectively implement the expected improvement (that is the change) as a result of the analysis.

The whole process of organizational and processes analysis was achieved through two main tools, applied synergistically, namely:

- The documentary analysis (prior analysis and substantiation of interview grids based on the documents related to the ROP implementation system, such as those mentioned in Chapter 2.b above);
- Interviews with the management and technical staff involved in the implementation of ROP processes (including applying self-assessment techniques to analyse problems encountered and their causes).

The information collected was then validated with the interviewees, refined by additional documentary research and systematized into Excel files that were used to describe the results and conclusions, included in Chapter 3.

Geospatial analysis

Geospatial analysis identifies a series of techniques that can be applied to geo-referential data located on the Earth's surface and reportable to all the activities performed on it.

As a data source, it was used in particular to extract data from SMIS through some elements (number of projects, grant allocated and expenses incurred) organized by counties. These numerical files (one for each axis) were then associated with a model file of the administrative boundaries (limits) of the counties, finally being aggregated by development regions.

The graphical representation of the results was performed by (automatically) subdividing the data into segments (amplitude classes) and assigning each segment a different colour or colour hue. This way, depending on the colour given to the region by the graphic representation, it is possible to identify, by means of the legend, the belonging amplitude class in terms of the number of projects, the allocated contribution and the expenses incurred. Of course, the visual result are of great help in interpreting the results of the ROP progress both for the evaluator and the MA in the evaluation process.

Qualitative analysis: focus group, case studies, expert panel

The qualitative analysis was carried out following the activities of documentary research and interpretation of information collected through direct interviews (individual and group).

In this regard, the achievements were as follows:

- **3 case studies** on the application of the mechanisms of integrated development and local partnership in the context of the ROP, as examples of how the ROP contributes to the decentralization processes and the strengthening of local partnerships, while also representing the way in which the ROP implemented the mechanisms of integrated territorial development according to existing regulations⁷. In this regard, we made an analysis of the progress in implementation and the functioning of:
 - The ITI Danube Delta mechanism (documentary analysis, interviews and focus groups with the actors in the territory);
 - Interventions of integrated urban development at the level of Cluj-Napoca Municipality (which is one of the Municipalities with the highest number of projects submitted and under implementation at PA 4 level);
 - CLLD mechanism at Târgoviște LAG level (whose President also covers the position of Vice-President of the Federation of Urban LAGs in Romania, which allowed to obtain additional information regarding the implementation mechanism carried out so far).

⁷ Article 7 of Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013, and Articles 32, 35, 36 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

- A **national focus group**, with the actors of the ROP implementation system, especially the IB and MA ROP, meant to deepen the results of the individual and group interviews conducted in the immediately preceding period, especially regarding the analysis of problems and their causes, as well as the proposals for improvement of the processes of programme implementation. As they are very technical discussions, **the focus group was focused on the institutional actors directly involved in the management and control system of the ROP 2014-2020**, and the representatives of the local public administrations will participate in the expert panel mentioned in the following.
- An **expert panel** for the purpose of debating and exchanging experiences, necessary to define guidelines and descriptions of the implementation stage, lessons learned and good practices related to the integrated approach and, in general, to the territorial development and decentralization policies at regional and local level. The representatives of MDRAP, MA OPTA, MA OPAC, MA OPHC, Association of Cities of Romania, Association of Municipalities of Romania, National Agency of Civil Servants and GSG, were invited to participate to his expert panel as institutions involved in the development of the capacity to manage national and European funds (e.g. through the OP Technical Assistance 2014-2020) and, in general, in the field of administrative capacity related to the formulation and implementation of public policies and services, addressed to public administrations (eg. within the 2014-2020 ESF programmes).

Matrix analysis of complementarity

Within the present study, a general, synthetic matrix was developed for the complementarity between the ROP and other strategic programmes and projects, in particular regarding the aspects related to the increase of administrative capacities and the correlation with other measures aimed more directly or indirectly at facilitating decentralization processes. At the same time, a brief description of complementarity between the financing sources specifically observed in the integrated territorial development interventions was made, thus highlighting their integrated and multi-sectoral character, as it was thought within the development strategies.

b. Literature review

The analysis of the specialized literature was carried out in order to substantiate the evaluation methodology; for details, see Annex 11 of the Initial Report.

European literature

The literature on the evaluation of the implementation systems of the programmes financed from the European funds suggests that **it is not possible to identify or specify a unique implementation model that will provide the best results**. The proper implementation model depends on the national and regional contexts. Similarly, institutional structures and procedural rules vary considerably, therefore, centralized and decentralized implementation models have strengths and weaknesses. The research also identified other horizontal aspects that affect the implementation mechanisms, including: coordination between the implementing bodies (efficient communication, information flow, general coordination); administrative capacity (matching the number of staff, ability to maintain staff, implementing IT systems) and choosing the regulatory instruments (the procedures adopted at national level).⁸

The literature has shown that the evaluation of the implementation systems often focuses on the **evaluation of processes**, targeting in particular the **inputs, activities, results and processes that combine these elements**. The guidance document on the monitoring and evaluation of the European Cohesion Fund and the European Regional Development Fund for the period 2014-2020 states that, in the evaluation of the implementation systems, the typical questions refer in particular (but not limited to): knowledge of the program by the potential beneficiaries and the degree of access to the related information; clarity of the procedure for accessing the funds; the existence of clear and relevant project selection criteria; the existence of a computer system for data management.⁹

With regard to the specific field of **integrated territorial development**, there are various methodologies for evaluation, depending on the objective of the evaluation. Ferry et al¹⁰ highlights the different types of knowledge that integrated urban development assessments must include, namely strategic knowledge (identifying needs), operational knowledge (identifying and addressing management and implementation challenges), as well as evaluative knowledge (project and program - data generated, focus on value added).

⁸ Thematic Working Group 4 Delivery Mechanisms of Rural Development Policy. Final Report (December 2011) at <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-static/fms/pdf/D44FCDEB-C1DC-3F8B-8EDE-B5C89302360C.pdf>

⁹ European Union (2015), Guidance document on monitoring and evaluation of the European Cohesion Fund and the European Regional Development Fund 2014-2020 https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/wd_2014_en.pdf, p. 8

¹⁰ Ferry M, McMaster I and Van der Zwet A (2018), Assessing the performance of integrated territorial and urban strategies: Challenges, emerging approaches and options for the future at https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/assessing_integrated_strategies/assessing_integrated_strategies_en.pdf

National literature

The evaluations made in Romania on themes relevant to the ROP implementation system revealed the following aspects:

a. With regard to the analysis of the regulatory framework for regional development, the studies conducted show that the **development policy in Romania is in fact concentrated on and operationalized by the implementation of the Regional Operational Programme**, without, however, the ROP having a true regional dimension, especially in terms of monitoring and evaluation of the results and the impact of the interventions **at integrated and unitary level** in the reference regions and territories.

b. The success of the 2014-2020 ROP will depend, first and foremost, on the extent to which the programme will be able to put the beneficiaries at the centre of the entire system, as **they represent a key element of the programme**, since they are the ones who will develop and implement the ROP-funded projects, determining the effective absorption of funds available, for the benefit of local communities and regions in Romania.¹¹

c. It is necessary to check the extent to which the **procedures development method** was optimized compared to the previous period: a faster activation of financing lines, a more efficient support provided to the beneficiaries during the preparation phase; a delegation of functions that is more effective and in line with the implementation needs and capabilities of the structures involved; a simplification of the implementation procedures for beneficiaries.

c. Data collection stage

The data collection stage took place between May and June 2019.

The data collected consisted of four main sources:

A. Official documents and other relevant sources of information on the legislative and regulatory framework, implementation mechanisms and partnership structures created (see Annex 5.1)

B. Qualitative information collected by interviewing relevant actors:

- There were 15 interviews with the technical and management staff within the MA/IB ROP (8 at regional level, including individual interviews with the management staff and group interviews/focus group with the technical staff, and 5 interviews at the central level with four technical services within the MA ROP - namely SAP, SAT, SMP, SECP - DG Public Administration, DG Regional Development and Programming Service within MA ROP);
- There were 3 interviews with the structures involved in the implementation of integrated development mechanisms, namely: IDA ITI Danube Delta, Târgoviște LAG, Cluj Urban Authority;
- There were 4 interviews with various types of ROP beneficiaries, namely: The City of Cluj-Napoca, two County Councils (Constanța and Tulcea), one SME belonging to the Cluster in the field of constructions from the South-West Oltenia Region.

¹¹ World Bank "Evaluation of communication and collaboration between MA and IBs within the Regional Operational Programme and facilitating proactive and direct support for beneficiaries", 2013.

d. Limitations, constraints and resolution methods

The only limitation of the evaluation can be related to the scope of the subject addressed: during the data collection and interpretation, the team of evaluators found that the **ROP 2014-2020 implementation system has strong links with other higher level systems** (FESI 2014-2020 implementation system as a whole, legislative system in general, and the system of legislative decision making with potential impact on the implementation of European funds) and lower level systems (administrative systems at local level, such as the structures, capacities and resources existing at the level of potential beneficiaries, in particular the TAUs, and local and regional partnership systems, namely the proactive approach of the actors in the territory and the existence of catalytic factors at local level). Obviously the in-depth analysis of these related systems cannot be covered by the present study.

The evaluators collected various data referring to these aspects of interconnection with other systems, by analysing the causes underlying the problems of the implementation of the ROP system, discussed within the focus group with the actors of the implementation system. Also, aspects of complementarity between national policies, other operational programmes and government programmes and ROP were addressed cross-sectionally in the interviews with various general directorates within the MDRAP and were targeted directly in the Expert Panel.

Another aspect that reflects the problem of the connection with the legislative system and the decision-making mechanisms at high level and determined a certain uncertainty during the data collection and the documentary analysis is that **the legislation is constantly changing** (eg. changes of the legislation on public procurement related to the ex-ante control of the award documentation).

These changes generate uncertainties in the system, likely to delay implementation processes. The evaluators analysed the evolution of the legislative framework so that at the end of the evaluation, the analyses, conclusions and recommendations are relevant and coherent to this legislative framework, which is in a continuous dynamic.

Chapter 3. Analysis and interpretation

a. Data collected

The data collected are correlated with the indicators established in the Initial Report in order to provide a substantiated answer to the evaluation questions, based on evidence.

These were mainly qualitative, being the result of documentary research, corroborated with interviews, case studies, expert panel and focus groups.

The research also includes quantitative data taken from the SMIS system (for the geo-statistical analysis in support of the analysis and for the analysis of the financial resources allocated through TA) or extracted from various analysed documents, such as the organizational charts, the training strategy, the Technical Assistance strategy and the financing contract model signed between the MDRAP and the IBs within the PA 12, in order to support the fulfilment by IBs of the delegated tasks within the ROP 2014-2020 implementation system.

Annex 5.4 briefly presents this correlation and the main sources and typologies of data collected.

b. Data analysis: answers to evaluation questions

EQ 1. How were the responsibilities for achieving the objectives of the regional development policy assumed?

Assumption 1.1: The ROP implementation system is based on a set of clear and appropriate normative acts for assuming responsibilities by the structures involved

Indicators:

- Clarity and adequacy of the normative provisions in relation to the need to assume responsibilities (scale from 1 to 5 where 5 is the highest value)¹²⁾
- Number of vacancies
- Number of employees/department
- Number of external experts contracted
- Degree of coverage of the required skills (scale from 1 to 5 where 5 is the highest value)¹³⁾
- The value of the financial resources allocated to the performance of the management functions of the ROP system (million euro)
- Performance indicators established in the functions delegation contract for the implementation of the ROP (performance targets reached annually) (% / number / amount in lei, as appropriate)

Data analysis and answer to Evaluation Question EI 1:

Assumption 1.1: The ROP implementation system is based on a set of clear and appropriate normative acts for assuming responsibilities by the structures involved

The documentary analysis, corroborated with the interviews among the institutions involved in the ROP implementation system, allows the following conclusion to be drawn: the legislative framework is appropriate to assume the responsibilities related to the regional development policy, in particular with regard to assuming the responsibilities related to the implementation of the ROP at the MA/IB ROP level, due to the regulatory framework of the delegated functions, as well as the Rules of Organisation and Functioning (ROF) and the system procedures adopted. However, there is a need to define more clearly the horizontal collaborative links at the level of the MA/IB ROP directorates and departments, in order to streamline the processes of approval and decision-making, as well as to ensure an adequate planning of the human resources, in terms of reducing the risk of overloading with work duties. There is also a need for a clearer analysis and definition of vertical coordination relationships, both at national level (MDRAP/MA ROP and other structures involved in the ROP system and in managing FESI) and at regional level (RDC / RDA / county offices of RDAs), in order to ensure a more efficient correlation of the decision-making processes from top to bottom and bottom-up approval.

On the one hand, the case studies show that at the level of the local actors involved in the implementation of the ROP as beneficiaries and catalysts of development (see ITI, LAG and UA structures), there is the desire to assume new responsibilities in the implementation of the regional development and decentralization policy, provided that a formalized institutional framework and adequate financial resources are ensured. Participatory processes are able to increase the capacity of these actors to take on increased responsibilities in the processes of strategic planning and implementation of the regional development policy.

¹²⁾ the average of the answers obtained.

¹³⁾ the average of the answers obtained.

On the other hand, the interviews with the actors of the system, confirmed by the discussions within the focus group and the panel of experts, suggest that there is a higher level of coordination of government policies that needs to be strengthened from the perspective of assuming the shared responsibility of the line ministries, in terms of the sectoral contribution to the regional development policy so that it becomes increasingly integrated at the sectoral level..

Thus, the normative provisions are clear, but the regional development law does not fully reflect the existing institutional context in the field of regional development (eg. the law mentions national actors, respectively RDNC and RDNF, which are not functional and do not mention the partnership structures, such as IDA or LAG, created at inter-territorial and public-private level, with a role in the regional development system). Therefore, the indicator regarding the degree of clarity and adequacy of the normative provisions in the field of regional development was assigned the value 3.

In particular, it can be concluded that the regional development law needs to be updated in order to strengthen the strategic planning function at regional level, which will function as a bridge between the central and local level (territorial needs), in addition to the ROP implementation system, within the broader framework of Romania's regional and territorial development policy (for details, see related findings, conclusions and recommendations).

Assumption 1.2: The allocation of human and material resources (eg. financial and logistical) necessary for the functioning of the ROP implementation system is adequate at the level of MA, IB and even at beneficiary level.

In particular, with regard to the allocation of human resources, the assessment of its suitability can be made only in comparison with the work duties, in relation to the previous period (for which reference is made to Evaluation Question 2, Assumption 2.1), namely the increase of staff duties/evolution or by qualitative assessment according to the results of the interviews with the management staff. At the MA ROP level there are 177 positions (2017), and the interviews with the management staff within the technical services suggest that these resources have not increased in the last years, as some services did not cover the vacant positions either.

With regard to the regional level / IB ROP, human resources are considered adequate from all points of view (numerical and qualitative) and show a positive evolution of growth over time, but the financial resources represent a challenge for the future that must be tackled in parallel with ensuring the strategic function of connection between the central level and the territorial level of the regional development policy. On average, the IBs have 77 positions, to which on average 15 external experts are added, involved in the technical and financial evaluation of the financing applications (delegated function in the period 2014-2020, taken over from the MA ROP), but there are 14 vacancies.

Both structures, MA ROP and IB, are satisfied with the quality of the human resource, both in terms of coverage with the necessary skills (very good level - 4.5)¹⁴, and the level of training of management and execution staff that has a high level of specialization and work seniority (very good level - 4.7).¹⁵ Moreover, the stability of management and technical staff characterizes both MA and IB ROP.

In terms of technical and logistical resources, IBs generally have a good opinion, considering these resources as being appropriate to the needs. On the other hand, at the level of the MA ROP, there is a lack of premises and equipment necessary to fulfil the coordination function, responsibilities and tasks of the central technical structures.

¹⁴ According to the average of the answers received during the interviews.

¹⁵ According to the average of the answers received during the interviews.

Another aspect similar to the two structures is the way of solving the overwhelming workload situations, since both MA and IB ROP used the internal staff from other departments to cover the need for additional staff during peak periods. However, both the IBs and the MA ROP believe that this should only be an emergency measure and not a structural solution.

On the other hand, an aspect appreciated as critical by all the interviewees is the operation of the SMIS system, which has so far failed to ensure a reduction of administrative burden both at the level of the ROP management structures and at beneficiary level.

If the qualitative analysis reveals the existence of peak periods, which derive (among others) from the overlapping of the launch of calls for project proposals and from the non-optimal functionality of the information system (see below), it is necessary to analyse the additional support that could be provided to the technical services by the MDRAP / RDA structures outside the IB ROP, such as the legal and specialized departments in the field of public procurement, so that the MA / IB ROP technical structures are relieved of the responsibility of providing points of view and clarifications, which can be delegated to other structures more specialized on these topics.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the human, logistical and technical resources allocated to the system at central level turn out to be below the current needs, and a detailed needs analysis is necessary in the near future from the perspective of ensuring the optimal functioning of the ROP implementation system.

With regard to the resources and the administrative capacity at the beneficiary level, the case studies and the interviews with the ROP beneficiaries suggest that they differ substantially: although the access conditions of the ROP have contributed to the increase of these resources and capacities, there is still a need to support the beneficiaries, both when submitting funding requests as well as in project implementation, including by organizing practical tutoring and training sessions (for details, see also below, the answers related to Assumption 2.2, as well as the findings from the expert panel).

With regard to the financial resources, the allocations from the TA during the current period will become insufficient until the end of 2019, since over 136 million euros have already been contracted for IBs, while the total allocation for the OP TA 2014-2020 intended for IBs (based on data available at the time of this report drafting) is of about 123 million euros. For MA ROP, the allocation from PA 12 ROP 2014-2020, which until now has been contracted in the amount of about 78 million euros, could be sufficient given the availability of about 20 million euros, although it must be taken into account that the stage of project implementation will involve an overloading of cost verification duties along the financial progress of investments.

At the beneficiary level, the resources allocated by investment priorities are sometimes considered insufficient, and the legislative changes (eg. increase of wages in the field of construction) may generate syncope in implementation, including in terms of financial implementation, when certain expenses can become ineligible and beneficiaries may be in a situation of lack of funds to cover these additional costs or unforeseen situations (see also below the answers related to Assumption 1.3).

Assumption 1.3: The actions generated by the operational procedures are functional to an adequate absorption of the funds, being appropriate to the context and simple to apply (adequate administrative burden for the management structures and beneficiaries)

The procedures established for the implementation of the ROP processes comply with the requirements deriving from the European regulations, as well as the institutional framework and the delegation agreements for functions developed according to the national legislation.

The performance indicators are correlated with the delegated tasks and are achieved in most of the analysed cases, according to the financing contracts within the PA 12 signed by each RDA. However, some of the IBs consider it necessary to at least review the targets or reformulate certain indicators, in order to avoid further reductions in the financial resources transferred to

intermediary bodies (reductions that could have a significant effect on the IBs' ability to fulfil their delegated functions, in the context of a permanent increase of the covered work duties, due to the increased allocation of funds within the ROP). For example, we can mention the following targets specified in the financing contracts:

- Maximum 6 months, as an average duration of the stages of the evaluation, selection and contracting process;
- Maximum 7% addenda to the financing contracts, concluded with the beneficiaries, returned by MA ROP to the IB, as incomplete / incorrect as a result of their verification, during the implementation period of the project activities;
- Maximum 10 notifications per year transmitted via e-mail by MA ROP to IB for incorrect entry/validation or non-entry of data in MySMIS/SMIS2014+;
- Minimum "x" million Euro per year, as total eligible ERDF amounts, related to the reimbursement requests sent by the IB up to November 15 of each year and authorized by MA ROP

In the documentary analysis¹⁶ we provided observations on each performance indicator, with the purpose of highlighting the extent to which each of them depends on the action of several actors (in particular the ROP and beneficiaries) or may be affected by external factors that are not under the control of IBs. From this point of view, the absorption indicator formulated as "x mil. Euro per year, as total eligible ERDF amounts, related to the reimbursement requests sent by the IB up to November 15 of each year and authorized by MA ROP is the most "problematic", given that the value of the reimbursement applications submitted does not depend of the IBs but on the beneficiaries, and the authorization of expenses is the responsibility of the MA ROP.

In fact, from the qualitative analysis performed (individual and group interviews, plus national focus group), it turns out that external factors are the main causes of the problems of ROP implementation (among them, those standing up are legislative issues, as well as those related to the capacity of the beneficiaries but also, more generally, by the FESI coordination method), followed by procedural causes (bureaucracy, overlapping phases and implementation periods, rigidity of certain provisions of the financing contracts) and, last but not least, the overburden put on human resources in all phases, especially at the MA ROP level (payment authorization and evaluation services, project selection and contracting).

The initial cause of the problems encountered in the beginning phase of the programme was the delay in fulfilling the ex-ante conditionalities established by the Partnership Agreement. This situation, in turn, led to the non-observance of the initial schedule established for the implementation of the ROP, generating delays in defining the criteria for prioritizing projects according to the national sectoral strategies.

Another important organizational aspect is the centralization of the functions of contracting and authorizing payments at the MA ROP level, which, in the event of non-observance of the initial call launching schedule, leads to an overwhelming workload that the centralized system cannot support, generating chain delays in all phases.

With regard to the material and logistical resources, the lack of functionality of the SMIS system generates a series of delays, additional tasks and additional bureaucracy, which could be solved by an effectiveness/functionality of the information system more adapted to the ROP procedures and needs.

The point of view of beneficiaries is that the difficulties consist in changing the financing conditions before submitting the application, the duration of evaluation and the contracting period. The beneficiaries consider that support is needed from an external consultant for the design phase, in addition to the need for administrative simplification and the existence of resources for unforeseen aspects.

¹⁶ See Annex 5.5.

With regard to the duration of the evaluation, selection and contracting processes, its reduction could be achieved by streamlining certain processes such as decision-making, providing opinions and clarification requests, which are likely to increase this duration in an “uncontrolled” way. Also, observing the launch schedule and optimizing call handling could reduce the degree of overwhelming workload for MA ROP staff.

