

Evaluation Plan

Interreg VI-A NEXT Romania-Republic of Moldova Programme
Interreg VI-A NEXT Romania-Ukraine Programme

JANUARY 2024

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A. OBJECTIVES, COVERAGE AND COORDINATION

1. PROGRAMME LEVEL EVALUATION

Evaluation of Interreg VI-A NEXT Romania-Republic of Moldova Programme (further on referred to as ROMD Programme) and of Interreg VI-A NEXT Romania-Ukraine Programme (further on referred to as ROUA Programme), aims at assessing both the performance and effects of the Programmes. The evaluation criteria related to effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, are expected to be covered. As well, the impact, sustainability, EU added value and visibility of the programme are aimed at a later stage.

The current EvalPlan sets out an evaluation strategy for the entire implementation period of ROMD and ROUA Programmes and has been drawn up by the two MAs in cooperation with both NAs, building on the input of the Evaluation Unit. The drafting process took into account the provisions of the applicable EU regulations (Interreg Regulation - no. 1059/2021, Common Provisions Regulation - no. 1060/2021, ERDF-CF Regulation - no. 1058/2021, NDICI regulation - no. 947/2021) and Better Regulation Guidance¹, followed closely the Staff Working Document on performance, monitoring and evaluation issued by the European Commission² and also took into account the Guide for Drafting the Evaluation Plans of the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy in Romania³ developed under the service agreement to improve monitoring and evaluation capacity in the context of EU-funded programs in Romania (2021-2027) signed between MEIP and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. As well, the feedback received from the EC Evaluation Helpdesk on the previous generation of evaluation plans drafted by the Evaluation Unit was also used in selecting the types of information to be included in this plan.

Abbreviations and glossary of terms

MA	Managing Authority which is responsible for managing each programme with a view to delivering the objectives of the programme
NA	The National Authority is the counterpart of the Managing Authority, responsible for the coordination of the programme management in the Republic of Moldova or in Ukraine. It takes part in ESC.
MC	Monitoring Committee. Overall monitoring of the Programme implementation lies within the competencies of the MC. MC shall examine the progress made in carrying out evaluations, syntheses of evaluations and any follow-up given to findings. MC shall approve the EvalPlan and any amendment thereto.
JS	Joint Secretariat. It assists the MA and the MC in carrying out their respective functions. The joint secretariat shall also provide information to potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities under Interreg programmes and shall assist beneficiaries and partners in the implementation of operations. It may participate in ESC meetings.
MA Unit	Unit MA for the cooperation Romania, Ukraine, Moldova within MDPWA/ Directorate General European Territorial Cooperation/ Directorate MA for European Territorial Cooperation Programmes in charge with managing the Programmes

¹ https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-making-process/planning-and-proposing-law/better-regulation/better-regulation-guidelines-and-toolbox_en

² The Staff Working Document on performance, monitoring and evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund in 2021-2027 - [EC website](#)

³ <https://www.evaluate-structurale.ro/en/web/guest/resurse-metodologice> - Guide

Evaluation Unit	Evaluation Unit within MDPWA/ Directorate General European Territorial Cooperation/ Directorate MA for European Territorial Cooperation Programmes ensuring the evaluation function for the Interreg programmes
MDPWA	The Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration in Romania, hosting the MA for the Interreg programmes, including Interreg VI-A NEXT Romania-Republic of Moldova Programme and Interreg VI-A NEXT Romania-Ukraine Programme.
MEIP	The Ministry of European Investment and Projects in Romania. Institution coordinating the management of EU funds in Romania, in which ECU is located.
ECU	Evaluation Central Unit. Unit within MEIP which plays a central role in the overall evaluation set-up of EU funds in Romania. It takes part in ESC.
Interreg funds	The ERDF and the external financing instruments of the Union that support the Interreg Programmes (in this case, NDICI)
ERDF	The European Regional Development Fund. In line with Regulation (EU) no. 1058/2021, the ERDF shall contribute to reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions within the Union, and to reducing the backwardness of the least favoured regions through participation in the structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind and in the conversion of declining industrial regions, including by promoting sustainable development and addressing environmental challenges
NDICI	The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe. With its general objectives established in Regulation (EU) no. 947/2021, the instrument also supports Interreg programmes involving countries in the neighbourhood area.
IPA III	The Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance. With its general objective established in Regulation (EU) no. 1529/2021, the instrument also supports Interreg programmes involving IPA countries
CBC	Cross-border cooperation
LIP	Large Infrastructure Project
ESC	Evaluation Steering Committee. It supervises the evaluation process, coordinating in terms of: Terms of Reference (for evaluations conducted externally), quality of the evaluation reports.
EvalPlan	Evaluation Plan. The EvalPlan is an instrument for planning the evaluation activities for the whole programming period, which is approved by MC. Its role is to improve the quality of evaluations carried out during the programming period. The ToR are drafted starting from the provisions of the EvalPlan.
ToR	Terms of Reference. A written document presenting the scope of the evaluation, the key questions, the indicative methods to be used, the resources, schedule and reporting requirements.
TA	Technical assistance