The implementation system of the ROP can also be improved when the human, technical and financial resources are made available to the actors of the implementation system, so that the development of the processes corresponds to the level of quality and the time required to absorb the funds according as planned. In particular, administrative burdens for all parties can be reduced by simplifying procedures (eg. reducing the cases that require approval and/or validation), adopting a performing information exchange system (eg. ensuring the functionality of the “Implementation” mode in SMIS) and, last but not least, early involvement of actors at central and local level in order to schedule priorities and respect the implementation schedule for all. Only under these conditions will the absorption of funds be ensured and overwhelming workload during peak periods will be avoided.

EQ 2. What is the impact of the decentralization process on the regional and local institutional structures involved in the implementation of the ROP?

Indicators:

- % increase / decrease of the number of employed persons / department (evolution over time)
- % increase / decrease of the number of contracted external experts (evolution over time)
- % increase / decrease in the number of vacancies (evolution over time)
- % increase / decrease in the amount of the financial resources allocated to fulfilling the ROP system management functions (evolution over time)
- Number of formalized local partnerships (such as IDA) created from the perspective of ROP implementation
- Number of decisions taken or joint actions carried out within the partnership structures created as a result of ROP funding
- Number of public services activated / improved following ROP investments

Data analysis and answer to Evaluation Question EQ 2:

Assumption 2.1: The ROP contributes to the institutional and skills development from the perspective of regional decentralization, including by setting strategic objectives to exploit the potential in several priority sectors and regional identity, by collaborating with the relevant actors in the territory

With regard to the contribution of the ROP to the institutional development of the bodies set up at the regional level, the evolution of the financial resources intended for IB ROP suggests a growing trend. However, there are differences at regional level, because there were regions interested in decreasing the resources from Technical Assistance or in an increase below the average of 28%. The increase in allocations and the number of calls for proposals for ROP projects covered all the development regions, but differently, except the BI region.

Resources from the TA for the 2014-2020 period will become insufficient until the end of 2019. At MA ROP level, although the allocation for TA has increased considerably compared to the previous period (+178%), based on the qualitative information collected, the number of positions did not increase accordingly. The growth ratio between the volume of work deriving from the

allocations and the ROP structure (number of calls and the amount of the planned projects) should be correlated with a corresponding increase of the human resources at the level of all structures.

In terms of human resources, the analysis of the organizational charts shows an overall increase of about 58% of the positions at the level of all IBs ROP, although with important differences at regional level. Also, the number of contracted external staff increased, even by 100% (the starting point being zero), considering that during the previous period the function of technical and financial evaluation was the responsibility of the MA ROP, being delegated to the IBs in the 2014-2020 period. As a result, external expertise is not contracted at MA ROP level (except for specific consulting services, but not at the individual expert level). Finally, we noted the existence of a reserve of vacancies not covered, which (at the level of IB ROP, for which there is this information) increased on average from 14 to 16 positions (partial data) in 2019 compared to 2017, by +14%, respectively.

From the documentary analysis, corroborated with the interviews among the MA / IB ROP, it can be concluded that the evolution of the ROP complexity in the 2014-2020 period compared to the previous period is reflected in the corresponding evolution of the resources and the way of organizing the RDAs. In addition to the delegated tasks of the ROP, the analysis of the organizational charts shows a significant increase of the tasks related to the accomplishment of other functions at regional level (eg. development of offices at county level, establishment of IB OP EC), which suggests an increased capacity of the RDAs to adapt and take on further responsibilities related to complex development goals at regional level, issues that to be taken into account for a future review of regional development legislation.

Given the institutional stability and the non-governmental character of public interest, RDAs are currently the only regional actor able to provide a strategic vision on the development of the regions of Romania, exceeding the administrative limits, for the benefit of all the communities living in the regional territory.

Assumption 2.2: ROP contributes to the increase of the functionality of decision-makers at local (TAUs) and community (CLLD, LAGs) level.

At local level, the ROP has a significant contribution in developing the strategic planning capacity at the level of the potential beneficiaries, due to the financing conditions that require the preparation of integrated development strategies. Thus, this aspect is, in particular, highlighted in the integrated development mechanisms, where the structures created to prioritize the interventions (Urban Authorities, IDA ITI DD and LAGs) have contributed to the institutional development at local and sub-regional level, in terms of increasing the role of the actors in the territory in the field of regional development, by assuming increased responsibilities related to the strategic planning processes integrated in an ever-expanding partnership framework. From this point of view, it can thus be stated that the ROP has also contributed to increasing the capacity of decision-makers to identify and select priority projects for reference communities, in line with the integrated strategies adopted at the local partnership level.

Also, all the representatives interviewed emphasized that the partnership structures included the typology of public and private organizations corresponding to the needs of concerted strategic planning and the implementation of complementary interventions, including through adequate mechanisms for continuous monitoring and adaptation of territorial strategies.

However, local public administrations, especially the smallest or with fewer financial resources, are still facing a lack of human resources or a low level of technical training, with technical

assistance and/or consulting services being considered essential for submission of projects, but also for their successful implementation.

Moreover, the interviewed ROP beneficiaries argue that there is a close correlation between the planned investments and the improvement of public services, especially related to local transport, education, tourism and public spaces, without specifying an exact number of services. The analysis of the complementarity between ROP, OP AC, OP TA and other government programmes, as well as the discussions held within the Expert Panel suggest, however, that the process of increasing the administrative capacity of ROP beneficiaries represented by local public administrations has so far not been oriented towards the competences related to the administrative decentralization process. From this point of view, the ROP's ability to contribute to administrative decentralization processes is limited to an indirect contribution. This is more evident in the case of integrated urban development and the ITI mechanism, where ROP investments contribute more directly to the improvement of public services delivered by local public administrations.

According to the latest data available, there are 430 IDAs (August 2018), of which at least 36 structures can be identified, depending on the field of activity, which could be associated to the areas of intervention and ROP objectives, which are in particular local, regional and micro-region development, as well as local public transport. Other IDAs have areas of intervention focused on the provision of public services in common, especially water supply-sewerage services, but also local transport, which more closely associates them with the intervention fields from PNDR or LIOP (environmental infrastructure).

IDA ITI Danube Delta (DD) is a successful example so far in terms of the ROP's ability to catalyse resources and enhance the capacity of local actors to develop and implement investments of regional interest (outside the borders of local public administrations). So far, the decisions taken by IDA ITI have been related to the approval of the projects that can be financed within the integrated mechanism. With regard to the role of IDA ITI DD, the financing mechanism from Technical Assistance funds guarantees the functionality of the support structure, but to achieve the sustainability of the mechanism there is a need to define a legislative framework to ensure the stability and continuity of the coordination role, so that IDA is condition to fulfil its function within the ROP implementation system and, in general, within the regional and territorial development policy of Romania. The multi-level monitoring mechanism could be replicated within the monitoring and evaluation of the results and the impact obtained from the implementation of the regional development strategies included in RDPs. In general, the ITI Danube Delta approach could be replicated by piloting at sub-regional level (association between counties with similar development needs at the level of the same region), as a preparatory mechanism, from the bottom up, from the perspective of the regionalization of the European funds implementation system, under the coordination of RDAs and / or RDCs.

Also, the 37 LAG structures set up show that, given the strong assumption of responsibility at the level of key civil society actors, joint strategic planning of priority territorial investments for the benefit of the community can be successful and in close collaboration between the public decision-maker and the private entities. However, it is noted that no decision has been taken so far with the LAG structures related to ROP implementation, due to the initial stage of the implementation of the CLLD mechanism. To increase the impact and coherence with the strategies and policies implemented at the local and regional level, the social component that characterizes the integrated local development strategies financed by the CLLD mechanism could be integrated within the IUDSs, so as to be complementary to other urban development initiatives (without overlapping them), and the LAGs become a permanent institutional actor of the system, with a well-defined responsibility, related to facilitating processes aimed at achieving the objectives of reducing social marginalization and poverty among disadvantaged communities.

The bottom-up approach could be strengthened and developed to involve actors in the economic development sector, so that social inclusion measures are coordinated with the strategic orientation of economic operators with regard to the development of the production and service markets. This suggestion derives from the assumption that after satisfying the basic needs (eg housing, food, basic education, health services), there can be no social inclusion without creating conditions for employment and economy development.

With regard to the experience of the Urban Authorities, the representatives involved in the evaluation consider that the experience of IUDS and the delegated role of the UA have undoubtedly contributed to raising awareness among the local administrations regarding the need to prioritize the interventions and to ensure the integrated approach and complementarity, within a strengthened partnership framework and oriented towards beneficial results for the local population. The case study on Cluj-Napoca city shows that the process of integrated urban development can be a successful one, if (including, but not limiting to): the local administration has a medium and long term vision on the positioning of the city in the context of polycentric development; the actors in the territory are involved in all phases and are close to the local administration; there are catalytic factors at a higher, regional level, which support the processes of strategic planning capacity building, including through studies to substantiate the development options.

Also, for the city of Cluj-Napoca, capitalizing on the previous experience meant building in time an effective management and monitoring mechanism of IUDS, with a wide participation of actors in the territory, capable of reducing the “centrifugal” impulses deriving from particular interests and needs, in support of achieving the common vision on the positioning of the city in the national territorial context. The Urban Authorities had no role in facilitating these partner processes, since their attributions were limited to the prioritization and selection of projects.

c. Findings from the analysis

EQ 1. How were the responsibilities for achieving the objectives of the regional development policy assumed?

- The Regional Development Law No. 315/2004 represents a **satisfactory regulatory framework**, especially in terms of the institutional system established at the regional level (RDAs and RDCs), but it also mentions various national institutions that do not exist anymore and are not functional.
- The Regional Development Strategy at national level is formulated based on the **strategies prepared at regional level** by consulting the actors in the territory,¹⁷ assuring the participatory character of the process of strategic planning and programming of the funds.
- **The Regional Operational Program is currently the main instrument for implementing the regional development policy**
- There are also **other national laws and regulations** that impact on the regional development and the capacity of local public administrations to plan and implement projects at local and regional level, including national and local laws and strategies related to national spatial

¹⁷ According to the Framework Regulation for the functioning of the Regional Committees and the Methodology regarding the Regional Development Planning

planning, as well as the Public Administration Code and other regulations with an impact on investments in the territory.

- Secondary regulations on regional development policy and its **operationalization** focus on: the inter-sectoral and multi-level character of regional development policy; the importance of the participatory nature of the process of formulating the regional development policy and plans; the importance of the European funds for financing the regional development policy in Romania; the central role of RDAs in the whole process of policy formulation and regional development plans; the need to base the regional development policy on spatial planning documents (national, regional, sub-regional level).
- The updating of the legislation in the field of regional development is necessary, in order to reflect the new European guidelines related to the integrated territorial development and to ensure a greater efficiency of the achieved results. In this regard, RDAs emphasize the need to give a more important role to regional structures (RDAs and RDCs), in order to ensure a **more efficient selection of investment priorities** at regional level and to monitor and evaluate the RDPs along the way. Instead, the MDRAP directorates and departments emphasize the need for **closer coordination of regional development policy with other relevant national strategies and policies**, in particular the National Strategy for Territorial Development and the strategic documents for spatial planning, which reflect the vision regarding the territorial development of Romania in the medium and long term.
- A key aspect of the success of achieving the regional development objectives is the **multi-annual strategic approach** in the planning of public investments at the level of local public administrations. Added to this is the provision of complementary funding sources (national budget, plus European funds).
- According to the national legislation¹⁸ and in line with the provisions of the European regulations, MDRAP is the managing authority for the Regional Operational Program 2014-2020, and the RDAs fulfil the function of intermediary bodies for the ROP 2014-2020. **The functions of the MA and IB ROP are in accordance** with the provisions of the European Regulations in terms of the characteristics of the systems of implementation of the structural and investment funds, as the management structures were successfully audited. The function delegation agreements signed between the MA and the IB ROP ensure the proper separation of functions, as well as the responsibilities arising from the European Regulations.
- **Organizational charts are periodically updated** according to the needs and changes brought to the implementation system, but there is a delay in the adoption of the Internal Organization Regulations, especially at national level, which may be due to the complexity of the structure at national level and the numerous changes in the structure of the government system (manifested by frequent reorganisation of ministries).

¹⁸GD no. 904/2016 amending and completing GD no. 398/2015 for establishing the institutional framework for coordination and management of the European structural and investment funds and ensuring the continuity of the institutional framework for coordination and management of the structural instruments 2007-2013 and repealing GD no. 1183/2014 regarding the nomination of the authorities involved in the management and control system of the European structural and investment funds 2014-2020, and GD no 556/2017 amending and completing GD no. 398/2015 establishing the institutional framework for coordination and management of the European structural and investment funds and ensuring the continuity of the institutional framework for coordination and management of the structural instruments 2014-2020.

- At RDA/IB ROP level, the **organizational structures are stable and easily adaptable to change**, but there is a need to define more clearly the horizontal relationships at the technical department level, in order to shorten the duration of the internal approval processes and to ensure an adequate allocation and division of work duties at the level of IB departments, support departments and county offices.
- The increase in allocations, amounting on average more than 84% as compared to the previous period, and the number of calls for proposals for ROP projects covered, although differently, all the development regions (except for the BI region). Similarly, the evolution of the financial resources allocated to ROP MA / IBs through PA 12 "Technical Assistance" shows a growth trend. However, the experience gained up to 2019 shows that the coverage of expenses generated by the performance of the delegated tasks by IBs for the whole programming period and until programme closure (2023) could represent a challenge.
- The number of positions at the level of all IB ROP¹⁹ has increased, although there are differences at regional level. The growth ratio between the workload deriving from the allocations and the ROP structure²⁰ should be correlated with an adequate increase of the human resources at the level of all structures. In this respect, although the allocation by TA at the MA ROP level has increased considerably compared to the previous period, the number of positions has not increased to the same extent with the assigned responsibilities.
- In terms of **technical and logistical resources**, IBs generally have a favourable perception, considering these resources as being appropriate to the needs. At the level of the MA ROP, there is a lack of premises and equipment necessary to fulfil the coordination function, responsibilities and tasks of the central technical structures.
- The operational procedures have a unitary character and ensure the uniform application of the ROP implementation rules. However, the analysis highlighted the need to strengthen the communication and exchange of experience of the staff from different levels of implementation, so that the interpretation of the operational procedures is homogeneous and prompt.
- In the 2014-2020 period, the operational procedures **were simplified** compared to the 2007-2013 period and the outcomes were especially positive. However, some of these changes, that mainly regarded the submission phase, generated undesirable effects²¹, while for the implementation phase, administrative tasks for the beneficiaries (especially for the beneficiaries of public administration) remained the same (eg. public procurement procedures).
- At present, the **SMIS system cannot be considered as a simplification tool**, because the conditions for its proper functioning are not fully ensured, and the functions themselves are not sufficiently adapted to the needs of the programme.
- **External factors²² are the main causes of ROP implementation problems, followed by procedural causes** (bureaucracy, overlapping of phases and implementation periods, rigidity

¹⁹ These findings are also relevant for providing a response to EQ 2, with regard to the extent to which the ROP contributes to the institutional development of regional structures.

²⁰ Number of calls and the amount of the planned projects.

²¹ Such as failure to submit the Technical Project in the submission phase of the grant application, which facilitated the contracting, but created delays in the next implementation phase.

²² External factors are considered to be factors that cannot be controlled by MA / IB ROP. The national legislation issued by other institutions and administrations of the central government, specific socio-economic conditions of the

of certain provisions of financing contracts) and, not least, **overwhelming workload for human resources** (especially at the AM and ROP level) **in all phases**.

- The root cause of the problems encountered in the beginning phase of the programme was the delay in **fulfilling the ex-ante conditionalities** established by the Partnership Agreement. This situation, in turn, led to the non-observance of the initial schedule established for the implementation of the ROP, generating delays in defining the criteria for prioritizing projects according to the national sectoral strategies.
- Another important organizational aspect is the centralization of the functions of contracting and authorizing payments at the MA ROP level, which, in the event of non-observance of the initial call launching schedule, leads to an **overwhelming workload** generating chain delays in all phases.
- With regard to the material and logistical resources, **the lack of functionality of the SMIS system** generates additional tasks for the staff²³ which should be simplified by the information system.
- The point of view of beneficiaries is that the procedures are complex, before the financing application is submitted there are changes of financing conditions, the evaluation process and the contracting take a long time. For the implementation phase, the support of intermediary bodies, in conjunction with the administrative simplification and the existence of adequate resources for unforeseen aspects, is considered necessary. Considering the results of the documentary analysis and the interviews with MA / IB ROP, this point of view of the beneficiaries is justified and coherent with the problems identified in the ROP implementation system.
- The helpdesk function for beneficiaries was consolidated in the 2014-2020 period compared to the 2007-2013 period. The support offered by RDAs to the beneficiaries is positively appreciated by the interviewees. The creation of the partnership structures for the management of the integrated territorial interventions (IDA ITI and LAGs) contributed to the approximation of the programme to the needs of local communities, public administrations and non-governmental actors. **Thus, it can be stated that the orientation towards the beneficiaries was strengthened during the current programming period, compared to the previous period.**
- **The performance indicators established for verifying the fulfilment of the delegated functions** are achieved in most of the analysed cases, according to the financing contracts within the PA 12 signed by each RDA. However, a revision of these performance indicators could be needed, because there are procedural and external factors that may affect the achievement of performance targets.

EQ 2. What is the impact of the decentralization process on the regional and local institutional structures involved in the implementation of the ROP?

territories, the availability of resources from the beneficiaries and their proactive approach are among the main external factors identified.

²³ For example, the lack of functionality of the "Implementation" module in SMIS determines additional tasks in the expenditure authorization phase.

- **ROP contributes substantially to the institutional development and skills of regional structures.** They are organizationally flexible, as seen over time and could assume new responsibilities, under the conditions of an adequate allocation of financial resources and the definition of an appropriate regulatory framework.
- The composition of the Regional Development Council ensures the reflection of local interests and identities within the Regional Development Plans, but the **regional perspective must be ensured on a strategic plan, more consolidated and “impartial”²⁴ at regional level.** This is currently represented only by RDAs, due to the experience gained in promotion of regional territories, as part of the function assigned by the Regional Development Law.
- The ITI Danube Delta approach could be replicated by piloting at sub-regional level (association between counties with similar development needs at the level of the same region), as a preparatory mechanism, from the bottom up, from the perspective of the **regionalization of the European funds implementation system**, under the coordination of Regional Development Agencies and/or Regional Development Committees.
- **The ROP contributes to strengthening the strategic planning capacity by the beneficiaries**, in particular, in the field of urban development and **creating and managing local partnerships**. However, local public administrations, especially the smallest or with fewer financial resources, are still facing a lack of human resources or a low level of technical training.
- In the case of integrated urban development, the condition of access to PA 4 is related to the preparation of IUDS, which forced the county residence municipalities to think **strategically to respond to the needs of cities in an “integrated” and multisectoral way, financed under different sources**. The establishment of Urban Authorities, through the delegated role of prioritization and the selection of the interventions, contributed to the institutional development of the local public administrations, even though the role of these structures was limited to the initial phase of identifying the interventions.
- Similarly, the requirements of the programme to prepare the integrated development strategy in the Danube Delta area and the establishment of the IDA ITI Danube Delta have increased the **capacity for strategic planning and prioritization of investments**, including with the support of public and private actors, members of the IDA Delta Danube Advisory Committee. In addition, by its nature as a partnership body between public administrations, IDA ITI DD directly contributes to **facilitating the processes of association and local partnership for development**, with an innovative perspective that goes beyond administrative boundaries and the sectoral approach.
- An equally innovative character is identified in the CLLD mechanism, where the requirements of the programme have led to the **overcoming of “cultural/administrative resistances” related to the development of the public-private partnership**, promoting the establishment of LAGs, from the perspective of meeting common development objectives, oriented towards certain marginalized areas and communities. Thus, at the level of the CLLD mechanism, the integrated interventions contribute rather to **strengthening the capacities of involvement in the development of local policies in support of the community** by the non-governmental actors, namely the civil society and the private actors.

²⁴ In relation to local / private interests.

- In order to strengthen the ROP's contribution to the decentralization processes, the panel of experts suggests **creating a synergy between the ROP implementation system and the methodological guidelines underlying the administrative decentralization**. For example, links could be established between the quality and cost standards of public services (according to the methodology developed at DG PA, MDRAP level), the formulation of public policies at local level, the access conditions and the achievement of investments financed from the ROP (and other operational programmes).
- **The complementarity between the ROP and the OP AC** (and other European and governmental programmes) is essential to continue the effort to increase the capacity of local public administration.
- The case studies show that the **mechanisms of integrated territorial development**, although in the limit of the relatively low progress in the effective implementation of correlated investments **have contributed at least to the development of the partnership and support structures necessary for the good coordination of these mechanisms**.
- **All integrated territorial initiatives are correlated with development strategies, sectoral programmes and other initiatives implemented by other actors at local level**. In particular, at the ITI Danube Delta level, this complementarity arises from the way the integrated mechanism is thought, which provides for the **correlation of the sources of financing from various Operational Programs**. Also, the integrated urban development is a mechanism of territorial development **integrated vertically** (especially at county / local level and municipal level, respectively) and **horizontally, at sector level**, but on a smaller territorial scale than the ITI mechanism. The CLLD mechanism shifts the focus of complementarity and local partnership to **another level of governance, which implies a more consistent participation of private, non-governmental actors, thus promoting the assumption of strategic planning responsibility to a new level of public/private collaboration and governance**.

Chapter 4. Conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned

EQ 1. How were the responsibilities for achieving the objectives of the regional development policy assumed?

The following **conclusions** were drawn based on the findings of the analysis:

A. In relation to the legislation in the field of regional development:

A.1. There is a need to review the legislation in the field of regional development in order:

- To ensure the functionality of certain structures coordinating the regional development policy that provide the adequate financial resources, so that the regional development policy is not seen only through the ROP / ERDF perspective;
- To ensure a closer and strategic correlation at the level of the government policies that intersect with the regional development policy;
- To ensure the capacity to fulfil the strategic role of connection between the central and local level by the regional structures established by law, respectively the RDAs;
- To take into account the increasing importance of integrated territorial interventions;
- To provide bases for the regional development policy through land use plans (national, regional, sub-regional level);
- To ensure coordination of the ROP system with administrative decentralization processes, so that projects developed by LPA have a greater and more direct impact on improving the delivery of public policies at local level.

B. In relation to ROP institutional management system:

B.1. The institutional system for managing the ROP 2014-2020 can be used in the next programming period, without the need for new accreditations, so that additional administrative procedures are avoided and the system becomes immediately functional.

B.2. There is a need to clarify the horizontal relationships within the various departments and services of the IB/MA ROP (eg. at the level of the management and support structures within the IB/MA ROP), so that the existing resources are used and optimized and the procedures are streamlined through shorter decision-making processes and a clearer burden-sharing.

C. In relation to the institutional system of national coordination between FESI and national policies

C.1 It is necessary to develop mechanisms of strategic coordination at the governmental level, so that the sectoral policies are closer to the territorial needs and this aspect is properly reflected in the regional development policy and specifically in the ROP.

C.2 It is necessary to increase the degree of responsibility assumed by line ministries, regarding the contribution of national sectoral policies to the regional development policy.

C.3 There is a need for strategic coordination of the legislative process, so that the impact of the legislation on the ROP implementation system (and in general the FESI) is systematically analysed.

D. In relation to the human and financial resources allocated to the ROP implementation system

D.1 There is a need to carry out a detailed analysis of needs for human and financial resources in the near future from the perspective of ensuring the proper and efficient functioning of the ROP implementation system, including at the MA ROP level, taking into account the content of the future ROP 2021-2027.

D.2 It is also necessary to ensure the continuity of the MA ROP structures, in order to capitalize on the experience gained, avoiding reorganizations likely to destabilize the ROP implementation system.

D.3 In order to avoid the periods of overwhelming workloads, also coming to the support of beneficiaries, it is necessary to strengthen the programming and planning function of the various stages of program implementation.

D.4 There is a need to ensure the adequate financial resources to fulfil the tasks delegated by the IB ROP until the end of the current programming period (until 2023).

D.5 The resources allocated to RDAs should ensure the continuity of the central role that they play in the process of programming, monitoring and evaluating the regional development policy in the territory, in addition to the delegated tasks in the ROP implementation system.

E. In relation to process improvement:

E.1 The effort to simplify and optimize the implementation processes must continue, in line with the guidelines of the new European regulations for the 2021-2027 period.

E.2 In particular, there is a need to further simplify the ROP implementation processes, by eliminating waiting periods which often depend on a complex decision-making process, on a substantive overload with more tasks than the system can withstand, as well as external factors, such as: change of legislation; cumbersome administrative procedures for beneficiaries who do not depend on the ROP system; sectoral policies that are not appropriate to the needs existent in the territory.

E.3 It is also necessary and urgent for the SMIS system to become fully operational and in the next period represent a powerful tool for simplifying the implementation processes.

Given these conclusions, the Evaluators make the following **recommendations**²⁵:

A. In relation to the legislation in the field of regional development:

Addressed to MA ROP/MDRAP

A.1.1 Review of legislation in terms of establishing mechanisms for coordinating top-down and bottom-up policies, with a reinforced role for regional structures

A.1.2 Opening a debate at MDRAP level, between the MA ROP, the General Directorate for Public Administration and the General Directorate for Regional Development in terms of identifying the options for revision and coordination with other government initiatives (e.g. National Fund for Local Development and the Public Administration Code, approved on 26/06/2019).

²⁵ The recommendations highlighted with * refer to the 2021-2027 programming period.

A.1.3 Extend the regional character of the programming until the identification of the selection criteria of the projects of regional interest closely correlated with the National Land Use Plan vision. Capitalizing on the role of the Regional Planning Committee, RDAs and sectoral committees in the identification phase of the priority project portfolio*

A.1.4 Continuing the effort to promote integrated territorial interventions to increase the impact of investments in the territory, based on the lessons learned from the 2014-2020 pilot experience (LAG, urban authorities, ITI).

Addressed to other government structures outside the ROP system:

A.1.5 Continuing the effort to support local public administrations, in order to increase the capacity of strategic planning and the capacity to correlate the local policies with the financing programmes, especially among small towns. (recommendation addressed to MA OP CA)

B. In relation to the institutional management system of the ROP

Addressed to other government structures outside the ROP system:

B.1 Ensuring the institutional continuity of the ROP 2014-2020 implementation system during the 2021-2027 programming period* (recommendation addressed to the Ministry of European Funds)

Addressed to MA ROP/MDRAP:

B.2 Carrying out an analysis of the horizontal functional relationships, both at the MA level and at the IB ROP level, so that the support structures (eg. legal departments, public procurement, county offices) help the implementation of the program more systematically in terms of reducing the tasks at the level of DG MA/IB ROP and to systematize the process of approval and decision-making.

C. In relation to the institutional system of national coordination of FESI and national policies

Addressed to MA ROP/MDRAP

C.1.1 Ensuring the continuity of the integrated territorial mechanisms by financing the structures created during 2014-2020 period*

C.1.2 Accelerating the preparation process of the future ROP 2021-2027 at national level, by coordinating with the relevant ministries involved in the ROP investment fields*

Addressed to other government structures outside the ROP system:

C.2 Strengthening the coordination function of government policies, by establishing a stronger link between them and the government responsibilities arising from the signing of the Partnership Agreement, for example through a mechanism for monitoring and alerting delays in fulfilling the “enabling conditions” in the start-up phase of operational programmes* (recommendation addressed to the Ministry of European Funds)

C.3 Establishing an inter-ministerial working group (eg. coordinated by the GSG) to analyse the impact of the regulations on the ROP implementation system (and, in general, FESI). (recommendation addressed to the Ministry of European Funds/GSG)

D. In relation to the human and financial resources allocated to the ROP implementation system

Addressed to MA ROP/MDRAP

D.1.1 Ensuring the correlation of human and financial resources allocated to the ROP implementation system with the evolution of ROP allocation and structure, so that the organization of specialized services might reflect the complexity of the program.

D.1.2 Ensuring the premises and equipment needed for the proper functioning of the implementation system.

D.1.3 Carrying out a workload analysis for each implementation process, taking into account the length of the processes and the expected workload (eg. in terms of number of projects submitted that will be contracted, number of expected reimbursement requests, etc.), at least quarterly.

D.1.4 Continue the effort to strengthen the helpdesk function, including by involving support structures, by structuring it according to the ROP implementation processes, to provide specialized and customised support for the beneficiary

D.2 Ensuring the institutional continuity of the ROP 2014-2020 implementation system during the 2021-2027 programming period*

D.3 Defining a timetable for preparing and launching calls for project proposals and ensuring it is respected, so that the estimation of the necessary resources at the system level is correct and the potential beneficiaries are able to prepare their projects in time.*

D.4.1 Ensuring the financial resources necessary to perform the function of IBs until programme closure.

D.4.2 Review the targets of the performance indicators set to check the fulfilment of the tasks delegated to the IB, so that they are adapted to the actual progress in the implementation of the ROP (eg. the annual absorption target value is calculated according to the actual number of projects under implementation, not according to the regional allocation foreseen on an annual basis) and IB ROP is not be penalized for aspects that are not entirely under the control of the IB.

D.4.3 Revise the procedure for verifying the performance of the delegated tasks, taking into account the analysis of projects and system risks that can be specifically manifested at regional level, while strengthening the collaboration of the MA/IB ROP, so that the procedure actually has a new purpose, namely to monitor the manner in which the tasks of the MA/IB are fulfilled within the implementation system, thus becoming a common working tool of the MA/IB ROP from the perspective of improving the system, focusing on the complementarity and continuity of the MA/IB ROP functions.

D.5 Ensuring the financial resources necessary to fulfil the strategic function of the RDAs in the framework of the regional development policy, by (re)operationalizing the National Regional Development Fund or another similar fund/system aimed at achieving the regional development objectives.

E. In relation to process improvement:

Addressed to MA ROP/MDRAP

E.1.1 Reducing the complexity (measures/axes) of the ROP: concentrating the development objectives according to the priorities of the regional and sector development policy, in line with the proposed regulation for 2021-2027.

E.1.2 Extending the adoption of the simplified cost option (in particular the flat rates option by cost lines) according to the proposed common regulation for 2021-2027*

In the submission, evaluation, selection and contracting phase

E.2.1 Systematization of rules for similar calls

E.2.2 Regular updating, proper publication and follow-up of the call launching calendar

E.2.3 Adopting the mechanism of the “staged access point” so that the calls remain open for a longer period of time and the beneficiary has a short and medium term perspective of successive calls. *

E.2.4 Granting financing priority to projects in areas with updated urban documentation

E.2.5 Analysing the opportunity to reintroduce the Implementation Framework Document

E.2.6 Capitalizing on good practices from the 2014-2020 programming period with regard to the processes of prioritization and pre-selection of projects (e.g. PA 6) in order to reduce the tasks related to the submission, evaluation and selection phase.*

E.2.7 Simplifying the evaluation and selection procedure in such a way as to limit the cases for which points of view / clarifications / documents are required subsequent to those already requested upon submission or pre-contracting

E.2.8 Adapting the framework contract to the type of investment and the specificities of implementation*

E.2.9 Simplifying the contracting procedure with a view to reducing administrative burdens (eg. through inter-institutional agreements with the entities responsible for issuing the necessary administrative documents in the contracting phase).

During the implementation stage

E.2.10 Notifying beneficiaries with regard to the risk of termination deriving from breach of contractual conditions

E.2.11 Organizing monitoring visits whenever necessary, for projects with high implementation risks

E.2.12 Preventing the problems of changing the legislation with impact on the ROP through inter-ministerial working groups, which should confront all the laws that must be taken into account when implementing actions on each type of call for project proposals. *

Addressed to other government structures outside the ROP system:

E.2.13 Changing the GEO 40/2015, which stipulates the obligation to include in reimbursement applications (with the exception of the first reimbursement application) those expenses incurred within no more than 3 months from the date of payment (recommendation addressed to the Government of Romania)

E.3.1 Ensuring the functioning of the implementation module in MySMIS (recommendation addressed to the Ministry of European Funds)

E.3.2 Checking the possibility of improving/extending MySMIS functions, especially in terms of improving the reporting module, document archiving (ensuring the capacity to load a large volume of documents), implementation (expenditure authorization function)* (recommendation addressed to the Ministry of European Funds)

EQ 2. What is the impact of the decentralization process on the regional and local institutional structures involved in the implementation of the ROP?

The following **conclusions** were drawn based on the findings of the analysis:

F. In relation to the contribution of the ROP to the decentralization process at the regional level:

F.1. There is a need to review the legislation in the field of regional development in order:
- To ensure the capacity to fulfil the strategic role of connection between the central and local level by the regional structures established by law, respectively the RDAs;

F.2 The evolution of regional structures demonstrates an increased capacity to assume additional responsibilities within the framework of regional development policy. This capacity must be capitalised in terms of strengthening the integrated approach of the regional development policy.

F.3 The resources allocated to RDAs should ensure the continuity of the central role that they play in the process of programming, monitoring and evaluating the regional development policy in the territory, in addition to the delegated tasks in the ROP implementation system.

G. In relation to the contribution of the ROP to the decentralization process at the local level:

G.1 In order to strengthen the ROP's contribution to the development of administrative capacity at local level, it is necessary to create a structured synergy with other complementary funding programmes and sources, which are directly aimed at this goal.

G.2 The effort to promote integrated territorial interventions must continue in the direction of ensuring the continuity and sustainability of the structures established during the 2014-2020 programming period.

G.3 The contribution of the ROP to decentralization processes can be strengthened only under the conditions of adequate coordination with the methodology and instruments adopted to facilitate administrative decentralization processes.

Given these conclusions, the Evaluators make the following **recommendations**:

F. In relation to the contribution of the ROP to the decentralization process at the regional level:

Addressed to MA ROP/MDRAP

F.1 Review of legislation in terms of establishing mechanisms for coordinating top-down and bottom-up policies, with a reinforced role for regional structures

F.2 Opening a debate at MDRAP level, between the MA ROP, the General Directorate for Public Administration and the General Directorate for Regional Development in terms of identifying the options for revision and coordination with other government initiatives (e.g. National Fund for Local Development and the Public Administration Code, approved on 26/06/2019).

F.3 Extending the participatory nature of programming by strengthening the role of the Regional Planning Committee, RDAs and sectoral committees in the identification phase of the priority project portfolio*

F.4 Ensuring the financial resources necessary to fulfil the strategic function of the RDAs in the framework of the regional development policy, by (re)operationalizing the National Regional Development Fund or another similar fund/system aimed at achieving the regional development objectives. *

F.5 Analysis of the opportunity to transfer the experience gained through the ITI Danube Delta mechanism to other sub-regional contexts, with the executive support of inter-territorial structures like IDA and under the coordination of regional structures, such as RDAs, as a regional level entity in charge of programming strategic interventions of regional interest.

F.6 Analysis of the opportunity to adopt the monitoring and evaluation mechanism used within the ITI Danube Delta mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Regional Development Plans, under the responsibility of the RDAs.

G. In relation to the contribution of the ROP to the decentralization process at the local level:

G.1.1 Carrying out an analysis of the needs for information and training of potential beneficiaries on topics related to strategic planning, project management, public procurement, as well as other aspects relevant for assuming the responsibilities deriving from accessing European funds, in particular through the ROP. The analysis could be coordinated at national level (eg. by DG PA/MDRAP or ANFP) and facilitated by LPA associations. *

G.1.2 Allocation of reserve resources to cover the costs deriving from the strategic planning effort made by the LPA (eg. coverage of exceeding allocations by specific objectives within the PA 4, in order to ensure the integrated approach) (recommendation addressed to the MDRAP in collaboration with other institutions of the central government)

G.2.1 Continuing the effort to promote integrated territorial interventions to increase the impact of investments in the territory, based on the lessons learned from the 2014-2020 pilot experience (LAG, urban authorities, ITI)*

G.2.2 Simplifying the access requirements for integrated interventions, while strengthening the approach based on community-led local development (CLLD) 'and the role of LAGs, by integrating local development strategies within IUDS and other strategic documents at the TAU level. *

G.2.3 Strengthening the role of Urban Authorities in the monitoring and evaluation phase of IUDS*

G.3 Initiation of a dialogue at the level of the central government institutions, in order to coordinate with the various Managing Authorities of the OP, with regard to the joint effort to promote the processes of administrative decentralization, under the methodological coordination by specialized departments of MDRAP and GSG. *

Lessons learned

Participating and involving actors with attributions and an institutional mission relevant to the ROP implementation system at various levels of governance (vertically) and in various fields of activity (horizontally), as well as ensuring the integrated character of the interventions that have an impact on reaching the regional development policy objectives. In terms of key issues to the effectiveness of this policy. In this regard, **actors at all levels must assume responsibility** in formulating and implementing development strategies, programmes, plans and projects, in order to ensure the success of regional development through an integrated, hierarchically coordinated and appropriated and bottom-up approach.

Local actors need further support to understand and implement the principles of balanced territorial development, including from the perspective of assuming the responsibilities of administrative decentralization. For local public administrations with less human and financial resources, this support must include additional support that can go beyond the administrative limits, in order to create that critical mass needed to deliver optimal public services depending on the final beneficiaries, namely the local communities. In this context, the association between the local actors is essential to the success of the regional development policy.

The regional level of governance needs to be strengthened to ensure the strategic vision and “catalysing” of resources and potential expressed locally from a regional perspective. In this regard, the role of RDAs and other regional structures of partner and associative type is essential and should be further capitalised on, in order to avoid the dispersion of resources and fragmentation of the results obtained from ROP interventions. Thus, the function of monitoring and evaluating regional development strategies must be strengthened and more closely linked to the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of governmental, sectoral strategies and policies locally and regionally.

This aspect can only be ensured if **line ministries** assume their specific responsibility in regional development policy, under the coordination of the MDRAP, as a governmental structure responsible for regional development policy.

For these reasons, the main lesson learned from the evaluation of the 2014-2020 ROP implementation system is that in order to achieve the expected results, the regional development policy must exceed both the local administrative limits and the ROP limits, so that the **regional development policy becomes an instrument for ensuring the integrated character of all government policies, reflected at regional level.**

Chapter 5. Annexes

Annex 5.1. Bibliography of literature and documentary research

Bibliography of documentary research

- The documents related to the implementation system: the updated organization charts and those in force for the 2007-2013 programming period; updated Organisation and Operation Regulations; description of technical and logistical resources from IB / MA ROP; the training strategy of IB/MA ROP staff and ROP beneficiaries; Technical Assistance Strategy; ROP implementation procedures (collected in the beginning period); framework documents regarding the delegation of functions to the Intermediate Bodies (level I and II);
- SMIS database (for the analysis of progress in the implementation of the ROP, and for the geo-statistical analysis, respectively).
- The Partnership Agreement 2014-2020, including the annex regarding the assumed ex ante conditionalities, the ROP Monitoring Committee Operating Regulation
- The methodology for drawing up RDPs, Regulation on the functioning of the regional partnership framework and the Regulation on the functioning of the Regional Development Council;
- Legislation in force in the field of regional development policy;
- Legislation in force and relevant strategies in the field of decentralization;
- Documents related to OPAC 2014-2020 projects that are under implementation;
- Centralization of the Inter-Community Development Associations registered with Prefect's Offices, by activity areas;
- Documents related to the integrated mechanisms (eg. Articles of Incorporation of the IDA ITI Danube Delta, the documentation provided by the interviewed LAG structure, Guide for integrated urban development implementation, Local Development Strategies, etc.)

In more detail, the documentary research related to the case study on the ITI Danube Delta mechanism concerned the collection and analysis of the following documents:

- Integrated strategy for sustainable development of the Danube Delta
- Articles of Incorporation of the IDA ITI Danube Delta;
- Protocol on the implementation of the ITI Danube Delta Mechanism
- List of members of the Advisory Committee and its Operating Regulations
- Other documents provided by IDA ITI Danube Delta for the preparation of scheduled meetings with its members.

The documentary research related to the case study on integrated urban development concerned the collection and analysis of the following documents:

- Integrated Strategy for Urban Development of the municipality of Cluj-Napoca;
- Supporting document for the financing of FESI projects presented by the municipality of Cluj-Napoca;
- Function Delegation Agreement to the Urban Authority;
- Other documents related to the implementation of Priority Axis 4 of the 2014-2020 ROP (eg. the framework document for the implementation of integrated urban development).

The documentary research related to the case study on the CLLD mechanism concerned the following documents and information:

- The documents related to the functioning of the CLLD mechanism in Romania (respectively the LAG Guidelines, phase III, the draft of the Applicant's Guide, the list of LDS/urban LAGs selected within the OP OPHC 2014-2020);

- Existing online information regarding the LAG structures set up and their activities;
- Documents related to the case study specific to “Târgoviște Egalității de Șanse” LAG (Equal Opportunities in Târgoviște) (Târgoviște Local Development Strategy and other documents provided by LAG representatives during the interview).

Review of the main normative acts with relevant impact on the implementation of the ROP

Following the discussions with the staff involved in the management and implementation of the ROP, the beneficiaries and other relevant structures (such as DG Public Administration and DG Regional Development within the MDRAP), a table can be defined illustrating examples of normative acts that they had (or will have) a relevant impact on the implementation of the 2014-2020 ROP (not limited). These include acts concerning the organization, operation, budgeting among potential beneficiaries of the ROP represented by local public administrations, as well as other laws applicable to the fields of ROP implementation.

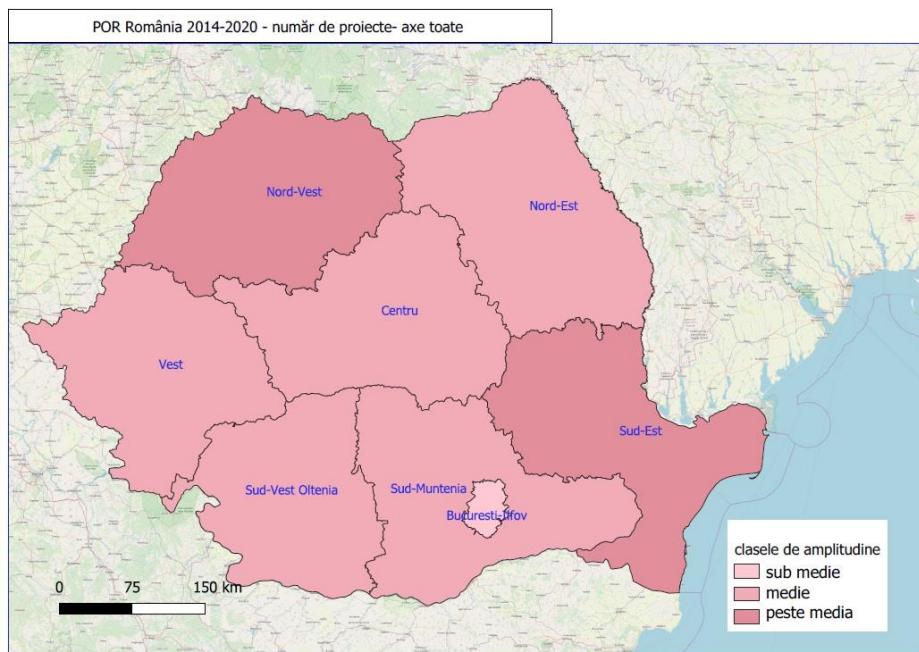
Title of the normative act	Relevance of the normative act for the regional development policy and the implementation of the ROP 2014-2020
Code of Public Administration 2019	Regulation of the general framework for the organization and functioning of the authorities and institutions of the public administration, the status of the staff from the public administration, the public and private property of the State and of the administrative-territorial units and the public services
EMERGENCY ORDER No. 114 of December 28, 2018 imposing measures in the field of public investments and fiscal-budgetary measures, amending and completing some normative acts and extending certain deadlines (with the amendments brought by GEO 43 of June 12, 2019)	Establishment of the Development and Investment Fund, without legal personality, managed by the National Commission for Strategy and Forecasting (CNSP) within the GSG. Increasing the gross salary in the field of constructions
Law No 273/2006 on local public finances, as subsequently amended and supplemented	Establishing the principles, general framework and procedures for the formation, administration, employment and use of local public funds, as well as the responsibilities of local public administration authorities and public institutions involved in the field of local public finances. Establishing the annuality of the LPA budget.
Government Emergency Ordinance No. 1/2017 establishing measures in the field of central public administration and modifying and completing normative acts	Establishing and reorganizing the structures of the central public administration, by combining and/or dividing existing ministries (eg. MDRAPFE is set up, which will eventually be abolished by reorganising the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration and the Ministry of European Funds)
Law no. 98/2016 of public procurement and other related provisions (eg. GEO no. 46/2018 of May 31, 2018 regarding the establishment, organization and functioning of the National Office for Centralized Procurement and GEO no. 16/2019 amending the GEO no. 98/2017 regarding the ex-ante control of award procedures)	Establishes the rules and procedures for conducting public procurement procedures, with major impact on the rules for implementing ROP projects.