Effectiveness	How successful EU action has been in achieving or progressing towards its objectives, looking for evidence of why, whether or how the changes are linked to the EU intervention
Efficiency	The costs and benefits of the EU intervention as they accrue to different stakeholders, identifying what factors are driving these costs/benefits and how these factors relate to the EU intervention, depending on data availability; otherwise, qualitative analysis may concentrate on the identification of inefficiencies
Relevance	How well the objectives of the EU intervention being evaluated (still) match the (current) needs and problems
Coherence	How well the intervention works internally and with other EU interventions
EU added value	The value resulting from EU interventions that is additional to the value that would have resulted from interventions initiated at regional or national levels
Visibility	How the communication activities of the programme make the EU policy visible to the interested population and appraise the public awareness of the EU financial and policy effort
Impact	The changes associated with a particular intervention which occur over the longer term
Sustainability	Whether the benefits of a project or programme are likely to continue after its finalisation

2. ROLE AND MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION PLAN

The EvalPlan represents a practical management tool for the implementation of ROMD and ROUA Programmes by providing the framework for the implementation of quality evaluations to be used effectively by the two MAs, in order to contribute to the implementation of evidence-based programmes. As well, the generated findings can become roots for setting the elements for the next programming period.

The **objectives** of this EvalPlan are:

- to ensure the quality of the first evaluations during the programming period carried out under MA's responsibility, through proper planning and agreed procedural steps;
- to facilitate informed programme management and policy decisions aiming at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of ROMD and ROUA Programmes and at streamlining the next programming period;
- to set the guiding framework for the impact evaluation of ROMD and ROUA Programmes;
- to ensure the proportionality with the financial allocation of ROMD and ROUA Programmes and the practicality in terms of alignment with the expected evolution of the two Programmes.

In addition, the EvalPlan ensures that the evaluation criteria mentioned in the regulations are taken into account to the widest possible extent while performing the evaluations of the two Programmes, in line with art. 3(1) of the Interreg Regulation.

Formal arrangements

The EvalPlan is submitted for approval to the MC within one year from the adoption of each Programme, in line with art. 35(6) of the Interreg Regulation.

At the time of writing the current EvalPlan, both ROMD and ROUA Programmes have been revised to accommodate the additional allocation received in 2023, and are in negotiation process with European Commission. The programme versions taken into account in this plan are the revised versions to be formally submitted to the European Commission in November

2023, therefore the EvalPlan, although submitted to the MC in line with the deadline in the regulations, may only be approved by MC only after each revised programme is approved. The EvalPlan may be later amended in line with the evolution of the Programmes, amendments to it being subject to MC decisions. Amendments affecting the evaluation of only one of the two Programmes need to be submitted only to the respective MC. In case of emerging needs, additional ad-hoc evaluations to the ones clearly indicated in the EvalPlan may be carried out.

3. COVERAGE AND RATIONALE

This EvalPlan covers Interreg VI-A NEXT Romania-Republic of Moldova Programme and Interreg VI-A NEXT Romania-Ukraine Programme for the entire programming period, taking into account that the impact evaluation has to be completed by 30 June 2029 according to art. 35(2) of the Interreg Regulation. For the impact evaluation, the interventions of the 2014-2020 ENI CBC programmes between Romania and the Republic of Moldova/Ukraine in certain fields are also covered, their aggregated effect being analysed.

The two Programmes are part of the Interreg A strand in line with art. 3(1)(b)(ii) of the Interreg regulation, namely external cross-border cooperation between adjacent border regions of one Member State and one partner country supported by NDICI. The cross-border cooperation strand is supported by the EU with a view to promote integrated and harmonious regional development between neighbouring regions. The two Programmes are newly introduced as part of this strand, in the previous programming periods being part of the cross-border cooperation neighbourhood programmes, following the dedicated rules established. In the current programming period they apply the Interreg rules, which cover all ERDF, IPA and NDICI financed Interreg programmes.

The two Programmes are funded by NDICI, ERDF (total Interreg funds of 97,275,434 euro for ROMD Programme and total Interreg funds of 68,025,717 euro for ROUA Programme) as well as match-funding from the participating countries, adding up to a total budget of 108,083,817 euro for ROMD Programme and 75,584,130 euro for ROUA Programme and were first approved by the European Commission in November 2022.