Source: Processing by the Evaluator of the results of the documentary and qualitative analysis

Annex 5.2. Existing situation: geo-statistical analysis

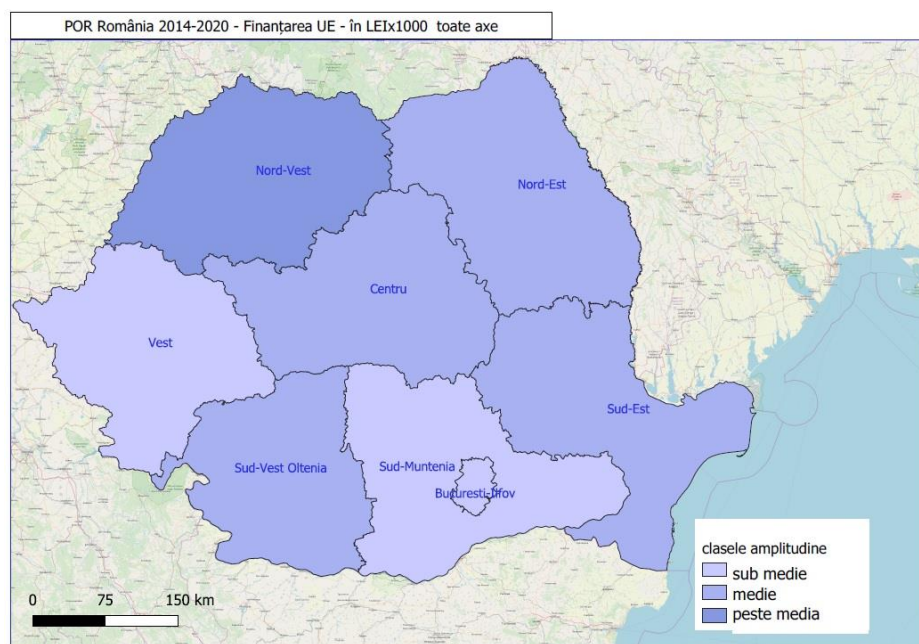
Annex 5.2.1 Regional maps

Figure 2: Number of projects contracted by regions (total axes)



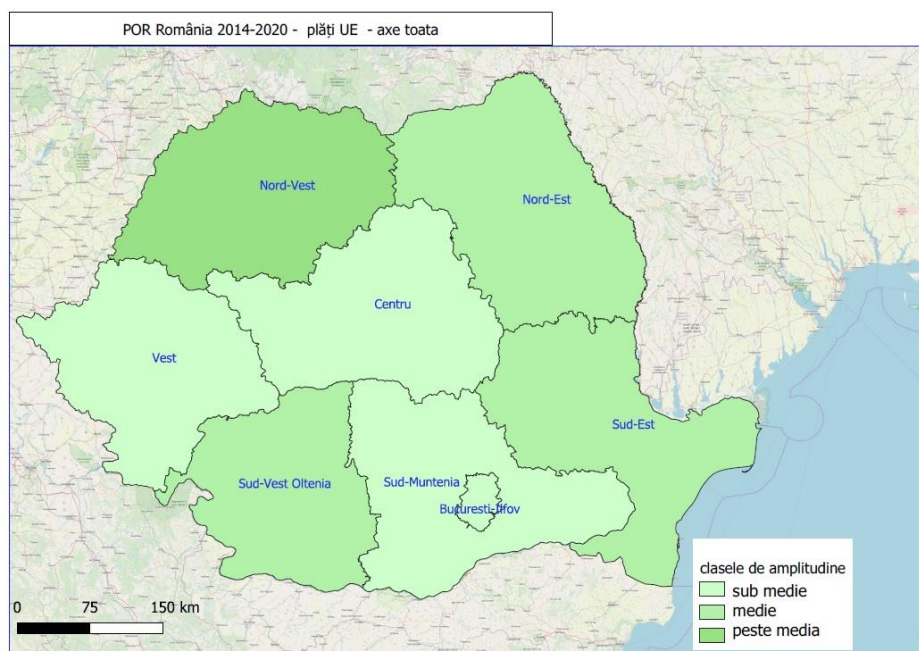
Source: Evaluator's processing of SMIS data on 02/04/2019

Figure 3: Amount of projects contracted by regions (total axes)



Source: Evaluator's processing of SMIS data on 02/04/2019

Figure 4: Amount of payments made by regions (total axes)



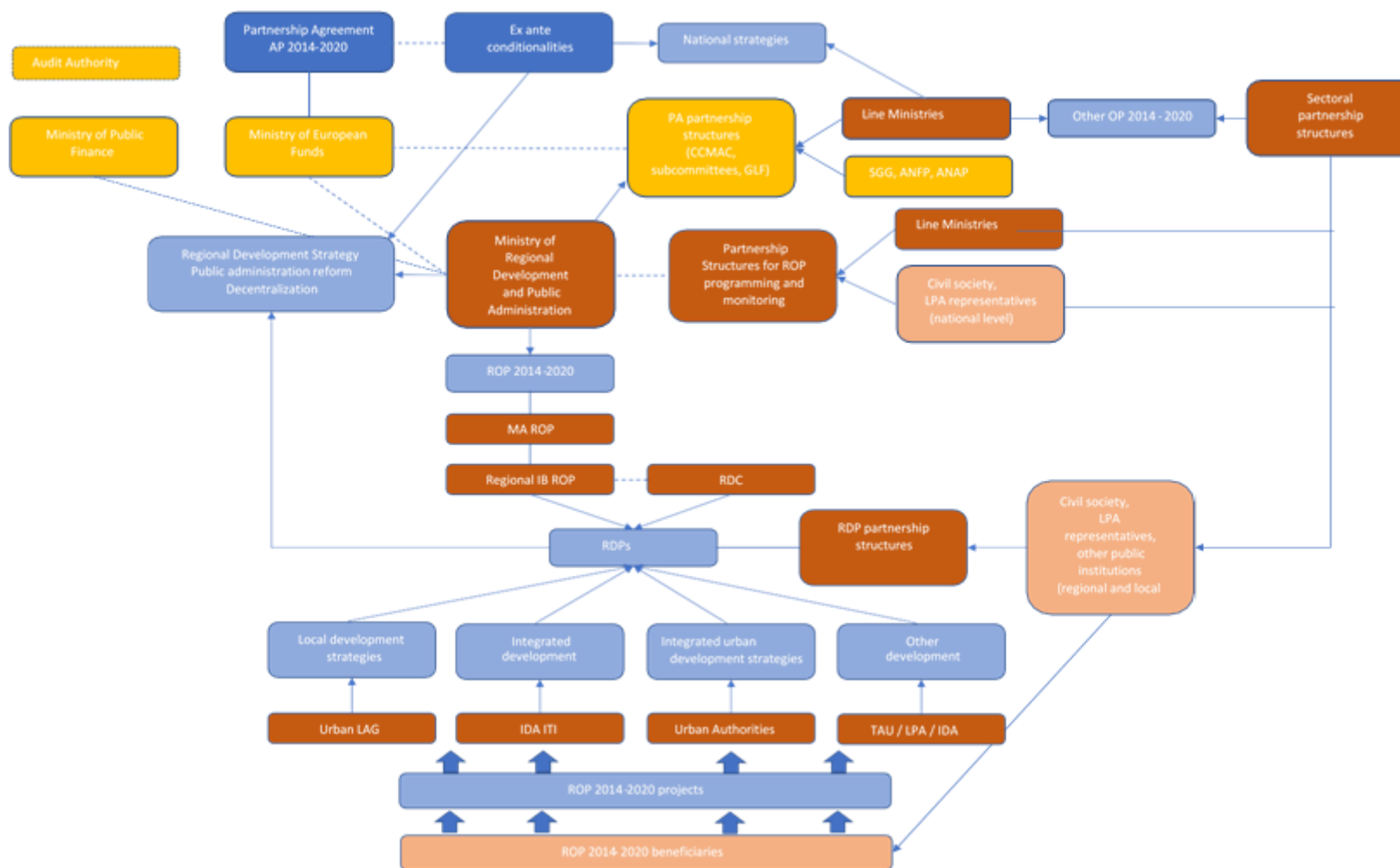
Source: Evaluator's processing of SMIS data on 02/04/2019

Annex 5.2.2 Database of the geo-statistical analysis

To be attached separately

Annex 5.3. Overview of the ROP implementation system (graphical representation)

Figure 5. Scheme of the main actors and documents of strategic programming and planning within FESI and ROP 2014-2020



Annex 5.4. Methodological tables

Table 5.4.1: Evaluation matrix

Evaluation objectives	Evaluation questions for each evaluation objective	The key concepts included in each of the evaluation questions	Evaluation criteria	Operationalizing each of the concepts in indicators or variables	Methods of analysis
<p>Establishing the impact of the legislative and institutional framework on the regional development process in Romania</p> <p>Ability to achieve and manage the implementation of European-funded development strategies</p> <p>Capacity of regional and local bodies to ensure the identification, prioritization, promotion and management of sustainable and regional impact projects.</p>	EQ 1 How were the responsibilities for achieving the objectives of the regional development policy assumed?	<p>Responsibilities</p> <p>Delegated functions</p> <p>Objectives of the regional development policy</p> <p>Access to funds</p> <p>Projects of regional importance</p>	<p>Responsibilities in the area of programming and implementing regional development policy are clearly defined and assumed</p> <p>The staff for managing the responsibilities assumed in the ROP implementation system is sufficient and compliant with the requirements</p> <p>The procedures for implementing the ROP ensure the adequate level of absorption of the funds according to the established targets</p>	<p>Clarity and adequacy of the normative provisions in terms of the need to assume responsibilities</p> <p>Performance indicators established in the Function delegation Agreement for the implementation of the ROP (see Chapter 3)</p> <p>Number of employees/department</p> <p>Number of external experts contracted</p> <p>Number of vacancies</p> <p>Degree of coverage of the necessary skills</p> <p>Amount of the financial resources allocated to the performance of the management functions of the ROP system</p>	<p>Analysis of institutional documents (eg. normative acts etc.) and of the legislative and institutional framework</p> <p>Qualitative analysis (based on interviews, expert panel and case studies)</p> <p>Documentary analysis of the function delegation procedures and agreements</p> <p>Organizational analysis</p> <p>Qualitative analysis of the implementation procedures</p> <p>Analysis of the set of indicators and geostatistical analysis</p> <p>Quantitative analysis of the human resources allocated (analysis of organizational charts and vacancies)</p> <p>Qualitative analysis of available skills and workload</p> <p>Analysis of the evolution of KPIs at the organization and program level</p> <p>Quantitative analysis (financial indicators for PA 12 resource allocation)</p>

Evaluation objectives	Evaluation questions for each evaluation objective	The key concepts included in each of the evaluation questions	Evaluation criteria	Operationalizing each of the concepts in indicators or variables	Methods of analysis
	EQ 2. What is the impact of the decentralization process on the regional and local institutional structures involved in the implementation of the ROP?	<p>Decentralization</p> <p>Delegated functions</p> <p>Institutional cooperation</p> <p>Projects of regional interest</p> <p>Strategic planning</p> <p>Integrated multi-sectoral policies at local level</p>	<p>The regional structures involved in the implementation of the ROP have strengthened their institutional capacity over time by fulfilling the delegated functions</p> <p>The degree of cooperation among the actors in the territory has been strengthened by the implementation of integrated development projects</p> <p>Local public administrations have strengthened their ability to draw up policies, make public policy decisions and deliver public services for the benefit of local communities.</p>	<p>Number of employees/department (evolution over time)</p> <p>Number of external experts contracted (evolution over time)</p> <p>Number of vacancies (evolution over time)</p> <p>Degree of coverage of the necessary skills</p> <p>Amount of the financial resources allocated to the performance of the management functions of the ROP system (evolution over time)</p> <p>Number of formalized local partnerships (such as IDA) created from the perspective of ROP implementation</p> <p>Number of decisions taken or joint actions carried out within the partnership structures created as a result of ROP funding</p> <p>Number of public services activated / improved following ROP investments</p>	<p>Documentary analysis (programming documents at regional level, strategic planning documents at local level, case study documents etc.)</p> <p>Quantitative analysis of indicators relating to human and financial resources allocated to intermediary bodies over time</p> <p>Qualitative analysis (interviews)</p> <p>Case studies</p>

Table 5.4.2: Data sources correlated with indicators

Purpose of the evaluation	EQ code	Indicators/purpose of collected data	Interrogated data sources	Collection methods used Type of collected data
Analysis of the contribution of the ROP, through the corresponding institutional and legislative system, to the process of regional development in Romania	EQ 1	Clarity and adequacy of the normative provisions in terms of the need to assume responsibilities	The applicable legislation in the field of regional development, the operating regulations of the structures involved Development strategies and programmes	Documentary analysis of the legislative and institutional framework Qualitative analysis (15 individual and group interviews, 1 national focus group and 3 case studies)
Analysing the capacity of the institutions involved in the implementation and management of the development strategies co-financed by European funds		Performance indicators established in the functions delegation contract for the implementation of the ROP (performance targets reached annually) Number of vacancies Number of employees/department Number of external experts contracted Degree of coverage of the necessary skills	Documents regarding the organization of the ROP implementation system (procedures, financing contracts, TA strategy, etc.) Organizational charts, Organisation and Operation Regulations Training strategy Technical Assistance Strategy MA ROP / MySMIS	Documentary analysis (procedures, delegation agreements, implementation system description) Qualitative information (11 group interviews, MA/IB ROP, 4 interviews with ROP beneficiaries) Documentary analysis (organizational charts, Organisation and Operation Regulations) Individual and group interviews (11 group interviews, MA / IB ROP) Quantitative data (indicators on human resources allocated) Documentary analysis (strategies) Qualitative information (11 group interviews, MA / IB ROP) Documentary analysis (financial allocations for TA) Qualitative information (11 group interviews, MA / IB ROP)
Analysis of the extent to which the ROP contributes to strengthening the capacity of regional and local bodies to ensure the identification, prioritization, promotion and	EQ 2	Number of employees/department (evolution over time) Number of external experts contracted (evolution over time) Number of vacancies (evolution over time)	Regional Development Agencies Organizational charts, Organisation and Operation Regulations	Documentary analysis (organizational charts, Organisation and Operation Regulations - comparison to 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 programming periods) Qualitative information (11 group interviews, MA / IB ROP)

Purpose of the evaluation	EQ code	Indicators/purpose of collected data	Interrogated data sources	Collection methods used Type of collected data
management of sustainable and regional impact projects		<p>Degree of coverage of the necessary skills Amount of the financial resources allocated to the performance of the management functions of the ROP system (evolution over time)</p> <p>Number of formalized local partnerships (such as IDA) created from the perspective of ROP implementation</p> <p>Number of decisions taken or joint actions carried out within the partnership structures created as a result of ROP funding</p> <p>Number of public services activated / improved following ROP investments</p>	<p>MA ROP / MySMIS</p> <p>Documents regarding the IDA establishment</p> <p>Documents regarding the implementation of the CLLD mechanism</p> <p>Beneficiaries of the ROP 2014-2020</p> <p>Documents regarding the implementation of the CLLD mechanism</p> <p>GAL structures</p> <p>Beneficiaries of the ROP 2014-2020</p>	<p>Documentary analysis (financial allocations for TA - evolution over time)</p> <p>Qualitative information (12 group interviews, MA / IB ROP)</p> <p>Documentary analysis (programming documents at regional level, strategic planning documents at local level, case study documents etc.)</p> <p>Qualitative information (3 interviews, case study analysis, 1 expert panel, 4 interviews with ROP beneficiaries)</p>

Annex 5.5. Data analysis and interpretation (full version)

EQ 1. How were the responsibilities for achieving the objectives of the regional development policy assumed?

Assumption 1.1: The ROP implementation system is based on a set of clear and appropriate normative acts for assuming responsibilities by the structures involved

Legislation analysis

The Regional Development Law no. 315/2004 establishes the institutional framework, objectives, competences and instruments specific to the regional development policy in Romania. According to Article 2 of Law No. 315/2004, *“the regional development policy represents **all the policies developed by the Government**, through the central public administration bodies, the local public administration authorities and the specialized regional bodies, with the consultation of the socio-economic partners involved, in order to ensure the economic growth and the balanced and sustainable social development of some geographical areas set up in development regions, improve Romania’s international competitiveness and reduce the economic and social gaps existing between Romania and the Member States of the European Union”*.

The law establishes that the development regions constitute the framework for the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the regional development policies and designates the **Regional Development Council (RDC)** and the **Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)** as the main executive structures for the technical and financial programming, implementation and monitoring of regional development programmes, projects of regional interest, as well as for the fulfilment of any function delegated by central or local public administration authorities for the implementation of regional funding programmes. The functions delegated to the RDAs are established by a delegation contract signed with the authorities delegating them, and they are responsible for providing the necessary financial sources for the fulfilment of these functions by the RDAs, from the national or European budget, such amounts being highlighted in a distinct position called “Technical assistance” for the implementation of regional development programmes.

Thus, other relevant structures in the field of regional development, established by Law no. 315/2004 with subsequent amendments and completions are the **Council for Regional Development** (Article 7), and the **National Council for Regional Development** (Article 11). The Regional Development Council is the deliberative regional body, without legal personality, which is established and operates based on partnership principles at the level of each development region, in order to coordinate the elaboration and monitoring activities arising from the regional development policies. The National Council for Regional Development (NCRD) is the national structure of a partnership type, playing a decisive role in the preparation and implementation of the objectives of the regional development policy.

Also, Law no. 315/2004 provides for the functioning of the **National Fund for Regional Development (NFRD)**, aimed at financing multi-annual regional development programmes, consisting of the amounts that are allocated, on an annual basis, through the State budget, as a distinct position for the regional development policy.

Finally, the law designates the Ministry of European Integration (the duties of which have now been taken over by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration), to fulfil the function of specialized institution at the level of central public administration, which exercises, at national level, the duties and responsibility for the preparation, promotion, coordination, management, implementation and monitoring of the policies and strategies of

regional development in Romania, as well as of the economic and social cohesion programmes, while covering the Secretariat function of the National Council for Regional Development, as the RDAs ensure the Secretariat of RDCs.

The National Strategy for Regional Development is in fact defined by the regional development strategies contained in the Regional Development Plans (RDPs), drawn up by RDAs and approved by RDCs. The methodology for drawing up the RDPs for the 2014-2020 period provides for a standardized approach to the regional development planning exercise, applicable to all development regions. Thus, this standard approach refers to the unitary application, throughout the process:

- of some common research methods (eg. analysis of standard socio-economic indicators);
- a standardized structure of planning documents;
- key elements regarding the development of regional planning documents in partnership.

According to the methodology for drawing up the RDPs, when drawing them up, special attention should be paid to:

- The cohesion policy of the European Union, an important source for financing investments and development priorities of the regions;
- The relevant strategic policy directions at regional level of the institutions/authorities that can finance development investments related to the region in question.
- The provisions of the land-use documentation at the national level (the 6 sections approved by law of the National Land Use Plan)²⁶, at the regional and sub-regional level (Regional Land Use Plans, Inter-county/Inter-communal Land Use Plans) and the county level (County Land Use Plans).
- The Strategy for Territorial Development of Romania (STDR), which represents the long-term programmatic document establishing the guidelines for territorial development of Romania and the directions of implementation for a period of time of more than 20 years.

Results from interviews with relevant organizations: ROP contribution to the achievement of regional development objectives

The documentary analysis was corroborated with the interviews conducted with the following MDRAP structures relevant to the field of regional development and decentralization policies. These included: Directorate General for Public Administration; Directorate-General for Regional Development; ROP Programming Service and ROP Technical Assistance Service.

With regard to the capacity of the legislative and institutional framework to ensure the achievement of the objectives of the regional development policy, most of the interviewed structures did not provide a clear answer on a scale from 1 to 5²⁷ (except for the Programming Service within the MA ROP, which provided a value of 4), preferring to argue their views descriptively and qualitatively. Thus, in general, the legislative framework is considered adequate for regional development objectives, but there are certain shortcomings deriving from:

- The fact that the law is relatively “outdated” compared to the evolution of regional development policy, which places increasing emphasis on the territorial character of investments aimed at the balanced development of communities (including through integrated and bottom-up mechanisms) and, moreover, the law includes institutions that have never been truly functional for the purpose of achieving national policy objectives (NCRD and NFRD);

²⁶ Communication routes, water, natural hazard areas, network of localities, protected areas, areas with tourist resources.

²⁷ Where: 5 = very much; 4 = much; 3 = not much nor little; 2 = little, 1 = very little.