The performance framework overview tables of the Programmes, which correlate the types of actions, the estimated budget, the output and result indicators and the intervention fields, by specific objective, are available on [ROMD Programme's website](#) and [ROUA Programme's website](#).

Although the actual Programme evaluations will be performed separately for each programme, the current EvalPlan covers both programmes given the following:

- the two Programmes are of the same type and have the same financing sources;
- the thematic coverage is similar;
- the same types of projects are financed;
- the territorial coverage of the two Programmes is interlinked;
- the institutional setup of the MA has joint features;
- the shared background.

Where certain provision refers to one of the two Programmes only, this is clearly specified.

Institutional context

Besides Interreg VI-A NEXT Romania-Republic of Moldova Programme and Interreg VI-A NEXT Romania-Ukraine Programme, which are CBC programmes financed from NDICI, MDPWA is MA for one transnational NEXT programme (Interreg VI-B NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme), one external IPA CBC Programme (Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia Programme) and two internal CBC programmes (Interreg VI-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme, Interreg VI-A Romania-Hungary Programme).

4. ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT EVIDENCE

The first step in designing the future is learning from the past.

In order to root the evaluation of the future programme in the available evidence, the direct sources of information on the previous programming period that contain evaluation-related useful evidence have been analysed and are detailed below.

General observation

The previous CBC programmes with the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine were not subject to evaluation by the programme structures, so this represents the first evaluation exercise of such type.

However, programmes-targeted evaluations were performed for the ERDF and IPA CBC programmes that Romania acted as Managing Authority for. In addition to these, the Interreg programmes in Romania were also covered by overarching evaluations carried out at Partnership Agreement level. As experience has shown, although evaluation usually brings valuable findings, these findings often come too late or are based on the information available up to a cut-off date that is well back in time. In some cases, especially as regards the financial data and indicators' targets, at the time the recommendations are issued, the bodies of the respective programme had to already make decisions based on monitoring and projections, while the pertinent recommendations of the evaluators had sometimes been already implemented at the time they were made. This is considered a risk derived from the length of programme evaluations.

Annual reports for the 2014-2020 Programmes

The annual reports prepared by the previous **Romania-Republic of Moldova ENI CBC programme** (technical part) and the annual monitoring and evaluation plans point out to a slow start in Programme implementation, with grant contracts starting to be signed mid-2019 for LIPs, early-2020 for soft projects and 2021 for hard projects. With the pandemic and the restrictions imposed affecting the projects, the Programme bodies took mitigating measures as the extension of procedural deadlines, accepting scanned formats, on-line pre-contracting visits, encouraging digitally-signed documents. In addition to close monitoring of projects, MA and JTS constantly performed internal analyses to assess the results of the calls, the impact on the financial and output indicators and the achievement of the key performance indicators related to the calls, in order to have an updated overview on the expected achievements of the Programme.

The annual reports prepared by the previous **Romania-Ukraine ENI CBC programme** (technical part) and the annual monitoring and evaluation plans also point out to a slow start in Programme implementation, with grant contracts being signed in the first half of 2019 for LIPs, in 2020 for soft projects and in 2021 for hard projects. With the pandemic and the restrictions imposed affecting the projects, the Programme bodies took mitigating measures as the extension of procedural deadlines, accepting scanned formats, on-line pre-contracting visits, encouraging digitally-signed documents. In addition to close monitoring of projects, MA and JTS also constantly performed internal analyses to assess the results of the calls, the impact on the financial and output indicators and the achievement of the key performance indicators related to the calls, in order to have an updated overview on the expected achievements of the Programme. The unprovoked and unjustified military aggression of Russia against Ukraine brought dramatic changes, challenges and uncertainty, therefore efforts were made to ensure that all the programme structures could operate and meet their responsibilities in the programme framework, that actions were taken to redress projects' implementation (including amendments of legislation) and blockages encountered and that adequate support was offered to Ukrainian beneficiaries.

2014-2020 Programme evaluations

Performing programme evaluations by the managing authorities was not mandatory for the 2014-2020 ENI CBC programmes. However, EC result-oriented monitoring (ROM) missions took place.

As regards the previous **Romania-Republic of Moldova ENI CBC programme**, the **ROM Report** at programme level which was issued in 2019 found the programme to be fully relevant to the needs of potential beneficiaries, but with a sub-optimal indicators system that enabled ROM during the Programme implementation to a limited extent only. Programme implementation was found at that point to be inefficient, with more intensive efforts required especially on the Moldovan side and with insufficiently proactive and cooperative

relations MA-NA-JTS-Branch Office, but with promising sustainability of results, should effectiveness be ensured. The EMS-ENI monitoring system used and the information available on the Programme's website were also found to have limitations.

As regards the previous **Romania-Republic of Moldova ENI CBC programme**, the **ROM Report** at programme level which was issued in 2019 found the programme to be relevant to the needs of both countries, but delayed in implementation. The beneficiary organisations in both countries are competent and committed towards appropriate projects but there is less capacity and commitment of the Ukrainian authorities and there is not an adequate culture of inclusion across the management and implementation system. The indicators were found not to be optimal for the purposes of informing programme management. The bi-lateral as opposed to the previous multi-lateral programme model and the shared management model were found to be conducive to achievement of objectives.

As a lesson learnt and also taking count that the two Programmes were not subject to dedicated operational evaluations, the implementation evaluations should be placed in time so as to cover sufficient implementation progress at project level, while also being performed early enough for their findings to be still useful in practice.

Other evaluations

At EU level, the **special report** of the European Court of Auditors on EU support to cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries⁴ issued in December 2022 concluded that the 2014-2020 EU-funded programmes have provided relevant and valuable support to the regions on both sides of the EU's external borders. However, the programmes suffered from significant delays at the start of their implementation, so it was too early to assess their overall effectiveness. In addition, the programmes were found to contain weaknesses in monitoring and reporting on results.

The Joint EEAS-DG NEAR document containing the **Mid-term review** on ENI CBC Programmes⁵ issued in 2018 also showed that the preparatory phase of CBC has been slower than anticipated. However, ENI CBC programmes were found to be in a better position compared to their predecessors to demonstrate their achievements by using better designed output and result indicators in more focused fields of intervention. The management procedures seemed to be carried out much faster and in a more coordinated way than in the previous programming period thanks to the improvements in the regulatory framework and the efforts of programme bodies. Nevertheless, it was too early to assess any increase in the capacity of the Managing Authority or the applicants in the implementation phase.

The **Overview of evaluations and recommendations** in ENI CBC programmes⁶ developed by the TESIM project in September 2021 points to recommendations related to the capacity building for the project beneficiaries (on communication, electronic monitoring system, horizontal issues, also by providing information on the common mistakes, lessons learned, and best practices). The performed evaluations also included the performance of the programme bodies (which was generally seen as efficient and effective), communication and reaching the target values of the output and result indicators.

The Overview also provides in Annex 1 a list of aspects to be taken into account when planning future programme evaluations and which were also reviewed and observed in drafting the current EvalPlan. The aspects present in the list are related to evaluation timing, clarity of objective, evaluation questions, availability of data, non-limitation of evaluation tools and methods, unintended effects, evaluation scope and deliverables.

Policy context

Policy wise, thinking about the overall aims of the three funds that feed into the allocation for these two Programmes, **NDICI** aims to uphold and promote the Union's values, principles and fundamental interests worldwide in order to pursue the objectives and principles of the Union's external action and the **ERDF** aims to contribute to the objective of strengthening the economic, social and territorial cohesion and to reducing disparities between the level

⁴ <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications?did=62741>

⁵ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/eni-cbc-programme-mid-term-review-2017_en

⁶ <https://tesim-enicbc.eu/download/mid-term-evaluations-in-eni-cbc-programmes/>

of development of the various regions. At the same time, the aim of the **cross-border cooperation programmes** is more targeted in the regulations, as they are listed to promote integrated and harmonious regional development between neighbouring border regions. However, from the **NDICI perspective**, these programmes offer strategically important and meaningful frameworks for deepening relations with and among partner countries, based on the principles of mutual accountability, shared ownership and responsibility.

In this context, an approach that can be explored for these two Programmes is to take into account in performing the impact evaluation also the perspectives presented above.

Continuity of interventions

Given the fact that dedicated Programme evaluations were not performed for the previous ENI CBC Romania-Republic of Moldova and Romania-Ukraine Programmes, for certain fields it might be useful to examine the aggregated effect of both Interreg NEXT and ENI CBC programmes. In order to use this approach, the first step is analysing whether the interventions under the 2021-2027 programme may be considered a continuation of the interventions of the 2014-2020 programme. To this end, a comparison in EU funding is made in the table below, taking also into consideration the types of projects financed in 2014-2020:

Present 2021-2027 interventions	Related 2014-2020 interventions/projects
(PO2)(iv) Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches Planned operations of strategic importance Both regular and small projects	ROMD: Priority 4.2 - LIP of 6.42 mil. euro, soft projects of 2.7 mil euro ROUA: Priority 4.2 - LIPs of 10.54 mil. euro, soft projects of 4.1 mil euro
ROMD: 23.74 / ROUA: 18.36 mil. euro	ROMD: 9.12 / ROUA: 14.64 mil. euro
(PO2)(vii) Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution ROMD: both regular and small projects ROUA: small projects only	No similar interventions
ROMD: 4.55 / ROUA: 2.53 mil. euro	n/a
(PO4)(ii) Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and life-long learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training Both regular and small projects	ROMD: Priority 1.1 - soft projects of 4.33 mil euro ROUA: Priority 1.1 - soft projects of 3.29 mil euro
ROMD: 11.52 / ROUA: 12.34 mil. euro	ROMD: 4.33 / ROUA: 3.29 mil. euro
(PO4)(v) Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family-based and community-based care Both regular and small projects	ROMD: Priority 4.1 - hard projects of 6.42 mil euro, soft projects of 1.16 mil euro ROUA: Priority 4.1 - LIP of 3.78 mil euro, hard projects of 6.99 mil. euro, soft projects of 2.33 mil euro
ROMD: 17.90 / ROUA: 9.6 mil. euro	ROMD: 7.58 / ROUA: 13.1 mil. euro

(PO4)(vi) Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation ROMD: both regular and small projects ROUA: small projects only	ROMD: Priority 2.1 - hard projects of 10.24 mil euro, soft projects of 1.13 mil euro ROUA: Priority 2.1 - soft projects of 4.9 mil euro
ROMD: 12.61 / ROUA: 4.99 mil. euro	ROMD: 11.37 / ROUA: 4.9 mil. euro
(ISO1)(b) Enhance efficient public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens, civil society actors and institutions, in particular, with a view to resolving legal, capacity and other obstacles in border region (for ROMD including border mobility) Small projects only	There is no perfect correspondence between the interventions in the two programming periods, although in the two 2014-2020 Programmes all priorities included indicative activities meant to enhance the capacity building of public authorities and stakeholders.
ROMD: 13.18 / ROUA: 8.84 mil. euro	n/a
(ISO2) Border crossing management and mobility and migration management ROMD: regular projects only ROUA: small projects only	ROMD: Priority 4.3 - LIPs of 12.85 mil. euro, soft projects of 2.26 mil euro ROUA: Priority 4.3 - LIP of 3.22 mil euro, hard projects of 4.54 mil. euro, soft projects of 0.6 mil euro
ROMD: 4.39 / ROUA: 3.03 mil. euro	ROMD: 15.11* / ROUA: 8.36 mil. euro

* some of the financed projects also regard border mobility actions, which are financed in 2021-2027 under ISO1

As it can be noticed from the table above, almost all interventions may be considered similar to the ones implemented in the two 2014-2020 programmes. However, given the budget share, as well as the fact that LIPs and/or hard projects were financed in the previous programming period, the impact evaluation may take into account the combined interventions for the two programming periods in the following fields: climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience, health and border crossing management and mobility. For ROMD Programme, culture and tourism might also be added.

Additional relevant information on the programming document for 2021-2027

In search of the major trends that could translate into future evaluation questions, the analysis of the 2021-2027 programming documents for ROMD Programme showed an outward migration trend, significant effects of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine (including inward migration), socio-economic challenges, significant environmental concerns, focus on complementarity with other frameworks and funding instruments, programme design in line with the goals of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), commitment to horizontal principles (sustainable development, DNSH - "do no significant harm", equal opportunities and non-discrimination, equality between men and women), consideration of the core principles of the New Bauhaus Initiative, strategic use of public procurement, partnership approach and encouragement of capitalisation and visibility.

For ROUA Programme the analysis of the programming documents showed that the territorial analysis performed for drafting the Programme was affected by the military aggression in Ukraine, with material damages, loss of lives, fleeing population, pressure on medical services, pressure on border management structures, economic disruptions and energy crisis. Otherwise, the programming document demonstrates as well significant environmental concerns, focus on complementarity with other frameworks and funding instruments, programme design in line with the goals of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR),

the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea (CMA), commitment to horizontal principles (sustainable development, DNSH - "do no significant harm", equal opportunities and non-discrimination, equality between men and women), consideration of the core principles of the New Bauhaus Initiative, strategic use of public procurement, partnership approach and encouragement of capitalisation and visibility.

5. COORDINATION MECHANISMS

In Romania, ECU, as part of MEIP, plays a central role in the overall evaluation set-up of EU funds and is in charge of both Partnership Agreement-level evaluation and ensuring the methodological coordination of the overall evaluation process and promoting capacity building at system level. At a higher level, the Coordination Committee established for the Partnership Agreement approves Evaluation Plans for national programmes, while also supervising the use of evaluation results.

In addition, the National Evaluation Working Group, also led by ECU, plays an active role in coordinating methodological efforts at national level. The group gathers representatives of all MAs' evaluation units, including the Evaluation Unit, which ensures the evaluation function for the Interreg programmes that Romania acts as Managing Authority for. The undertaken coordination efforts are the key in creating consistent practices across the system and in sharing good evaluation practices, as well as providing the means and the place to both give and receive adequate guidance and support on evaluation matters.