- The regional development policy is implemented mainly in the light of the Regional Operational Program, and the development needs in the territory are far beyond the resources made available;
- The achievement of the indicators depends on the timing of the submission and on the way the projects are prepared, which somehow affects the results actually achieved, because the input coming from the beneficiaries is too little related to the existing strategic documents (starting from the National Plan and the Zonal Land Use Plans)

Although all the structures interviewed recognize the existence and functionality of more or less formal forms of coordination, according to the existing legislative provisions, at the level of the different institutions and structures of the MDRAP involved in the programming and implementation of the policies of regional development, decentralization and public administration reform, there are aspects that could be improved with reference to:

- Involving the technical directions within the MDRAP in the programming of ROP interventions;
- Closer coordination between the ROP, the National Program for Local Development²⁸ and other government programmes that finance various investment objectives, taking into account the methodological guidelines provided by projects dedicated to coordinating investment objectives at national level.²⁹

With regard to the vision for increasing the efficiency of the regional development policy, the structures within the MA ROP interviewed emphasized the option of strengthening the role of ADRs and/or CDRs in monitoring and evaluating the RDPs and the contribution of the various programmes to achieving the estimated results and the strengthening of the role of the ROP Monitoring Committee in monitoring the degree of complementarity at the sectoral policies level during the implementation of the programme.

The point of view of the Regional Development Agencies (management staff) on this aspect is also focused on the regional level, underlining the option of strengthening the role of CDRs, especially with regard to the prioritization of investments of regional interest, provided that CDRs have a truly “regional” and not “local” vision of the strategic objectives to be pursued through the ROP.

“With regard to Regional Development Councils, we consider that they must have a regional specificity because at this moment, the way of thinking of the RDCs is more local than regional, promoting the local interest to the detriment of the regional interests.”.

- quoted from a Regional Development Agency -

Other existing structures at regional level that could have a stronger role in defining the strategic investments of regional interest are the Regional Planning Committees, respectively the partnership structures created for the preparation of RDPs. Also, the central aspect, according to some RDAs, is the correlation of the ROP with the sectoral policies at regional level

²⁸ The Local Development National Programme, coordinated by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, establishes the legal framework for the implementation of projects of national importance, which support the regional development by carrying out road infrastructure, technical-urban and socio-educational works.

²⁹ For example, the project “Efficient and transparent coordination and selection of infrastructure projects financed from structural instruments and from the state budget for the 2014-2020 period”, SMIS code 48659, implemented with the support of the World Bank, which had, among others, as main result drawing up three investment guides on county roads, communal roads and social infrastructure and water supply-sewerage infrastructure: these are tools that can be used by county and local public authorities to make better decisions and to guide an investment package at county/local level.

and the territorial needs, correlation that should be reflected more carefully in the ROP implementation documents, such as the Applicant's Guides and the selection criteria adopted. With regard to the option of extending / strengthening the role of the regional structures, respectively of RDAs, for the programming and implementation of integrated policies and programmes, at regional level (eg. delegation of IB functions for other operational programmes), part of the RDAs and technical services from the MA ROP considers it a viable option, given the adoption of an appropriate legislative and/or contractual framework, taking into account the current non-governmental status (although of public utility) of the agencies.

On the other hand, the interviewed General Directorates emphasized the central level of coordination, respectively, by a greater involvement of the DG Regional Development in the programming of ROP interventions, as well as by the coordination of the investment programmes and, in general, a coordination and a stronger strategic vision at intergovernmental level (eg. at SGG level).

“The main problem is that the Ministries have many duties on current activities and a reduced component of analysis and time for a strategic unitary vision. At the SGG level (or another “super partes” structure) a think tank unit should be created, a structure that will achieve the correlation between needs and policies, not starting from the budget, but starting from needs prioritized on a multiannual level, so that there is a strategic vision when it comes to multiannual budgeting”.

- MDRAP quote -

With reference to the relevant laws, regulations and strategies that could facilitate the increase of the efficiency of the regional development policy in Romania, acting as a lever for strengthening the role of the regional structures, the MDRAP departments and the MA ROP services interviewed mentioned first of all the National Strategy for Territorial Development, but also the legislation and regulations in the field of urban planning and spatial planning, as well as the Strategy for the Consolidation of Public Administration, from the perspective of decentralization and, at a higher level, the Partnership Agreement with the European Union and the country-specific recommendations. In this regard, the emphasis was again placed on the need for strategic coordination at the level of national policies and strategies, in order to ensure a balanced growth and equipping of the territory.

Assumption 1.2: The allocation of human and material resources (eg. financial and logistical) necessary for the functioning of the ROP implementation system is adequate at the level of MA, IB and even at beneficiary level.

Analysis of functional relationship between MA / IB ROP

According to the national legislation³⁰, and in line with the provisions of European regulations, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration is the managing authority for

³⁰ GD no. 904/2016 amending and completing GD no. 398/2015 for establishing the institutional framework for coordination and management of the European structural and investment funds and ensuring the continuity of the institutional framework for coordination and management of the structural instruments 2007-2013 and repealing GD no. 1183/2014 regarding the nomination of the authorities involved in the management and control system of the European structural and investment funds 2014-2020, and GD no 556/2017 amending and completing GD no. 398/2015 establishing the institutional framework for coordination and management of the European structural and investment funds and ensuring the continuity of the institutional framework for coordination and management of the structural instruments 2014-2020.

the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020, and the Agencies for Regional Development fulfil the function of intermediary bodies for the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020.

The Managing Authority for the ROP has final responsibility before the European Commission, for the proper fulfilment of the obligations referred to in Article 125 of the EU Regulation no.1303 of the European Parliament and of the Council and delegates tasks to the IB (RDA).

The current organizational chart of the MDRAP³¹ reflects the attributions and the lines of collaboration and coordination between the departments, but the Organization and Operation Regulations (OOR)³² is not updated compared to the latest version of the approved organizational chart. With the update of the OOR it is necessary to define very well the horizontal collaboration to reflect the current activity of the various services. Horizontal collaboration lines are important for endorsement circuits and for avoiding duplication of activities. In addition, it emerges that the current organizational chart does not mention the number of approved positions, separately for the MDRAP and MA ROP.

The function delegation is achieved through the framework agreement for the implementation of the Regional Operational Program 2014-2020, concluded between the MDRAP as Managing Authority and the Agencies for Regional Development, as intermediary bodies. The agreement establishes the powers delegated to IB ROP by MA ROP, as well as the rights and obligations of the parties arising from this delegation. The agreement was concluded for the entire period of implementation of the ROP 2014-2020, as well as for a period of 5 years from the date of the official closure of the ROP 2014-2020 in Romania.

According to the Framework Agreement, the MA delegated to the IB the following functions:

(i) programming, (ii) evaluating, selecting, contracting operations/projects, (iii) verifying purchases and reimbursement and payment applications, (iv) monitoring projects, (v) information and communication, (vi) support for potential recipients/beneficiaries.”

The functions delegated to ADRs as IBs are reflected similarly, without being identical, in their organizational structures, being reflected in the OOR, job descriptions, code of conduct, code of ethics, as well as in the procedures applied at the level of ADRs. The diversity of RDAs organization is based on conditions specific to each region and keeps as a basis the delegation agreements concluded with each of these bodies with legal, non-governmental, non-profit, public utility.

The current organizational charts reflect the main tasks assigned to the various departments and services in the structure, but these are too briefly presented in the OOR, especially in terms of document approval/endorsement circuits. The lack in the OOR of these collaboration links between directorates/services makes it difficult to identify the procedural steps and can lead to wasted time on the approval circuit, as long as there is time for certain stages.

In carrying out the tasks at national, regional and local level, there is a need for continuous coordination, which will allow the tasks to be fulfilled within the regulated deadlines. From this perspective, a periodic organizational analysis is required for several reasons, including:

- The role it plays in highlighting the higher overloading periods of the execution staff during the periods followed after launching some investment priorities;
- Identification of bottlenecks in the process of applying the procedures, through the need to carry out internal approval cycles that could be shortened;
- Identifying possible duplications of activity between services from different directions;

³¹ <https://www.mdrap.ro/userfiles/ORG%20MDRAP%20180619.pdf>

³² <https://www.mdrap.ro/userfiles/ROF-MDRAP-0318.pdf>

- Lack of staff at central level and county offices within the RDAs and involvement of all support structures (both centrally, and regionally and locally) in the activities of this programme, etc.

Analysis of indicators regarding human and financial resources

The benchmarking analysis of the Technical Assistance Strategy for 2014-2020 and 2007-2013 periods shows that the overall allocation for the functioning of the ROP implementation system has increased, in 2014-2020 compared with the previous period by about 68%, as the resources allocated to the IBs increased by about 28% and those allocated to MA ROP by about 178%. On the other hand, the overall value of the ROP 2014-2020 allocation (EU contribution) increased compared to the previous period by over 84% of the value allocated in 2007-2013, this increase, corroborated with the doubling of priority axes and investment priorities, determining a significant increase in the number of potential projects funded by the programme. Moreover, according to the data from MySMIS, at the time of drafting this report, the allocation for IBs for the period 2014-2020 has already exceeded 136 million euros, which means that resources must be found to finance their activities after 2019.

Table 3.b.1: Benchmarking analysis of the financial resources allocated to TA during the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 periods in support of the ROP implementation system

	ERDF allocation for 2014-2020 period (euro) and national contribution **
MA ROP	97,902,029
TOTAL IB ROP	123,374,564.61
total allocation IB/MA ROP 2014-2020	221,276,594.00
total allocation IB 2007-2013*	96,375,588.18
total allocation MA ROP 2007-2013	35,131,061.82
total allocation IB/MA ROP 2007-2013	131,506,650.00
increased allocation to MA ROP (%)	28.01
increased allocation to MA ROP (%)	178.68
overall increase of the TA allocation in the 2014-2020 period (%)	68.26

* including tourism IB

** after the SUERD reallocation

Source: Evaluator's processing of data from the TA Strategy 2007-2013 and 2014-2020

The benchmarking analysis of financial resources by development regions shows that the lowest increase of the allocation from TA was registered at the level of Bucharest-Ilfov IB ROP (about 17%) and at the level of SW IB there was even a decrease thereof. On the other hand, the ROP allocation (i.e. the total value of the investments foreseen at the operational program level) increased by over 93%, and in some regions it was even doubled (North West and Central regions), being in any case close to an increase of 90% in the rest of the development regions, except the SW and BI regions.

Table 3.b.2: Benchmarking analysis of the financial resources allocated to TA during the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 periods in support of the ROP implementation system compared to the increase of the ROP allocation by development regions

	ERDF TA allocation (euro) and national contribution (2014-2020)	TA ROP allocation 2007-2013	Δ TA allocation (2014-2020) - (2007-2013) in%	ERDF allocation 2007-2013 (million EUR)	Δ allocation (2014-2020) - (2007-2013)	Δ ROP allocation (2014-2020) - (2007-2013) in%
MA POR	97,902,029					
North-East Regional Development Agency (NE RDA)	20,114,830	15,728,496	27.89	608.08	1138.68	87.26
South-East Regional Development Agency (SE RDA)	16,598,936	12,769,765	29.99	493.70	966.35	95.74
South Muntenia Regional Development Agency (SM RDA)	17,581,915	13,714,246	28.20	530.21	1023.57	93.05
South West Regional Development Agency (SW RDA)	13,370,744	13,502,220	-0.97	522.01	778.41	49.12
West Regional Development Agency (W RDA)	13,147,340	9,965,236	31.93	385.27	765.40	98.67
North-West Regional Development Agency (NW RDA)	16,589,095	11,651,809	42.37	450.47	931.88	106.87
Central Regional Development Agency (CRDA)	15,971,705	10,504,939	52.04	406.13	898.71	121.29
Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Agency (BI RDA)	10,000,000	8,538,877	17.11	330.12	356.00	7.84
TOTAL IB ROP	123,374,564.61	96,375,588	28.01	3726.00	6860.00	93.14

Source: Evaluator's processing of data from the TA Strategy 2007-2013 and 2014-2020, ROP 2007-2013, ROP 2014-2020

With regard to the evolution of human resources, the comparison of the organizational charts of the IBs during the 2012-2013 and 2018-2019 periods shows that the number of positions within the IB ROP structures also increased on average by more than 58%. However, it is also worth mentioning two details:

1. The growth is not homogeneous for all ADRs, in particular Bucharest-Ilfov and South-East IB ROP have had an increase of positions below 15%, whereas at the North-East IB ROP and North-West IB ROP there is an increase by about 90% (i.e. almost double) of positions in 2019 compared to 2012.
2. There are regional differentiations in terms of vacancies as well, their number being higher in certain regions (e.g. within North-East and North-West IB ROP there were more than 25 vacancies in 2017, while vacancies were below 5 units at the level of South-East IB ROP and South-East IB ROP).

Table 3.b.3: Comparative analysis of the evolution of positions within the IB ROP during the 2012/2013 and 2018/2019 periods

	Positions in the Organizational Chart (2012/2013)	Positions in the Organizational Chart (2017)	Vacancies (2017)	Positions in the Organizational Chart (the last one in force)	Δ vacancies (2014-2020) - (2007-2013)	Δ vacancies (2014-2020)- (2007-2013) in %
MA POR		168	19	177	177	N/A
North-East Regional Development Agency (NE RDA)	55	79	33	106	51	92.73
South-East Regional Development Agency (SE RDA)	66	74	0	74	8	12.12
South Muntenia Regional Development Agency (SM RDA)	52	72	15	79	27	51.92
South West Regional Development Agency (SW RDA)	49	78	25	76	27	55.10
West Regional Development Agency (W RDA)		53	12			
North-West Regional Development Agency (NW RDA)	45	72	10	86	41	91.11
Central Regional Development Agency (CRDA)	31	34	4	46	15	48.39
Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Agency (BI RDA)	48	49	12	55	7	14.58
TOTAL	49	66.00	14	77	28	58.56

Source: Evaluator's evaluation of data from analysis of organizational charts and the "Description of the ROP implementation system submitted to the Audit Authority" document

Results from interviews with MA and IB ROP with reference to organizational analysis

Interviews with IB management staff and MA ROP technical structures suggest that the common feature of the two main actors of the ROP implementation system during the programming periods was the **stability of the management and technical staff**.

As regards the extension of the number of positions, this aspect was mentioned by most agencies (5 out of 8) and by no technical service within the MA ROP. Two other aspects worth mentioning because they were quoted by both categories of structures (at national and regional level), being success factors for the smooth functioning of the implementation system, are: the exchange of experience and continuous learning and the existence of an internal code of conduct, able to motivate the staff to assume responsibility for the duties performed in the workplace. Moreover, although most agencies (apart from North-West RDA) do not have an organizational development strategy, many of them mention that the status and working procedures actually define the organization's development strategy, being directly related to the mission that it has within the ROP implementation system and even beforehand, the strategy and mission of RDAs are actually defined from the pre-accession period once they are set up.

It is also worth mentioning that most agencies (with the exception of Bucharest-Ilfov RDA) consider **the human resources** allocated to fulfil the delegated functions as being sufficient, while the staff in the technical services MA ROP (except for SAT) consider them **insufficient**, especially since there is an overlap of the programming periods, especially in terms of the functions of verification (ex post 2007-2013, implementation 2014-2020) and programming (evaluation and contracting for the 2014-2020 period and preparation of the access conditions for the 2021-2027 period).

On the other hand, in terms of the level of coverage (quantitative and qualitative) of staff competences, both the IB and the MA ROP consider it very good, although everyone recognizes the need for continuous updating of the existing competencies and the creation of new technical competences related of the specificity of the financing programme (including by financing areas), especially when the employment of external staff is in fact limited to the needs of the technical and financial evaluation and is carried out only by the IBs, especially by signing a framework contract with a company that offers a minimum number of experts, to be mobilized on request (on average around 15 people).

Another common element of the two types of structures is the **strategy for solving the problems of overwhelming workloads**: all the structures interviewed, both at central and regional level mentioned firstly the reallocation of the internal staff, respectively the support from other departments of the organization. Although many interviewees argue that this should rather be seen as an emergency measure, so far it has been the most common solution in "crisis" situations deriving from overwhelming workloads, with one exception, namely the Payment Authorization Service, where assuming responsibility for the proper performance of the work duties presents a more complex problem, related to payments to beneficiaries, detection of irregularities, etc.

With regard to financial resources, although most of the IBs are still satisfied, at least half of them raised the problem of an appropriate future allocation, considering the depletion of the initially allocated resources, through the TA projects that have ended or will be completed until the end of 2019. In contrast, the staff in the technical services of the MA ROP did not express their particular opinions regarding the available **financial resources**, but mentioned that the technical resources (eg. computer equipment) and materials, including the available spaces are often inadequate to the needs arising from the tasks covered (whereas IBs generally consider the technical and material resources they have to be adequate).

“The space is not adequate: there is no space suitable for meetings. Also, the office equipment is not sufficient/underperforming: hundreds of sheets are printed using one printer, all files are archived on paper. More printers would be necessary. The files are transferred from one institution to another under inappropriate conditions”.

- quote from the Technical Service of the MA ROP -

Assumption 1.3: The actions generated by the operational procedures are functional to an adequate absorption of the funds, being appropriate to the context and simple to apply (adequate administrative burden for the management structures and beneficiaries)

Documentary analysis

The documentary analysis regarded the following documents related to the ROP implementation system, focusing on the mapping of selected processes according to the methodology described in the Initial Report, taking into account the related audit trails:

- General evaluation and selection procedure - General considerations CODE PO.DGPOR.SEP.I
- Operational monitoring procedure CODE PO.DGPOR.SMP.1
- Operational procedure for verification and authorization of expenditures CODE PO.DGPOR.SAP.1

The audit trails allowed to identify the levels of involvement, specifying the main activities and tasks of each actor involved.

Thus, the mapping of processes (see Annex 5.7) started from the process diagram, divided into the main stages, according to the SIPOCA methodology, with an emphasis on the predicted input and output, correlated with the main requirements (eg. following the procedures forms and meeting the submission deadlines) and the recipient of the output, according to the example given below for the process of authorization and verification of expenses:

Figure 6: Example of SIPOCA process scheme

Suppliers	Entries	Requirements	Process	Output	Requirements	Recipient	Comments
ROP beneficiaries	Signed grant agreement	Observe implementation schedule	Submit application for pre-financing / payment /	Progress reports	According to Annex 2 to the monitoring procedure	Monitoring officer	
ROP beneficiaries	Progress reports and annexes thereto	Observe reporting procedure	I. Check documents	Check lists, Notes on progress reports, IB Monitoring Reports	According to Annexes 5, 6, 14 and 16 of the monitoring procedure	Monitoring officer	
DMP	Annual schedule of on-site visits	According to Annex 10 to the monitoring procedure	II. On-site visits	On-site visit reports	According to Annexes 7, 8 and 11 to the monitoring procedure	IB/MA ROP	
ROP beneficiaries	Memorandum of request to amend the Grant Agreement	According to Annexes 18 and 19 to the monitoring procedure	III. Endorsement	Check lists, Register of additional documents and other annexes related to the conclusion of the addendum	According to Annex 22 of the monitoring procedure and other AA notes and supporting documents according to the procedure	MA ROP	
ROP beneficiaries	Final claim for reimbursement	According to the models annexed to the procedure for reimbursement of expenses	Continue project	Check list, on-site visit report, Quarterly monitoring report of IB	According to Annexes 12, 13, 15, 16 of the monitoring procedure	IB ROP	

The analysis of the procedures was used to refine the research tools, as it allowed the identification of a set of critical moments during the processes. These moments can be summarized as follows:

- Vertical communication between MA ROP, IB ROP and beneficiaries;

- Horizontal communication between the various departments involved at MA and IBP ROP level;
- The waiting times due to the decision-making process and the approval of some documents;
- The waiting times due to the request for clarification and obtaining responses from the beneficiaries;
- Uploading to MySMIS of the documents produced in each process.

Moreover, the analysis of the procedures was used by the Evaluator as the knowledge base for deepening some qualitative aspects during the in-depth interviews with the staff involved.

In addition, the analysis of the operational procedures was completed with the analysis of the following documents: Technical Assistance Strategy; Grant Agreement template within the TA; Framework Function Delegation Agreement between MA and IB ROP; TA procedure and Procedure for verifying delegated functions.

Thus, based on the Function Delegation Agreement, in conjunction with the Grant Agreement for TA contracts (through which the IB activities are financed for the effective implementation of the ROP, as described in the previous chapter), there is a set of performance indicators correlated with the tasks delegated according to the risks identified in each process. The Evaluator's comments on these indicators, following the analysis of the processes, are summarized in the following table:

Table 3.b.4: Performance indicators correlated with the main processes analysed and preliminary observations of the Evaluator

ROP implementation macroprocess	Performance indicators	Observations
Process of evaluation, selection, contracting	Maximum 3% of the contracting documents returned/rejected annually at IB level, during the pre-contractual phase, by the AMPOR as incomplete/incorrect/ineligible after the verification, during the implementation period of the project activities.	Errors in the pre-contractual stage can be generated through changes in the conditions of submission (guides) until the contract is signed or through their different interpretation by the MA/IB ROP. The probability of materializing the risk of errors can be prevented by an adequate communication at the IB/MA ROP level.
	Maximum 2% annual complaints regarding the verification, evaluation, selection and contracting process admitted by AMPOR, related to the number of financing applications evaluated annually, during the implementation of the activities of this contract, as a result of errors in the evaluation and selection process.	These two indicators partly overlap, both being linked to errors in the evaluation, selection and contracting process. The indicator could be merged / simplified
	No resumption of any stage of verification / evaluation / contracting of the projects submitted within a project call, following the verification of the delegated tasks during the	

ROP implementation macroprocess	Performance indicators	Observations
	<p>selection and contracting evaluation phase as a result of finding errors in the selection and contracting evaluation process of calls for projects.</p> <p>Maximum 6 months as the average duration of the stages of the evaluation, selection and contracting process, which, according to the framework function delegation agreement for the ROP 2014-2020, is carried out at the IB level, calculated as the average of the duration for the projects for which the IBs complete the specific procedural stages within a calendar year.</p>	
Monitoring process	Maximum 7% addenda to the financing contracts, concluded with the beneficiaries, returned by MA ROP to the IB, as incomplete / incorrect as a result of their verification, during the implementation period of the project activities.	The pre-contracting process is the responsibility of the IB. The contracting process at the MA ROP level, therefore the total duration of the process until contracting, cannot be considered at the IB level.
Public procurement verification process	Maximum 2% error rate calculated at the percentage discount value and maximum 10% error rate calculated at the number of public procurement procedures verified.	The additional documents are signed at MA ROP level. The verification of their correctness is done before the documents are signed and not after their entry into force.
Cost verification process	<p>Maximum 10% claims for reimbursement from beneficiaries, processed by the IB in the projects financed by the ROP and returned by the MA ROP, during the implementation period of the project activities, as not in compliance with the relevant procedures of the MA ROP.</p> <p>Minimum x Euro in year x, as total eligible ERDF amounts, related to the reimbursement requests sent by the IB up to November 15 of each year and authorized by MA ROP</p>	<p>The amounts of the claims for reimbursement submitted by the IB annually depend on the degree of the actual progress in the project implementation by the beneficiaries.</p> <p>Also, the authorization process itself at the MA ROP level affects the total amount of the expenses related to the claims for reimbursement that are calculated for this indicator.</p>
All processes	Maximum 10 notifications per year transmitted via e-mail by MA ROP to IB for incorrect entry/validation or non-entry of data in MySMIS/SMIS2014+.	MySMIS functionality is an essential external factor that can lead to the risk of errors, invalidations, incomplete data.