In the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine the responsibility for the evaluation activities as regards the Programme rests with the NA, which at its turn consults the relevant bodies which need to be involved for a particular evaluation. The input is submitted by the NA directly to the MA or as part of the ESC activity.

The NA is responsible with ensuring the evaluation related activities on the territory of the participating state, in coordination with MA, in supervising / coordinating the implementation of recommendations deriving from the evaluations (follow-up to the recommendations) on the territory of the participating state and in supporting the MA in taking the evaluation results into account in the next programming process.

As regards the coordination mechanisms established at EU level, the information received by MEIP by taking part in DG Regio's Evaluation Network is shared with the relevant national actors, including the Evaluation Unit.

In addition, Interact is playing an important role in favouring the exchange of knowledge and best practices between the Interreg programmes, by organizing periodical events focused on evaluation themes, organizing online courses, developing and upkeeping an online library with all presentations and briefing documents and by hosting a platform on results and evaluation for posting updates and having dialogues on various evaluation topics. TESIM support is also highly valuable in facilitating the transfer of know-how and the exchange of information amongst Interreg NEXT programmes, especially by facilitating the regular meetings of the active monitoring and evaluation network.

B. EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

1. THE EVALUATION FUNCTION

The evaluation function for the two Programmes is ensured by the Evaluation Unit, which supports the two MAs in their responsibilities connected to programme evaluation.

The evaluation activity is linked to monitoring and audit activities, but there is a strong distinction between these processes. Monitoring measures the performance of a programme, but does not assess its quality, effectiveness and impact, as evaluation does. Audit verifies the compliance of an implementation system with the existing rules, but does not appraise the influence of the implementation on the final effects, as evaluation does. As audit and

monitoring cannot be confused with evaluation, evaluation is not to be used for audit or monitoring purposes. These different instruments all contribute to the effective management of the Interreg funds and reciprocally integrate their findings, but each of them covers a specific area of investigation and pursues different objectives.

According to the European Commission in the Staff Working Document on performance, monitoring and evaluation, the task of programme evaluation is to assess the effects of the programmes, in a wider context, as performance judgment cannot be made purely on indicator achievement values (indicators measure 'what', but do not explain 'why'). Evaluations should be an essential part of the life cycle of a programme. They are intended to increase knowledge of what works and what does not and in which context in order for decision makers and other stakeholders to make timely decisions to support the implementation of programmes and to draw conclusions for policy making.

Institutional details

The Evaluation Unit is located within the General Directorate for European Territorial Cooperation, Directorate MA ETC Programmes, within MDPWA. Its staff is functionally independent of the staff of the units within the Directorate that perform the functions of MA for each Interreg programme that Romania acts as MA for, as well as of the staff of the other structures within the General Directorate involved in the connected processes and functions (e.g. accounting function, MA and NA for the other Interreg programmes, monitoring, authorisation, electronic monitoring system, payments, irregularities, first level control). Therefore, the implementation of the Programme and the evaluation of the Programme are located within the same organisation but are assigned to different units, ensuring independence and impartiality. The Evaluation Unit is directly subordinated to the Director of MA ETC Programmes and its activity includes regular workflows with the other units within the General Directorate and other supporting departments within the ministry. The decision-making process follows the internal procedural rules established at ministry level, the documents being approved by respecting all hierarchical necessary steps. As regards the relationship with the coordinating bodies, the Evaluation Unit acts as the main Interreg counterpart for ECU in all aspects related to evaluation, participating in working groups, meetings and any other related trainings.

The Evaluation Unit currently consists of three full-time positions. The staff of the Evaluation Unit has deep Interreg knowledge and carries out various horizontal tasks as well, having an overview of the programming and implementation of the Interreg programmes in Romania. As regards evaluation-related tasks, the three evaluation officers are partly working for ROMD and ROUA Programmes and partly for the other Interreg programmes that Romania participates in.

To ensure the sustainability of programme evaluation activity, the evaluation officers make use of the common Interreg virtual workspace where all important information is stored electronically. As well, all internal procedures are followed, as regards both processes (e.g. archiving, risks, anti-fraud, security of IT systems, data recovery in case of disaster) and human resources (e.g. annual evaluation of staff, workload analysis, training plan, substitution plan, programming of annual leaves to ensure continuity).

Evaluation Unit's responsibilities directly related to the evaluation function are detailed in [Annex D](#).

2. THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Regulatory requirements

According to the regulations, programme evaluations may address one or more of the following criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value with the aim to improve the quality of the design and implementation of programmes. Evaluations may also cover other relevant criteria, such as inclusiveness, non-discrimination and visibility, and may cover more than one programme. Other criteria relating to the needs of programmes may be addressed.

In addition, an evaluation for each programme to assess its impact is to be carried out by 30 June 2029.

All evaluations are published on the Programme's website.

The regulatory provisions require MA to draw up the current EvalPlan which is approved by the MC, as well as any amendment thereto. The MC also examines the progress made in carrying out evaluations, syntheses of evaluations and any follow-up given to findings.

Involved bodies

The evaluation process is led by the Evaluation Unit. Evaluations commissioned to external experts are commissioned, monitored and supervised by the Evaluation Unit. The evaluation officers within the Evaluation Unit may also carry out certain studies or evaluations, if deemed necessary during the implementation process.

Evaluation Steering Committee

An ESC shall be convened for each of the two Programmes and shall oversee the implementation of the EvalPlan and corresponding evaluations. The ESC shall convene for each evaluation exercise.

The **core membership** of the Committee will remain the same for the duration of its existence, and will include:

- The Head of MA (or his/her substitute);
- A representative of the NA;
- The evaluation officers within the Evaluation Unit (who also provide secretarial support: convening the Committee, organising consultations);
- A representative of the European Commission;
- A representative of ECU.

The MAs and NAs may also invite sectorial or academic experts for evaluations with technical nature.

The **functions of ESC** are:

- methodological function - to analyse and approve the preparatory and methodological documents for programme evaluations and the related deliverables, with a view to increasing their quality;
- partnership function - to ensure representation and consultation of the key actors in the cross-border programme in planning and implementing the programme evaluations;
- ownership function - to involve the key actors in the cross-border programme from the design phase and ensure they are aware of the evaluation results and any measures that need to be taken.

The ESC is consulted in the following indicative **stages**:

a. Evaluation Planning

- Approval of ToR, including the criteria for selecting the evaluators to ensure their functional independence (for evaluations commissioned externally)/of the Evaluation scope and timing (for evaluations carried out internally);

b. Evaluation Management

- Consultation on the inception report (for evaluations commissioned externally);
- Consultation on draft evaluation reports;
- Endorsement of the final evaluation reports, based on the quality grid previously filled in by the Evaluation Unit.

Monitoring Committee

In line with the regulations, the functions of the MC as regards evaluation are to approve the current EvalPlan and any other subsequent amendments to it and to examine the progress in carrying out evaluations, syntheses of evaluations and any follow-up given to findings.

Therefore, in line with the European Code of Conduct on Partnership⁷ the MC decides on the execution of the evaluations by analysing and approving the EvalPlan, examines the progress in carrying out evaluations whenever there are developments to be presented and discussed and analyses the response to the evaluation recommendations proposed by MA and the implementation status of accepted recommendations.

The division of responsibilities between the MA/Evaluation Unit, ESC and the MC, in relation to programme evaluation is presented in [Section B.3](#) - Involvement of stakeholders.

Evaluation Central Unit

ECU provides the Evaluation Unit both guidance and the relevant information received as part of the Evaluation Network coordinated by the European Commission. As well, it is part of the ESC of the Programme. The EvalPlan approved by the MC is also sent to ECU for information.

The procedural flows for drafting the EvalPlan before submission to MC, for drafting of preparatory documents for commissioning evaluations externally, for carrying out evaluations with internal expertise and ESC consultations is presented in [Annex D](#) - Procedural aspects.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

As regards the current EvalPlan, a first set of evaluation questions resulted from the analysis of the available evidence presented in [Section A.4](#) and enriched based on previous experience was consulted with the relevant programme structures, resulting in a final set of questions, grouped by evaluation criteria, that are included in [Section C.2](#) - Fiches of the planned evaluations. When the EvalPlan is submitted to the two MCs, the members are also able to make comments and proposals, including new proposed evaluation questions or themes.

In line with article 15 of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership, MA also involves the relevant partners in the evaluation of the Programme within the framework of the MC, where evaluation-related matters are presented and discussed. The two MCs are therefore able to comment on evaluation matters and make proposals.

Given the fact that for any programme-related process the involvement of the stakeholders brings in added value, a specific working group for programme evaluation may be established by each MC. Nevertheless, taking into account that the work of any group has to be based on constant and active input in order to bring useful results, such a group may be established only if enough participating members express their active interest in programme evaluation.