Source: Evaluator's processing

According to the AT Monitoring Procedure, the technical services within the MA ROP, namely SECP, SMP and SAP, provide the information regarding the performance indicators, each

according to their specific tasks, using the “Memorandum for requesting information on performance indicators monitoring” form attached to the TA procedure.

Moreover, according to the Procedure for verifying the delegated functions, the verification of attributions in terms of observance of contractual provisions and assumption by the IB is performed periodically, depending on the problems identified by quantifying the performance indicators provided by the specialized departments within the MA ROP.

Results from interviews with MA and IB ROP

The interviews conducted with the technical and management staff within the IB / MA ROP concerned both general aspects of the revision of the procedures compared to the previous period, as well as specific aspects related to the performance indicators and the problems encountered in the implementation of ROP processes during the current period.

The opinions of the interviewed staff with regard to the extent to which the **procedures were simplified** compared to the previous period are varied: some argue that they have been simplified, and others that they have become more difficult, although various interviewees consider that there were simplification measures upon the submission of projects (especially after the first calls for project proposals, by eliminating the conditionalities related to launching public procurement procedures), however, the administrative burdens of beneficiaries during the implementation phase cannot be considered reduced compared to the previous period, especially as regards the public procurement procedures (except for the investments made by the private beneficiaries) and the documents to be submitted upon claiming the reimbursement of expenses. In this regard, the staff of MA ROP mention that

“Any simplification raises the degree of risk: simplification cannot go very far, because the requirements of the Commission and the Audit Authority regarding the checks (which does not allow a great simplification) must be covered”

- MA RO quote -

With regard to introduction of the **SMIS system**: **This did not represent a major simplification for beneficiaries**, especially during the implementation phase: the beneficiaries did not know properly the functioning of the computer system, and the intermediary bodies could not specifically help them due to technical aspects related to the structure of the system on interfaces not communicating with each other, although in general all interviewees consider that **the support to the beneficiaries has increased** quite a lot in the 2014-2020 period compared to the previous period, and is offered even at the level of MA ROP (even though the help desk function is delegated to IBs), where the beneficiaries sometimes go directly for clarifications, information and all kinds of questions related to the processes of evaluation, contracting, monitoring and reimbursement of expenses.

Opinions are also somewhat different in terms of the **performance indicators** established for verifying the performance of delegated functions: some consider them appropriate; others consider that their revision or at least the revision of the related target values would be necessary.

“The indicator on reaching the absorption target is related to aspects that are not necessarily connected to the management mode: for example, there are delays in procurement, beneficiaries do not have signed works contracts: there are problems in the costs of the works contracts and there are no project verifiers any more, or tenders are launched and no one shows up. In addition, FSs are submitted and PTs must be prepared afterwards: if they do not have a funding source, they cannot prepare the technical documentation and only some richer municipalities can prepare the technical documentation.”

- IB ROP quote -

“The 9 indicators are derived from the risks related to the activities carried out by IB ROP. The associated risk has been transformed into an indicator. Annual targets can be the subject of a discussion.”

- MA ROP quote -

The main problems identified in the analysed processes refer to the following aspects, ordered by process:

A. Submission and evaluation

- Delays in launching calls due to delay in approval of ROP;
- Overloading during the submission and evaluation period (eg. launching several calls at the same time), namely overlapping the contracting procedures, launching calls, appeals and points of view with very tight deadlines;
- Delays in providing a response to clarifications from beneficiaries.

B. Contracting

- Delays in verifying the documents of beneficiaries by the MA ROP;
- Including unfinished projects and prioritizing them;
- Over-contracting, which cannot be supported by the existing resources at MA ROP level.

C. Monitoring and implementation

- Rigidity of contractual provisions, namely cumbersome modification procedures (the necessity of an addendum for aspects that could be solved by notifications and by the IB);
- Delays in obtaining clarifications on claims for reimbursement;
- Organizing early field visits at a limited level of project progress;
- The implementation time is not appropriate compared to the time required to prepare the documentation and the implementation of projects;
- Excessive red tape (uploading to the SMIS system doubled by keeping paper documents; checks by more than 4 eyes, eg. for public procurement);
- Submitting the claim for reimbursement before verifying public procurement;
- Delays in verifying the final claim for reimbursement (eg. due to the complexity of the types of expenses);
- Lack of functionality of the SMIS system (delays in commissioning, mathematical errors, lack of functioning of the implementation mode);
- Lack of intermediate indicators for projects, which implies difficulties in monitoring performance indicators at programme level;
- Risk of termination of financing contracts in case of non-fulfilment of the conditionalities.

The main problems of the ROP implementation system, from the perspective of its overall efficiency, can be summarized as follows: there are delays in contracting projects, delays in implementation and, finally, delays in the absorption of the available funds. The main causes of these problems can be identified in the following categories: 1. Human resources; 2. Organizational structure (at all levels, from the coordination system, to the beneficiary, passing through the MA/IB ROP); 3. External factors; 4. Financial resources; 5. Time resources; 6. Processes; 7 Logistic and technical resources.

The summary of the causes identified in the discussions with the MA/IB POR staff is presented in the Fishbone Diagram below.



Among the measures taken or proposed by the technical departments of the MA/IB ROP for solving the identified problems, the following can be listed:

- More punctual monitoring of the fulfilment of ex ante conditionalities;
- Improving the programming and strategic planning phase, through greater and earlier involvement of local partners and an increased role in the strategic selection of projects of regional interest from regional structures;
- Continuously respecting and updating the submission schedule for calls of project proposals;
- Simplifying the provisions in guides and grant applications that add tasks without value in addition to the programme objectives;
- Reviewing national legislation and coordination at national level in order to prevent legislative changes that may affect ROP investments;
- Ensuring MySMIS functionality, in relation to the ROP implementation procedures;
- Providing financial resources for the performance of the functions of Intermediate Bodies;
- Continuing efforts to strengthen the support function for beneficiaries.

The detailed recommendations, formulated by the Evaluator based on the reformulation of the problems and their causes, within the Focus Group organized in June 2019, correlated with the conclusions drawn from the analysis, can be found in the chapter dedicated to the conclusions and recommendations, in the table on process analysis.

Results from interviews with beneficiaries

Although in general the collaboration with the responsible institutions (especially at ADR level) is considered very good, the **interviewed ROP beneficiaries** (both public and private) highlighted the following aspects on the difficulties to relate to the ROP implementation system:

- Changing the rules on the way due to legislative changes (public procurement) but also changing the provisions of the financing guides;
- The complexity of the applicant's guides;
- Cumbersome red tape;
- Decisions at central level not adapted to the needs of the territory (eg. some criteria for access are very difficult to reach and unclear).

Among the factors that contributed to the success of the project during the submission and evaluation phase, the beneficiaries assigned the highest priority level to:

- Hiring an external consultant to prepare an application of adequate quality
- Investment integration within a local / integrated development strategy, detailing the methodology of project prioritization
- A duration of the selection and contracting processes as short as possible

“The consultant is very important in drafting the projects, but they must be supported in the drafting process by the applicant, in order not to reach the situation where, upon contracting, the beneficiaries cannot fulfil the obligations assumed in the grant application. There are cases where certain responsibilities are assumed although they are not feasible.”

“It is important for the project to be included in a local / integrated strategy because, when there are several projects, the objectives are easier to achieve and there is continuity. The projects that are connected to each other are much more useful to the community than the isolated ones.”

The time between selection and contracting is far too long. Such a period may lead to the inability to complete the project because some conditions existing at the time of drafting are no longer valid during implementation.”

- Quote from ROP beneficiaries -

During the implementation phase:

- Sufficient resources for project implementation and solving unforeseen problems (5% for unforeseen expenses is considered too low)
- Complementarity with other public or private investments
- External support for project management (public beneficiary);
- Reimbursement of expenses according to the deadlines set to meet the needs related to ensuring the project cash flow

As support factors in all phases, the beneficiaries referred to:

- Support from other entities at national level
- Administrative simplification
- Support offered by RDA (especially public beneficiary)

Focus Group with the main actors of the ROP 2014-2020 implementation system

The issues and causes mentioned in the interviews with each IB ROP and various technical services within the MA ROP were synthetically presented, discussed in plenary, validated and reviewed together with representatives of four regional development agencies and two representatives of the ROP technical services, covering all the main processes targeted by the analysis.

The related problems and causes were thus refined for each analysed process, including the programming and strategic planning stage, which was highlighted as essential to an efficient implementation, based on local needs and taking on of the responsibilities of all the actors involved, as well as (not least) for starting and, finally, timely implementing the programme:

Table 3.b.5: Analysis of the problems identified in the strategic planning and programming phase

Problems	Causes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Delays in ROP approval 2. The large number of axes and specific objectives of the ROP 2014-2020 3. Low participation in partnership processes and working groups for programming (in certain territories and depending on the target group, eg. low participation in the business environment) 4. Low correlation with the needs and the territorial context (in some cases, they are not necessarily reflected in the project selection criteria) 5. Delayed elaboration of sectoral strategies at national level (e.g. education, health, social, etc.) which brought to delayed launch of certain calls 6. Rigidity of financing segmentation (to check ex ante conditionalities), e.g. allocation imposed by schools / kindergartens / universities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Negotiations with the European Commission (there were complex negotiations also in terms of budget) 2. Large and diverse needs, generous budget, existence of the 11 thematic objectives 3. Not covering travel costs during consultations - lack of trust / information / involvement / uncertainty, modification, completion of financing criteria 4-5 The grace period for the fulfilment of the conditionality led to the delayed elaboration of sectoral strategies. 6. Ex ante conditionality at national level, not correlated with local needs

Table 3.b.6: Analysis of the problems identified during the submission, selection and contracting phase

Problems	Causes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Very large number of calls launched 2. Overlapped call launches for the same categories of beneficiaries 3. Overloading in the evaluation and selection phase of projects 4. Insufficient time for project preparation 5. Changing the conditions in the guides while the calls are open 6. The non-unitary approach of the applicant's guides (e.g. activities, beneficiaries, project indicators, criteria related to the ROP objectives) 7. Delay in contracting projects 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1-4. The complexity/excessive fragmentation of the axes financed from the ROP (including the low values of interventions) 5. The impossibility of meeting certain conditions by potential beneficiaries (e.g. proof of certification of the public domain by the GD, submission of notices during the implementation period and not upon submission) 6. Waiver of the Implementation Framework Document 7. Overwhelming workload at the MA/IB ROP level - requests for clarification / points of view / reports / challenges / applicant's guides / prioritizing in the process of evaluation, selection and contracting of unfinished calls for projects to avoid decommitment during the year 2018

Table 3.b.7: Analysis of the problems identified in the implementation and monitoring phase

Problems	Causes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Delays in implementation due to the lack of PT, which led to a low absorption rate 2. Objective difficulties in meeting contractual conditions (which can lead to termination of grant contracts) 3. The appearance of the need to extend the duration of the project implementation period 4. Overloading of tasks for MA/IB ROP staff in the verification phase of claims for reimbursement/payment, including procurement procedures related to expenses for introducing the claims for reimbursement/payment in SMIS by the IB and not by the beneficiary 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Submission at FS level of grant applications/change of legislation in the field of public procurement (including the change of functions related to ex ante verification of the award documentation, according to GEO 114/2018) 2.1 Rigidity of contractual conditions 2.2 Legislative changes 2.3 Problems related to public procurement procedures 3.1 Delays in contracting 3.2 Delays in project implementation 4.1 Partial functionality of the "implementation" module of the SMIS system 4.2 Conditioning beneficiaries by GEO 40/2015 to include in claims for reimbursement (except for the first CR) the expenses incurred within 3 months from the date of payment 4.3 High administrative burdens related to the verification of expenses by IB/MA ROP and justification of expenses by the beneficiaries

Also, the participants in the focus group discussed the problems we defined as "transversal" and validated the analysis of cases, as follows:

Table 3.b.8: Analysis of cross-cutting problems

Problems	Causes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overwhelming workload for staff during peak periods 2. Existence of legislative provisions in the fields of implementation of the ROP 2014-2020 that may make it difficult or even block the stages of submission and implementation of ROP projects 3. Use of a common contracting model for all POs 4. Partial functioning of the SMIS system that generated the doubling of activity upon implementation 5. The structure and functions of the SMIS system partly correspond to the specificity of the ROP (considering that this is actually an adaptation for the specificity of OP HC) 6. Insufficient financial resources to cover the operational needs of the IB ROP (2020-2022 period) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Subdimensioning of staff structures, especially at MA ROP level (at IB level, there is greater flexibility to meet peak periods) - Overlapping of various programming periods / failure to comply with the initial planning 1.2 The MA ROP support structures have only an advisory role (e.g. legal, purchases) 2. Lack of ex ante assessment of regulation impact 3. Coordination of the Partnership Agreement without adaptation to the specificity of the OP 4-5. Delays in the development of the SMIS system 6.1 Initial allocation insufficient to cover the delegated functions correlated with the very large number of calls, respectively projects evaluated and implemented 6.2 Loss of resources due to corrections applied as a result of non-performance indicators

Based on the problems and causes identified, discussed and validated with the actors of the system, the Evaluator prepared the plan to improve the ROP system, annexed to this Report.

The recommendations in Chapter 3 take over these recommendations, in addition to those related to the decentralization processes and the increase of the administrative capacity at regional and local level.

EQ 2. What is the impact of the decentralization process on the regional and local institutional structures involved in the implementation of the ROP?

Assumption 2.1: The ROP contributes to the institutional and skills development from the perspective of regional decentralization, including by setting strategic objectives to exploit the potential in several priority sectors and regional identity, by collaborating with the relevant actors in the territory

For the analysis of the data related to Assumption 2.1, reference is made to the analysis of the data regarding the evolution of human, financial and logistical resources at the ROP level, which is found under Assumption 1.2.

Assumption 2.2: ROP contributes to the increase of the functionality of decision-makers at local (TAUs) and community (CLLD, LAGs) level.

Documentary analysis

As a result of the framework Law on decentralization (Law no. 195/2006, as amended and supplemented, repealed by the Public Administration Code, approved in June 2019), in recent years the process of decentralizing public policy competences from the central to the local level in Romania has received numerous acceleration impulses through:

- Adoption of the Strategy for the consolidation of the public administration 2014-2020 (GD no. 909/2014)
- Establishment of the National Committee for the coordination of the implementation of the Public administration consolidation strategy 2014-2020
- Approval of the General Decentralization Strategy, representing a framework document that sets out the strategic directions of the Government regarding the continuation of the decentralization process.

In particular, the Strategy adopted in 2017 aims to analyse the opportunity of the transfer of competences from the level of central public administration to the level of local public administration authorities for the following areas: agriculture (including fisheries and aquaculture), culture, tourism, environment, water and forests, health, education (extracurricular activities), youth and sports.

The action plan annexed to the Strategy was to achieve the following objectives, results and related actions:

- Specific objective 1 Carrying out the transfer of competences from central to local level, which will allow to strengthen the application of the subsidiarity principle
Result: Transfer of competences in a coherent legislative framework and in an operational and stable institutional framework
A1. Completion of the steps regarding the decentralization process
A2. Transfer of competences from central public administration authorities to local public administration authorities, as well as of the heritage related to decentralized competences, through sectoral decentralization laws
- Specific objective 2 Streamlining the exercise of decentralized competences for providing quality public services Result: Decentralized public services provided in an efficient and effective way based on cost and quality standards
A1. Developing or, as appropriate, updating cost and quality standards in the provision of decentralized public services
A2. Development/consolidation of the methodological coordination, monitoring and control mechanisms regarding the way of exercising the decentralized competences at local level
A3. Strengthening the capacity of local public administration authorities for the efficient exercise of decentralized powers.

However, after recognizing the delays in achieving the objectives of the National Decentralization Strategy, in June 2019 the Government of Romania adopted a Memorandum entitled "Measures for the continuation of the decentralization process". According to the analysis of progress in the decentralization process, in June 2019 the situation was as follows:

- a) The updated inventory of the goods subject to the transfer was made;
- b) **The impact analyses regarding the opportunity of competence decentralization were partially carried out:** out of the eight ministries involved in the decentralization process (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Culture and National Identity, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Water and Forests, Ministry of Health, Ministry of National Education and Ministry of Youth and Sport), five ministries have completed the impact analyses regarding the opportunity of decentralization of competences (respectively, the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Water and Forestry, Ministry of National Education and Ministry of Youth and Sport and Ministry of Culture and National Identity).

c) The conclusions of the impact analysis were partially fulfilled, and were approved by the Government in the fields of youth and sports and tourism, waters and forests, while the analyses elaborated by the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Culture and National Identity were under inter-ministerial approval at the time of drafting this report.

d) **The elaboration of the sectoral draft laws for decentralization was partially carried out**, and the two draft sectoral laws that propose the decentralization of competences from the central level to the county level for the youth and sports fields, as well as tourism, were prepared and placed under the process of decision transparency.

In parallel, taking into account the objectives of the Strategy and the national legislation in the field of decentralization, as line ministry, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration (MDRAP), through the General Directorate for Public Administration, initiated the process of elaborating/updating quality standards and cost standards for decentralized public services provided to citizens. This approach was achieved through the project called “Strengthening the framework for increasing the quality of public services and for supporting local development”, SIPOCA 9, co-financed under the Operational Programme Administrative Capacity 2014 - 2020. Within this project, proposals for quality and cost standards for the following areas of decentralized public services will be prepared:

a) Proposals of quality standards for: health, pre-university education, social assistance, culture, youth and sports, community services of public utilities, public order, public safety and population registration, public and private domain administration of territorial-administrative units.

b) Proposals for cost standards for: health, pre-university education, social assistance, culture, youth and sports.

Other three results of this project, extremely relevant in the context of public administration reform in the direction of administrative decentralization are:

- Analysis of the legislative and institutional framework for the provision of public services at the level of public administration,
- The methodology for monitoring and evaluating the administrative capacity of Administrative Territorial Units (pursuant to Article 15-30 of the Methodological Norms for the implementation of the Framework Law on decentralization) and
- Online platform, representing the system for monitoring and evaluating the quality and cost standards and the administrative capacity of the administrative-territorial units.

The methodology aims to **organize and standardize the activities of evaluation and monitoring of the administrative capacity of the administrative-territorial units** by making available to the central public authorities an algorithm for establishing, collecting, calculating, analysing and publishing a set of performance indicators and related input data, as well as the estimation of the resources required for implementation. Based on the methodology, the project has developed a platform that is in the pilot phase and that will allow the collection of data at a systematic level, in order to monitor and evaluate the annual performance of LPA in terms of administrative capacity and decentralization processes.

Results from interviews with actors from the territory: ROP's contribution to decentralization processes and capacity building of local actors

With regard to the contribution of the ROP to the processes of decentralization and capacity building of the local actors and partners

“The integrated approach undoubtedly contributes to increasing the administrative capacity of LPA to implement projects across multiple sectors and in partnership”.

- MDRAP quote -

However, the points of view among most of the structures interviewed, including ADRs, were that it was too early for the exact assessment of the size of this contribution, due to the beginning stage of the implementation of the mechanisms of integrated territorial development, and the fact that these mechanisms are effectively promoted only in certain areas of the national territory under special conditions (e.g. Danube Delta area, areas where marginalized communities live). In this regard, there was a view from an ADR that the ITI mechanism could be extended to areas where it is not currently implemented, because by its nature it could strengthen the strategic vision on planning of interventions and the raising of funds at regional level.

The point of view of the cluster organization interviewed regarding the participatory processes in the preparation of the local development strategies is that the participation of the cluster members was active and inputs were provided to define the strategic directions, but these inputs were not fully found in the final version of the strategy. The causes of this gap are explained as follows by the statements of interviewees:

“We consider that in the period between the establishment of the guidelines and the elaboration of strategies, the essence of debates had been lost. One of the factors leading to these losses is the political one, namely the successive changes and the different visions of those in decision-making positions”.

Taking into account this experience, the representatives of the Cluster believe that their role in the regional development should be strengthened by a more integrated structuring of activities and an allocation of the resources appropriate to the needs of participation, which reach various fields of interventions on the value chain, from production to research-innovation and up to education / training.

As for the beneficiaries of the ROP, the SMEs interviewed consider that the ROP financing has added value and the investment would not have been achieved without it. In addition, the process of accessing European funds has contributed to the development of internal human resources, both by employing the technical staff responsible for project management and by continuously training the technical staff, in order to adapt their technical competences to the new technologies.

At the level of the beneficiary municipalities under the ROP (growth pole), the representative interviewed stresses that the IUDS was prepared mainly with the support of an external consultant, but also the internal team had a contribution through the specialized directions (chief architect, cadastre, etc.). Moreover, the planning collaboration was extended to functional areas near the city, respectively to the local public administrations in the metropolitan area. With regard to partnership processes extended to other public and private actors in the territory, the representatives of the Municipality argue that they were wide and that the views were integrated in the final strategic document, and in the implementation phase the local partners are consulted every two months for monitoring the progress of the projects included in the Integrated Urban Development Plan (not only the ROP and not only the Local Council, as beneficiary interviewed). The beneficiary considers that they would have made the investments without the ROP contribution, although they would not have financed them only from the local budget but also from other external sources (other donors, other programmes managed by the European Commission).

The point of view of a representative of the County Council is first of all that the ROP represents the main source of funding for the county administration, and the investments would have been made at a much lower level or would not have been made at all without the ROP. Moreover, following the submission and implementation of ROP projects, the County Council created a

structure dedicated to strategic planning/project management, contracted consulting services, trained internal staff and purchased computer equipment and archiving systems. Also, ROP investments will contribute to improving the programming, quality and delivery of county/regional public services, tourism, cultural and environmental heritage, contributing, more generally, to increasing opportunities for members of local communities.

“There are positive experiences regarding the strategic programming mode, the improvement of the level of professional training of the staff involved in the process of implementing the European funds, of correcting the numerous gaps in the interinstitutional communication (especially in the process of obtaining opinions/authorizations) or establishing contacts at regional and national level that may prove beneficial in the context of a continuity in the process of attracting non-reimbursable funds.”

- quote of the County Council -

Other issues, related to the increase of decentralization capacities and the role of local partners in the integrated interventions will be analysed through the case studies selected within the integrated development mechanisms described below.

Complementarity analysis

The complementarity analysis at programme level can be carried out starting from the contribution of the interventions to reaching the thematic objectives assumed in the ROP 2014-2020.

This complementarity is highly relevant both for the integrated, multi-sectoral approach of the ROP and for aspects related to facilitating the processes of sectoral decentralization of policies at local level.

In order to have an overview of complementarities at programme and FESI system level, we have prepared a unitary table that includes all the thematic objectives and the related programmes.

In addition to the programmes funded from European funds, there is a strong complementarity with other government programmes that support infrastructure investments, cadastre and business environment development, according to national law, including: National Programme for Local Development, National Programme for systematic registration in the cadastre, National Programme for investments in tourism, State aid schemes and investments of regional interest, etc.

The complementarity of investments in integrated ROP interventions was deepened in the case studies and the complementarity with other interventions related to administrative capacity and the promotion of decentralization were looked at in greater depth within the Expert Panel.

All integrated territorial initiatives are correlated with development strategies, sectoral programmes and other initiatives implemented by other actors at local level. In particular, at the level of the ITI Danube Delta, this complementarity arises from the way the integrated mechanism is thought, which provides for the correlation of the funding sources from various Operational Programmes, including their monitoring and coordination in the implementation phase through the IDA ITI structure. Also, integrated urban development is a mechanism of territorial development integrated vertically (especially county/local, municipal level) and horizontally, sectorally, but on a smaller territorial scale than the ITI mechanism. Both the ITI mechanism and the integrated urban development focus on the collaboration at the level of the local public administrations, thus contributing to the strengthening of the partner processes and the degree of responsibility in achieving common development goals. Finally, the CLLD mechanism shifts the focus of complementarity to another level of governance, which implies a more consistent participation of private, non-governmental actors, thus promoting the assumption of strategic planning responsibility to a new level of public/private collaboration and joint governance.

Table 3.b.9: Matrix analysis: complementarity between the operational programmes 2014-2020

Thematic Objective	Axes under ROP 2014-2020	OPHC 2014-2020	OPLI 2014-2020	OPRD 2014-2020	OPF 2014-2020	OPC 2014-2020	OPAC 2014-2020	OPTA 2014-2020	Horizon 2020/ COSME/LIFE	FEAD
TO 1 - Strengthening research, technological development and innovation.	PA 1	X (PA 6)				X			X	
TO 3 - Improving the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, the agricultural sector and the fisheries and aquaculture sector.	PA 2	X (PA 3)		X	X	X (PA 1 and 2)			X	
TO 4 - Supporting the transition to a low carbon economy in all sectors	PA 3 PA 4	X (PA 3)	X							
TO 6 - Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency	PA 5 PA 4		X	X		X ³³				
TO 7 - Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures	PA 6		X	X						
TO 8 - Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility	PA 7	X		X	X	X				
TO 9 - Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination.	PA 8 PA 9 PA 4	X (PA 3 and 4)		X		X ³⁴	X			X
TO 10 - Investing in education and training for skills and lifelong learning	PA 10 PA 4			X						
TO 11 - Enhancing the capability of public authorities and efficient public administration	PA 11 PA 12			X			X	X		

Source: Evaluator's processing based on the ROP 2014-2020 analysis

³³ Digitalization of immovable items; innovation related to the architecture and design of revitalized urban spaces.

³⁴ E-health and e-inclusion.

Results of the Expert Panel

The panel of experts was held on July 24, 2019. The participants included representatives from the following institutions working in the areas of developing the administrative capacity of public administrations, as well as in the fields of formulation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies at central and local government level, including the processes of decentralizing the public policy function at local level, respectively: The General Secretariat of the Government; Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, DG Public Administration; Ministry of European Funds, Managing Authority for the Operational Programme (OP) Human Capital, and a representative of the Cabinet of the Minister; Managing Authority for OP Administrative Capacity; Managing Authority for OP Technical Assistance. The following conclusions were drawn from the discussions of the expert panel:

- In order to develop the administrative capacity of the beneficiaries of the funds from the Regional Operational Programme, it was emphasized that it was necessary to **train through topics covering concrete procedural aspects** and to provide practical examples for fulfilling in good conditions the responsibilities incumbent on potential beneficiaries and actual beneficiaries, including in the context of processes of administrative decentralization and planning of related local resources.
- In order to support the decentralization processes that may fall into regional and / or local competence, it is necessary to maintain a methodological orientation from the line ministries. In this sense, the process of administrative decentralization is under analysis through the impact studies that will evaluate the situation of the delegation of public policy functions from national to regional and local level, in compliance with national law. Among the issues under review and regulation the need to establish quality and cost standards for public services was mentioned, which will facilitate the delegation process of implementing sectoral policies at local level.
- The decentralized processes depend on resources, on the state budget, and the system of implementation of European funds represents an opportunity by **finding those additional financial resources**, which are necessary, and the ROP contributes and can continue to do so to increase these resources to fulfil the responsibilities pertaining to administrative decentralization through delegated powers, in accordance with Regulation 1303. This mechanism could allow the reimbursement from the ERDF and the ESF of some expenses generated by the process of delegation of public policy functions, related for example to the adoption of certain quality and cost standards for public services. Such an opportunity could be valid for the 2021-2027 programming period and only if the effort of standardization and methodological orientation in the sectors defined by law is continued.
- **The complementarity between the ROP/POHC interventions and the interventions within the OPAC, OPTA and other national programmes** is an aspect that can successfully contribute to the processes of administrative decentralization and the improvement of the administrative capacity for the local public administrations benefiting from the ROP. One such example is MA POHC, which will soon launch a call for proposals for projects addressed to LPA. This call is intended to support the preparation of strategic planning documents at local level for the next programming period. Another example is “strengthening the framework for increasing the quality of public services and for supporting local development”, SIPOCA 9, initiative funded by OPAC and promoted by the MDRAP, through the DG Public Administration, meant to support decentralization

processes. Through this project, an online platform (currently in the pilot phase) was developed, representing the system for monitoring and evaluating the quality and cost standards and the administrative capacity of the administrative-territorial units. This way, an algorithm for establishing, collecting, calculating, analysing and publishing a set of performance indicators and related input data, as well as estimating the resources needed to implement decentralization processes, is made available to central public authorities. The tools developed within the project will facilitate the collection of data at a systematic level, in order to monitor and evaluate the annual performance of LPA in terms of administrative capacity and decentralization processes.

- The **potential of the integrated territorial mechanisms**, the involvement of the actors in the territory and the association between the local public administrations (especially the smaller ones) were mentioned, in order to strengthen their capacity to formulate and deliver public policies and services at local level. The experience of rural LAGs, which have become functional structures, equipped with adequate human and financial resources thanks to the constant allocation of funds provided through PNDR, was mentioned as good practice. The experience of the rural LAG can be used as an example for the consolidation of the urban LAG structures, which would allow to extend the scope of the integrated interventions in the urban environment. In this regard, a measure that could strengthen the role of LAGs and at the same time reduce administrative burdens could be to include Local Development Strategies in broader, integrated development strategies at the cities and municipalities level; this would mean a social component in these strategies, specifically targeting marginalized communities, which would allow an integrated approach of CLLD in local planning. As a result of this kind of approach, LAGs would become a permanence in the context of the strategic planning of a locality.

Case Study 1. The ITI Danube Delta mechanism

The strategy for the integrated development of the Danube Delta and the surrounding areas was developed in 2013, through technical assistance services contracted by the Government of Romania (Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, MDRAP) signed with the World Bank.

In order to implement the Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) mechanism within the competence of the administrative-territorial units included in the Strategy for the Sustainable Development of the Danube Delta, the Association for Inter-Community Development - ITI Danube Delta, a legal person of private law and of public utility, was established, according to the provisions of the Law of the local public administration no. 215/2001, republished, as subsequently amended and supplemented, and of the Government Ordinance no. 26/2000 on associations and foundations, as subsequently amended and supplemented. The decision-making bodies within IDA ITI are the General Assembly and the Board of Directors.

IDA ITI Danube Delta represents the agreement of the 38 TAUs in the field of integrated strategy to jointly organize, regulate, finance, monitor and coordinate the operational plans for the implementation of the strategy, as well as to jointly carry out public investment projects of area or regional interest.

According to the Integrated Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Danube Delta, the ROP will finance the ITI interventions in the following priority axes:

- Priority Axis 2. Improving the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises
- Priority Axis 3. Supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy
- Priority Axis 5. Improving the urban area and preserving, protecting and sustainably capitalizing
- the cultural heritage

- Priority Axis 6. Improvement of regionally important infrastructure
- Priority Axis 7. Diversification of local economies through the sustainable development of tourism
- Priority Axis 8. Development of health and social infrastructure
- Priority Axis 10. Improvement of the educational infrastructure

In practice, IDA ITI coordinates locally the implementation of the strategy, supports the Managing Authorities in the implementation of the ITI mechanism, monitors the implementation of future projects within the ITI mechanism, ensures the visibility of the projects and the permanent public information on their implementation.

To this end, IDA ITI is carrying out a project co-financed by the OP TA 2014-2020, entitled “Technical assistance for supporting actions that contribute to achieving the strategic objectives within the Integrated Strategy for the Sustainable Development of the Danube Delta (ISSD DD)” in the amount of about 3.6 million euros, for the 2019-2023 period. The current project came to continue another project, also financed from the OP TA, for the 2016-2018 period, worth about 1.6 million euros.

The centralization of the projects under implementation at the level of the ITI Danube Delta mechanism shows that in June 2019 ROP concentrated 56% of the value of the projects under implementation within the ITI mechanism (the rest being covered by the NRDP 2014-2020), representing 179 projects (about 24% of the total) totalling about 160.5 million euros.

The results of the interview with the members of the IDA ITI suggest that the role played by the IDA ITI Danube Delta structure added value to the Danube Delta ITI mechanism through the technical assistance provided by the organization’s expertise in planning and implementing the interventions. At the same time, the IDA ITI members interviewed consider that both IDA ITI and CC IDA ITI include the **relevant and representative organizations** for the territory covered by the ITI mechanism and the type of its interventions, and consulting the communities in the territory and the decision-making process for strategic planning and choice of priority interventions was adequate and punctual.

The decision-making process within the partnership with public and private actors in the territory was appropriate from the perspective of obtaining the development results, with an important role also plaid by thematic sub-committees established within the Advisory Committee.

- Quote from the members of IDA ITI -

However, there is still room for improvement in the decision-making process, especially in the initial stages of defining the strategy, where the role of CCI IDA ITI members could be strengthened.

With regard to the contribution of the ROP experience and, in general, the access to European funds, in the process of strengthening the capacities of the actors in the territory, the experience of the members of the IDA ITI is a positive one, considering that the **experience from 2014-2020 will directly contribute to both future strategic planning regarding the sustainable development of the reference territories**, as well as the increase in the quality of the public services offered (for example, the modernization of the public transport services at county level or the saving of the historical heritage at national level and its enhancement from a tourist point of view) to the local population, in addition to improving inter-institutional communication and collaboration at the level of the various institutions involved with different roles in the management of the European funds system and other relevant issues at national level (e.g. legislation, opinions) from the perspective of continuity in the process of fundraising.

“Among the experiences learned, far more effective and realistic planning of priorities assumed by local communities as well as a more professional strategic vision at the level of central public authorities must be prioritized so as to eliminate major vulnerabilities resulting from non-unitary legislative practices, commitments changed over time, strategic documents prepared late and with errors that modify the rules of the game in the course of obtaining the financing. In particular, there are positive experiences regarding the strategic programming mode, the improvement of the level of professional training of the staff involved in the process of implementing the European funds, of correcting the numerous gaps in the interinstitutional communication (especially in the process of obtaining opinions/authorizations) or establishing contacts at regional and national level that may prove beneficial in the context of a continuity in the process of attracting non-reimbursable funds.”

- Quote from the members of IDA ITI -

Case Study 2. Integrated urban development interventions

The city of Cluj-Napoca has a tradition of very well-structured strategic planning ever since the 2007-2013 period, while the planning for the 2014-2020 period is based on the continuation of the previous approach, by highlighting the concept of Growth Pole and polycentric development, based on a strong integration of the development guidelines of the entire metropolitan functional area near Cluj-Napoca Municipality.

Thus, the Integrated Strategy for Urban Development (ISUD) for Cluj Napoca is based on a series of documents drawn up before July 20, 2017 (the date of notification of the IDUS and Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan admissibility for financing from the ROP) and is strongly correlated with the experience from the previous programming period, many projects being the continuation of those implemented in the Integrated Urban Development Plan 2007-2013.

In accordance with the provisions of EU Regulation no. 1301/2013 and EU Regulation no. 1303/2013 and taking into account the Framework Document for the implementation of sustainable urban development at the Priority Axis level of the ROP 2014-2020, within the Municipality of Cluj-Napoca in 2017, the Urban Authority was established, by Decision of the Local Council no. 165/2017.

The regulation stipulates that the Urban Authorities must at least be responsible for the tasks related to the selection of operations (projects). Thus, the Urban Authority has been designated to fulfil the role of intermediary body, delegated by the ROP Managing Authority under Article 125 of Regulation (EU) no. 1303/2013, being included in the management and control system of the European structural and investment funds (ESI Funds).

The choice of Cluj-Napoca Municipality for conducting the case study derives from the fact that Cluj-Napoca Municipality has the highest number of financing applications submitted within PA 4 (33 financing applications, equal to Oradea Municipality) and is the second Municipality from the North-West region in terms of the number of projects under implementation (7 projects in progress) according to the data take from SMIS as of 02/04/2019. Moreover, the election of the City of Cluj-Napoca, as a growth pole, allowed the analysis of the degree of continuity between the polycentric approach adopted in the 2007-2013 period and the approach of the 2014-2020 period, more exactly the extent to which the previous experience has been enhanced by consolidating the established structures and adapting them to the new programmatic context could be analysed at least qualitatively.

The interviewed Urban Authority considers that the **structure of the Urban Authority (AU)** established through the HCL is appropriate to the tasks delegated by the Function Delegation Agreement signed with the MDRAP.

“It is not desired to increase the UA’s duties, as it is considered that the guides will not be simplified and only the attributions will increase, without an effective simplification and efficiency of processes.”

- quote of an UA representative -

With regard to functionality of the UA, the criteria of prioritization and selection of the projects used so far were appropriate to the local context, and collaboration with the Urban Development Support Structure (UDSS) within the RDA was “fruitful”.

With regard to the **local partnership**, the UA considers that it includes all the necessary organizations, also from the public and private sectors, although other public institutions could be more involved in facilitating the obtaining of documents during the submission and implementation phase. Moreover, in the implementation phase, bi-monthly meetings are held to monitor the progress of the projects included in ISUD, developed by different actors in the territory. In addition, at the TAU level there is the concept of **participatory budgeting**, with meetings of the Civic Council where projects are proposed and analysed, and finally the observations are noted and taken into account in the continuous development of the local project portfolio.

“It is a dynamic and continuously developing process: for example, there are projects submitted directly to the European Commission in partnership with NGOs and other private entities and the like, as well as projects on OPAC implemented in conjunction with the Centre for Civic Imagination and Innovation.”

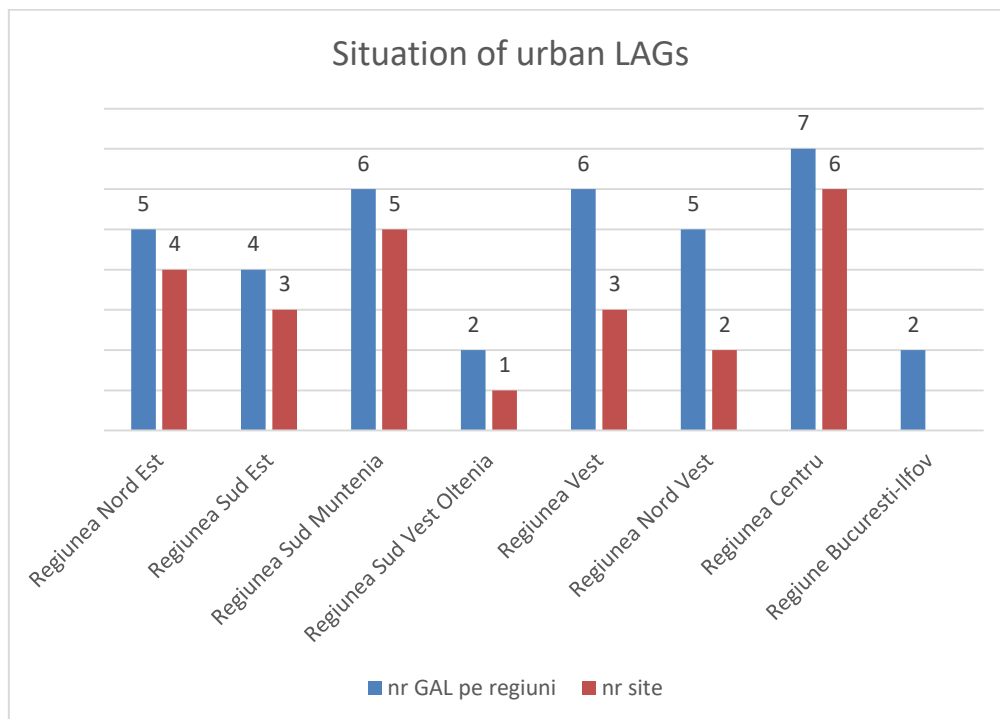
- quote of an UA representative -

In terms of complementarity issues, ISUD is correlated and complementary to other local strategies at different levels (e.g. LAG, investments of the County Council, Transport Master Plan), as well as with the broader municipal strategy for the management of public services (in particular, the public transport service, lighting, social, education). Thus, that ROP projects are deemed to contribute to economic development, and in particular, to the promotion of green economy, as well as to the improvement of the city’s image and, in broader terms, the increase of the quality of life. Also, the projects contribute to the awareness of their capacities in terms of management of interventions for the community.

Case Study 3. CLLD mechanism

From the documentary analysis we found that at present there are 37 urban LAGs set up (of which the largest number are concentrated in the Central, South Muntenia and West regions, followed by the North-East and North-West regions, as shown in the table below), and their activity level is relatively low, the strategies being actually approved in the last months of 2018, as the financing of the LAG activities within the OPAC (by granting pre-financing) actually started only in the first months of 2019. Also, the analysis of the information available online allowed the identification of a group consisting of 4 LAGs, with the largest number of events organized (more than 4) and other ongoing activities, in particular the Târgoviște LAG, which for this reason was selected for deepening the case study. It is also noted that the President of the Târgoviște LAG is the Vice-President of the Urban LAG Federation, which allowed to obtain important information, respectively an overview, and on the manner of undertaking and the problems encountered in the process of implementing the CLLD mechanism so far.

Figure 8: Situation of urban LAGs by development regions (2019)



Source: Evaluator's processing of data from online documentary research

The results of the interview with the representatives of the Târgoviște LAG, in conjunction with the analysis of the documents provided by the participants, can be found in the case study file annexed to this Report and are briefly described in the following.

It is specified that the urban LAGs have not so far adopted significant decisions regarding the ROP implementation process, since the Guide for the selection of projects under PA 9 has not been launched and there are no ongoing projects within PA 9. The decisions taken at the level of the LAG structures concern, until the moment of writing this report, only administrative and management aspects, such as: the recruitment of the project staff and the adoption of the internal LAG management procedures.

The representatives of the urban LAG interviewed consider that the **LAG structure is appropriate**, comprising local, private and non-governmental administrations, including a natural person relevant to the local community, according to the LDS evaluation and selection requirements. However, there is a possibility that the LAG will be extended, but only if the selection criteria are met. The expansion could be done in certain areas of interest and one of them may be represented by the economic development. The current context and the activity of the LAG allows the **development of the administrative capacity of the LAG members**: there are funds allocated for the vocational training part, the LAG members participating in project management, project evaluation, public procurement and data entry and validation courses. Furthermore, in the operational project, LAG members will be accredited as training providers. Thus, the involvement and commitment of LAG members are not viewed as challenging because LAG members are motivated to be active through ongoing training sessions and consultations. What was a challenge, however, was their **selection** and not their subsequent involvement. In this regard, a conference was held before the OPHC calls were launched. Another challenging aspect is that the operating strategy is designed for a period of 5 years and the **budget of the support structure** for implementation through the LAG (representing 15% of the value of OPHC funds) has been developed for a period of 3 years.

Thus, from the perspective of strengthening the capacity and ensuring the sustainability of the CLLD mechanism, the representatives of the LAG want the LAG structures to go through an

accreditation process as an Level II Intermediate Body so that their role in the implementation system of the integrated interventions is recognized, institutionalized and further valued.

The **decision-making process** goes through the General Assembly of the Members of the Association and there is a very well-established communication mechanism, regulated by an internal communication procedure and a permanent contact between the LAG members (including through social media, such as WhatsApp).

The participation of the stakeholders in the implementation of the local strategy is, in the opinion of the LAG representatives, appropriate: the strategy was under public consultation, received a positive vote in the general meeting and endorsement from the Ministry of European Funds. There were also training sessions for potential participants in the operation project.

The representatives of the LAG believe that the experience of setting up this structure will greatly contribute to strengthening the capacity of the community to think and implement development actions for the benefit of the community.

“From this experience we consider that the most important lessons learnt are related to responsibility and empowerment at community level. Also, it was concluded that a solid structure can only be constituted insofar as the vector represents a point of confidence. Private public collaboration is possible from the perspective of the public interest, the tools offered are extremely important.”

- GAL quote -

Annex 5.6. Detailed organizational analysis

According to the national legislation³⁵, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration (MDRAP) is the managing authority for the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020, and the Agencies for Regional Development (RDAs) fulfil the function of intermediary bodies for the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020, according to the legislation in force³⁶.

Coordination at national level of the management of the structural instruments, as well as the strategic coordination are ensured by the Ministry of Regional Development, Public Administration and European Funds, through the Coordination Committee for the management of the Partnership Agreement (CCMPA) and the Management Committee for the coordination of ESI funds (MCC-FESI). The internal control system for the ROP 2014 - 2020 is composed of the following institutions: The Managing Authority for ROP; Intermediate Bodies / Agencies for Regional Development (ADR) designated to establish the institutional framework for coordination and management of European structural and investment funds and to ensure the continuity of the institutional framework for coordination and management of structural instruments 2014-2020; Certification and Payment Authority (CPA)/Ministry of Public Finance (MPF) appointed to establish the institutional framework for coordination and management of European structural and investment funds and to ensure the continuity of the institutional framework for coordination and management of structural instruments 2014-2020; Audit Authority / Court of Accounts appointed to establish the institutional framework for coordination and management of European structural and investment funds and to ensure the continuity of the institutional framework for coordination and management of structural instruments 2014-2020 and the National Agency for Public Procurement under the conditions laid down by law³⁷, designated as an authority responsible for the mechanism in charge of verifying compliance with the rules on public procurement within projects financed from structural instruments.

The Managing Authority for the ROP has final responsibility before the European Commission, for the proper fulfilment of the obligations referred to in Article 125 of the EU Regulation no.1303 of the European Parliament and of the Council and delegates tasks to the IB (RDA).

The current organizational chart of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration³⁸ reflects the attributions and the lines of collaboration/coordination between directorates, to which the Operating Regulations and the operational procedures from the current activity are added. Horizontal collaboration lines are important for endorsement circuits and for avoiding delays in programme operation. The current organizational chart requires an update of the Organisation and Operation Regulations³⁹, which is on the web page, as Annex to the Order of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration No. 2534 dated 26/03/2018.

³⁵ GD no. 904/2016 amending and completing GD no. 398/2015 for establishing the institutional framework for coordination and management of the European structural and investment funds and ensuring the continuity of the institutional framework for coordination and management of the structural instruments 2007-2013 and repealing GD no. 1183/2014 regarding the nomination of the authorities involved in the management and control system of the European structural and investment funds 2014-2020, and GD no 556/2017 amending and completing GD no. 398/2015 establishing the institutional framework for coordination and management of the European structural and investment funds and ensuring the continuity of the institutional framework for coordination and management of the structural instruments 2014-2020.

³⁶ Law No 315/2004 on regional development in Romania, as subsequently amended and supplemented (Article 9)

³⁷ GEO 13/2015 on the establishment, organization and operation of the National Agency for Public Procurement.

³⁸ <https://www.mdrap.ro/userfiles/ORG%20MDRAP%20180619.pdf>

³⁹ <https://www.mdrap.ro/userfiles/ROF-MDRAP-0318.pdf>

Functions of the MA-ROP

The MA-ROP functions are as follows⁴⁰:

(1) The managing authority shall be responsible for managing the operational programme in accordance with the principle of sound financial management.

(2) As regards the management of the operational programme, the managing authority shall: support the work of the monitoring committee referred to in the Regulation 1303/2013 and provide it with the information it requires to carry out its tasks; draw up and, after approval by the monitoring committee, submit to the Commission annual and final implementation reports referred to in Article 50 of the Regulation 1303/2013; make available to intermediate bodies and beneficiaries information that is relevant to the execution of their tasks and the implementation of operations respectively; establish a system to record and store in computerised form data on each operation necessary for monitoring, evaluation, financial management, verification and audit, including data on individual participants in operations, where applicable; ensure that the data referred to in point (d) is collected, entered and stored in the system referred to in point (d), and that data on indicators is broken down by gender where required by Annexes I and II of the ESF Regulation.

(3) As regards the selection of operations, the managing authority shall:

(a) draw up and, once approved, apply appropriate selection procedures and criteria that: ensure the contribution of operations to the achievement of the specific objectives and results of the relevant priority; are non-discriminatory and transparent; take into account the general principles set out;

(b) ensure that a selected operation falls within the scope of the Fund or Funds concerned and can be attributed to a category of intervention or, in the case of the EMFF, a measure identified in the priority or priorities of the operational programme;

(c) ensure that the beneficiary is provided with a document setting out the conditions for support for each operation including the specific requirements concerning the products or services to be delivered under the operation, the financing plan, and the time-limit for execution;

(d) satisfy itself that the beneficiary has the administrative, financial and operational capacity to fulfil the conditions referred to in point (c) before approval of the operation;

(e) satisfy itself that, where the operation has started before the submission of an application for funding to the managing authority, applicable law relevant for the operation has been complied with;

(f) ensure that operations selected for support from the Funds or the EMFF do not include activities which were part of an operation which has been or should have been subject to a procedure of recovery in accordance with Article 71 following the relocation of a productive activity outside the programme area;

(g) determine the categories of intervention or, in the case of the EMFF, the measures to which the expenditure of an operation shall be attributed.

(4) As regards the financial management and control of the operational programme, the managing authority shall:

Verify that the co-financed products and services have been delivered and that expenditure declared by the beneficiaries has been paid and that it complies with applicable law, the operational programme and the conditions for support of the operation; ensure that beneficiaries involved in the implementation of operations reimbursed on the basis of eligible costs actually incurred maintain either a separate accounting system or an adequate accounting code for all transactions relating to an operation; put in place effective and proportionate anti-

⁴⁰ According to Articles 125 of the EC Regulation no. 1303/2013.

fraud measures taking into account the risks identified; set up procedures to ensure that all documents regarding expenditure and audits required to ensure an adequate audit trail are held in accordance with the requirements set; draw up the management declaration and annual summary referred to in the Financial Regulation.

Functions delegated by the MA to the IBs

The Member State⁴¹ may designate one or more intermediary bodies to carry out certain tasks of the managing authority or the certification authority, under the responsibility of the authority in question. The corresponding agreements between the managing authority or the certifying authority and the intermediary bodies shall be officially registered, in writing.

The function delegation is achieved through the framework agreement for the implementation of the Regional Operational Program 2014-2020, concluded between the Agencies for Regional Development, as intermediary bodies. The agreement establishes the powers delegated to IB ROP by MA ROP, as well as the rights and obligations of the parties arising from this delegation. The agreement was concluded for the entire period of implementation of the ROP 2014-2020, as well as for a period of five years from the date of the official closure of the ROP 2014-2020 in Romania.

Delegated functions

Through framework agreements,⁴² the MA delegated to the IB the following functions: (i) programming, (ii) evaluating, selecting, contracting operations/projects, (iii) verifying purchases and reimbursement and payment applications, (iv) monitoring projects, (v) information and communication, (vi) support for potential recipients/beneficiaries.

MA-ROP functional relations

Internal relations (with directions/services from the MDRAP)

Internal relationships are reflected in the OOR and are updated periodically, depending on the changes that have occurred in the organizational structures. A qualitative analysis was carried out through interviews with the technical staff of the MA ROP services.

In carrying out the tasks at national, regional and local level, there is a need for continuous coordination, which will allow the tasks to be fulfilled within the regulated deadlines. From this perspective, a periodic organizational analysis is required for several reasons, including:

- The role it plays in highlighting the higher overloading periods of the execution staff during the periods followed after launching some investment priorities;
- Identifying bottlenecks in the process of applying the procedures, through the need to carry out internal approval cycles that could be shortened;
- Identifying possible duplications of activity between services from different directions;
- Lack of staff at central level and county offices within the RDAs and involvement of all support structures (both centrally, and regionally and locally) in the activities of this programme, etc.

⁴¹ According to Article 123 paragraph 6 of the EC Regulation no. 1303/2013.

⁴² Pursuant to Article 123 paragraph 6 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council and to the provisions of GD no. 398/2015 establishing the institutional framework for coordination and management of the European structural and investment funds and ensuring the continuity of the institutional framework for the coordination and management of 2014-2020 structural instruments.

Relationships outside the organizational structure of the MA-ROP

These collaboration / coordination / control relationships should be updated and detailed, as they are part of the ROP implementation, some being entities outside the current MDRAP, such as: Ministry of European Funds; Certification and Payment Authority (CPA); Ministry of Public Finance (MPF); Audit Authority: Court of Auditors; National Agency for Public Procurement.

There are also relations with the RDCs, with other ministries, with other national and international programmes and/or financial instruments. It should also be detailed what communication-coordination system is operational and what this system covers.

Organizational and functional relationship analysis **- RDA and county office level -**

The common criterion for the two periods ROP 2007-2013 and ROP 2014-2020 is the type of activities carried out. The organizational structure of ADRs⁴³ plays the role of as **intermediary body for the ROP⁴⁴**.

The delegation of functions is done through delegation agreements that are concluded throughout the program by the MA ROP with each RDA, as an intermediary body. The specific functions that the intermediary bodies carry out in this implementation framework refer to: (i) programming, (ii) evaluating, selecting, contracting operations/projects, (iii) verifying purchases and reimbursement and payment applications, (iv) monitoring projects, (v) information and communication, (vi) support for potential recipients/beneficiaries.

The functions delegated to ADRs as IBs are reflected similarly, without being identical, in their organizational structures, being reflected in the OOR, job descriptions, code of conduct, code of ethics, as well as in the procedures applied at the level of ADRs. The diversity of RDAs organization is based on conditions specific to each region and keeps as a basis the delegation agreements concluded with each of these bodies with legal, non-governmental, non-profit, public utility.

In this analysis, we kept in mind the assumptions related to available data, the type of documents (official or just proposals) and the moment of analysis in relation to the updates that take place in terms of the organizational structure, also including the number of approved positions, as well as those effectively occupied.

In analysing the organizational structures of the two periods ROP 2007-2013 and ROP 2014-2020, a number of objective factors were taken into account, such as:

- The different complexity of the activities of the two periods (due to the more complex procedures, introduction of My SMIS);
- The type of training that the staff must have;
- There are staff dedicated 100% to the role of IB ROP and staff who only partially perform tasks related to the IB ROP, with other duties;
- Long cycles of internal approval of documents from ADRs, but also in relation to the MA and/or other institutions of approval.

⁴³ Based on the GD no.457 / 2008 regarding the establishment of the institutional framework for coordination and management of the structural instruments, as subsequently amended and supplemented.

⁴⁴ According to the GD no.1183/2014 regarding the nomination of the authorities involved in the management and control system of the structural and investment funds 2014-2020.

Evolution of RDA staff

The analysis of organizational changes, of organizational charts of the mentioned periods and of the approved/employed staff (management/execution) shows an increasing trend. This increase in the need for staff is justifiable by the increased complexity of the activities that the ADRs carry out as IBs. During this period, the procedures and tools related to each stage of the programme have diversified and become more complex. The stages of technical and financial evaluation were assigned to RDAs, the role of the contracting, verification, reporting, approval of reimbursement stages has become more complex, and require staff dedicated to some of the stages. The comparison of the two periods also resulted in an increase in the number and frequency of field visits, for monitoring ongoing or completed investments.

As a result of this analysis, it also emerges that the organizational charts are modified whenever necessary, and their approval falls within the tasks of the RDC. The organizational structures have a number of approved staff and a number (equal or less) of employed persons, which means that in each regional development agency there are vacancies, but it is difficult at the current information level to find out if for the tasks falling 100 % under IB responsibility, all positions are occupied or not.

ADR functional relationships

Internal relations (between ADR directorates/services)

The following conclusions are drawn from the analysis of the lines of collaboration / coordination between the directorates and services of RDAs and the OOR:

- The management structure of ADRs is the same in both periods. The differences are involved in the diversification and extension of the activities concerning the level of the heads of services and that of the execution staff.

- In both periods ROP 2007-2013 and ROP 2014-2020 the approval of the organizational structures is the responsibility of RDCs. In order to increase the role of the CDR, it is necessary to understand the activities of the RDA establishment plan, especially those of delegation as IB, but also in relation to the rest of the regional planning activities. This analysis needs to be based on a proactive policy of identifying the human resources needs, the types of qualification/training, distribution/redistribution of employees according to the workload of one stage or another of the ROP. The guidelines of this strategic approach also fall under the MA's responsibility, therefore the communication between the MA-RDA-RDC should be strengthened. These guidelines should be communicated annually or whenever ADRs need it, as they are necessary for structuring / restructuring activities per stages. The application of these guidelines can be a useful tool for RDC when approving organizational charts.

The RDA director should explicitly, through the OOR, have the responsibility *to approve* the documents related to the functions delegated to the IB. The analysis of some OORs shows that there are explicit approval tasks at the level of the deputy managers, but the approval function on the part of the RDA Manager does not appear explicitly. This is done through the endorsement-approval circuit of the documents related to the programme; however it is not explicitly reflected in the OOR.

The county offices need a clearer definition of the activities related to this programme in terms of responsibilities, funding, the type of activities allocated, the way of reporting and verifying the fulfilment of responsibilities. These local activities also ensure the connection with the local authorities, which is why the role and responsibilities must be clearly defined and verified, especially since the priority projects/interventions are identified in the first phase at this level. The lines of collaboration/coordination between the ADR management and these *county offices of the ROP 2014-2020 require a clearer allocation of tasks and verification of their fulfilment. This pillar of the programme could play a strengthened role in terms of planning the next programme.*

Relationships outside the organizational structure of the RDA

These relationships refer to collaborations with other entities at regional and/or local level, with potential applicants, with beneficiaries, with technical and economic experts co-opted for technical and financial evaluation (TFE). The evaluating experts are co-opted in the evaluation committees according to the evaluation stage, as they were not employed by RDA. There is usually a framework contract for the provision of experts, which becomes effective at the stages of evaluations. There are “call centre” type offices, through which applicants and beneficiaries can request information; there is a tendency to increase the interest for this information and guidance activity. Information campaigns are being conducted in counties in the region, to inform about the projects that can be financed.

An important link in the implementation of the ROP is at the county level, where the role of RDA representative in the county can increase. The county level is the one at which the priorities are identified, which then reach the RDC. Once arrived here, all priorities in the counties of the region should be ranked based on criteria for identifying regional priorities. In this respect, ADRs could play a more important role from a technical and procedural point of view, and have the task of applying the criteria for identifying these regional priorities.

Providing resources for the functioning of IB ROP

From the experience gained in the implementation of the ROP 2007-2013, the increase of performance is based on the increase of costs for financing staff, which is achieved through multi-annual financing contracts. These contracts include details of specific activities, as well as indicators that measure the performance of intermediary bodies. Support through TA aims to support quality costs.

Training activities of the MA for the intermediary bodies are useful for increasing the performance of the ROP implementation system. Human capital is a basic factor in the implementation of the ROP, as is an allocation of financial resources appropriate to the needs. Thus, in completing the analysis of functional relationships, in the following there is a description of the strategies underlying the allocation of financial resources and the training of the staff of the IB/MA ROP for the 2014-2020 period.

Technical Assistance Strategy (TA) and Training Strategy to support the proper functioning of the ROP 2014-2020 implementation system

The TA strategy is an essential document for the smooth functioning of the ROP implementation system, providing the financial resources, organizational support (training) and logistics, as well as guidelines for ROP beneficiaries. The TA strategy is the reference framework document that defines the guidelines for specific technical assistance interventions⁴⁵. The lessons learned from the previous period in the field of TA insurance focus on: permanent support; performance financing; training, as an essential factor of development; direct support for beneficiaries; sustained communication and awareness.

For the purposes of the above, the vision of the ROP 2014-2020 regarding the objectives of technical assistance are defined by: correct planning of the financial resources allocated to the priority axis TA to cover the identified assistance needs, throughout the entire period of the ROP

⁴⁵ According to Article 52 of the General Regulation no. 1303/2013, respectively “ESI Funds may support the preparatory, managing, monitoring, evaluation, information and communication, networking, complaints resolution, control, audit, actions to reduce administrative burden for beneficiaries”.

implementation; increasing the general level of information and awareness on ROP; increasing the quality of the MA and IB services in the ROP implementation process.

The objectives of the strategy are operationalized within the financing lines provided for under Priority Axis 12- Technical Assistance of the ROP, which provide:

- Supporting IBs (including administrative and staff costs) for the implementation of the various ROP stages;
- Purchasing and installing IT equipment, purchasing office equipment and consumables and software;
- Purchasing goods and services necessary to carry out the specific activities of the ROP;
- Supporting the organization of committees and working groups involved in the implementation of the programme;
- Supporting activities of structures supporting urban development;
- Elaboration of specific studies;
- Training potential beneficiaries, actual beneficiaries and IB ROP staff;
- Supporting programming for the next period;
- Supporting potential beneficiaries and actual beneficiaries through helpdesk.

The training program for IB/MA ROP staff, actual ROP beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries is another strategic document relevant for the proper functioning of the ROP implementation system, representing the main instrument for **building the capacities** of the main actors of the programme-specific implementation system.

The training programme for the ROP 2014-2020 is a framework document that sets out the objectives, target groups and strategic framework for training IB/MA staff, potential beneficiaries and actual beneficiaries of the ROP, including training priorities and themes. The document takes into account the good practices and lessons learned from the previous period, including the National Training Mechanism for Structural Funds used for the 2007-2013 programming period especially in terms of the definition of training needs and the planning of the corresponding training activities.

Starting from 2016 and up to 2022, the training plan is funded from Priority Axis 12 of the ROP 2014-2020. The main issues to be mentioned with regard to the training methodology, which are likely to have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the training actions in order to increase the efficiency of the ROP management, can be summarized as follows:

- Promoting the transfer of expertise at the MA/IB ROP level and conducting joint technical sessions on issues directly related to the management of ROP funds;
- Limiting the duration of the course sessions to 3-5 days, so that the participation in the course does not affect the workload;
- Carrying out the needs analysis at compartment level, not at individual level, so that the identified training needs are more realistic;
- Correlating training activities with those organized by OP TA on horizontal topics related to ESI fund management.

In the centralizing table below, the planned training activities are established, by theme and target group.

Main themes and target groups set out in the ROP 2014-2020

Training needs / main skills targeted for the 2016-2022 period	Target group	Total no. of participants	Type of training	Main themes
1. Basic knowledge for the staff involved in the management of the structural funds allocated under the ROP	Staff under IB ROP	92	Internal induction training	Introduction to EU cohesion policy and Structural Instruments
2. Detailed knowledge in accordance with the role assigned in the management process of the FESI allocated under the ROP	IB and MA staff (joint sessions)		87 training sessions (without SMIS sessions) divided into 6 main modules and sub-themes	Technical aspects concerning the main stages of the programme management cycle
2.1 FESI planning and programming	IB and MA staff (joint sessions)	150	6 sessions	
2.2 Management of Operational Programmes	IB and MA staff (joint sessions)	441	17 sessions	2.2.1 Monitoring, 2.2.2 Evaluation, 2.2.3 Information and publicity; 2.2.4 Assistance for programme management; 2.2.5 Closing the program
2.3 Evaluation, selection, contracting and monitoring	IB and MA staff (joint sessions)	981	40 sessions	2.3.1 Support for applicants; 2.3.2 Evaluation of projects; 2.3.3 Compliance with PA rules; 2.3.4 Monitoring of projects and verification of expenses
2.4 Financing and financial control	IB and MA staff (joint sessions)	443	21 sessions	2.4.1 Accounting; 2.4.2 Certification of expenses; 2.4.3 Identification of irregularities
2.5 Audit	IB and MA staff (joint sessions)	96	3 sessions	
2.6 Use of SMIS		261	Sessions organised by the Ministry of European Funds	N/A
3. General skills and competences of the staff involved in managing the ROP			13 sessions	
3.1 Managerial skills	IB staff	105	5 sessions	N/A
3.2 Administrative skills	IB and AM staff (separate sessions)	241	4 sessions	N/A

Training needs / main skills targeted for the 2016-2022 period	Target group	Total no. of participants	Type of training	Main themes
3.3 Improving communication	IB and AM staff (separate sessions)	169	2 sessions	N/A
3.4 Management of training processes	IB and MA staff (joint sessions)	52	2 sessions	N/A
Studio visits	IB and MA staff (joint sessions)		20 visits	N/A
4. Preparing the beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries of the ROP			136 sessions	
4.1 Identification and elaboration of projects	Potential ROP beneficiaries and actual beneficiaries	1440	54	N/A
4.2 Project management		2125	82	N/A

Source: Evaluator's processing of data from the Training Plan ROP 2014-2020

Annex 5.7. Scheme of processes by SIPOCA and process mapping

To be attached separately.

Annex 5.8. System Improvement Plan

To be attached separately.

Annex 5.9. Filled-in Interview Grids

To be attached separately.

Annex 5.10. Case study file - ITI Danube Delta Mechanism

To be attached separately.

Annex 5.11. Case study file - Cluj Urban Authority

To be attached separately.

Annex 5.12. Case study file - GAL Târgoviște

To be attached separately.

Annex 5.13. Minutes of the Expert Panel

To be attached separately.

Annex 5.14.1 Database: centralizing interviews

To be attached separately.

Annex 5.14.2 Database: quantitative analysis of human and financial resources

To be attached separately.

Annex 5.15. Power Point Presentation

To be attached separately.

Annex 5.16. Table of remarks / recommendations of BE ROP / CCE members and solving proposals

To be attached separately.