The responsibilities in relation to programme evaluation are divided between the MA/Evaluation Unit, ESC and the MC (as forum for the involvement of stakeholders) as follows:

Tasks	MA/Evaluation Unit	ESC (including NA)	MC
1. EvalPlan	Responsible for drafting	-	May submit proposals of evaluation questions prior to the drafting of the plan or during the approval process

⁷ Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds

			Approves the plan
2. ToRs, including the criteria for selecting the evaluators to ensure their functional independence (for evaluations commissioned externally)/of the Evaluation scope and timing (for evaluations carried out internally);	Responsible for drafting	Analyses and approves the ToRs/the Inception Report	- (should a specific MC working group on programme evaluation be established, it is kept up-to date on the progress of the ToRs/the Evaluation scope, which may be analysed upon request)
3. Selection of Evaluator (for evaluations commissioned externally)	Participates in the Evaluation Committee for selecting the evaluator established in line with the public procurement applicable rules	-	-
4. Draft and final evaluation reports (and Inception Report for evaluations commissioned externally) - quality aspects	Assesses the quality of the evaluation report and process based on the standards recommended in the official relevant documents.	Analysis and endorsement of the inception/evaluation reports, on the basis of the recommendations made by the Evaluation Unit.	- (should a specific MC working group on programme evaluation be established, it is kept up-to date on the progress of the reports, which may be analysed upon request)
5. Management of the evaluation	Direct contact point for programme evaluations, contract management for evaluation commissioned externally	Analysis of the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations; may make proposals on the response to evaluation recommendations	Is informed on the recommendations in the evaluation report, on the proposed response to evaluation recommendations and may make proposals
6. Follow-up	Tracks the progress made; MA uses a follow-up table to monitor the progress achieved in implementing the agreed evaluation recommendations	-	Is informed by MA on the progress achieved in implementing agreed evaluation recommendations

			and may make proposals
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In addition, stakeholders and project partners are involved in the evaluation of the Programme as part of the data collection process that takes place for each evaluation exercise, the reports being drafted taking into consideration their perception, opinions and suggestions.

4. THE SOURCE OF EVALUATION EXPERTISE

Given the fact that the evaluation function is ensured by the three evaluation officers within the Evaluation Unit for six Interreg programmes, the evaluations carried out for the Programme shall be, as a general rule, commissioned to external experts following internal procedures and the public procurement applicable rules.

The team of evaluators should preferably combine different experiences and skills: knowledge and experience in ETC/Interreg programmes; knowledge and experience in monitoring and measuring of regional development (for impact evaluations), knowledge and experience in data collection and visualization methodologies, knowledge and experience in stakeholder management.

In order to ensure the impartiality and functional independence of the evaluators and to minimise the risk of biased opinions or any unwanted interferences, the following measures are taken:

- inclusion in the ToR (endorsed by ESC) of provisions to ensure the independence of the evaluators (e.g. not MC members or observers, not having been involved in programming, in the calls for proposals, in the management of projects financed under the programme (depending on the type of evaluation));
- setting out clear award criteria and quality requirements;
- wide advertising of the public procurement procedure (including website and social media platforms);
- appointing a selection committee responsible for evaluating the bids against the criteria set out in the ToR, in line with applicable public procurement rules; the selection of the evaluators as part of a selection committee is performed, as a general rule, by different persons than the ones who drafted the ToR and are in charge of evaluation contract management;
- requesting signed declarations of impartiality and objectivity from the key experts and team leader to prevent any conflict of interest;
- as a general rule, performing of contract management and carrying out of ESC consultations not by the staff of the MA Unit, but by the evaluation officers in the Evaluation Unit, who are functionally independent from the other functions performed by MA, as regards both programming and implementation;
- carrying out any evaluations performed internally, if any, by the evaluation officers in the Evaluation Unit, who are functionally independent from the other functions performed by MA.

5. TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR STAFF DEALING WITH EVALUATION

Training for MA staff

Two of the current officers within the Evaluation Unit attended a full evaluation training programme designed specifically for the staff of evaluation units in Romania and organised under a TA project managed by ECU for supporting the evaluation capacity as regards EU funds. The training programme was delivered during 2019-2022 and covered various evaluation-related topics as the theory of change, indicators, evaluation design, quantitative and qualitative data analysis necessary in evaluations, evaluability and quality control. The

support and guidance offered by ECU shall continue to cover the Interreg programmes during the 2021-2027 programming period.

Regardless of the framework, the MA staff dealing with evaluation should continue to be involved in capacity building activities, including carrying out self-studies, and should continue to regularly take part in trainings, offered especially by Interact and ECU, on programme evaluation and wider related topics.

Such capacity building activities may refer to:

- self-study of evaluation plans, ToRs and reports, especially for the Interreg strands/programmes;
- self-study of published papers, guidelines and handbooks on programme evaluations;
- participating in online learning platforms/communities/groups related to programme evaluations;
- seminars on planning and managing evaluations, quality controlling of the evaluation reports;
- workshops on qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods and methods for impact assessment;
- meetings of the Evaluation Working Group, which allow exchange of information and good practices with other MAs, and meetings of the Evaluation Network in Romania, which allow wide exchange of ideas between the supply and demand sides;
- on-the job coaching;
- Interact and TESIM events on evaluation and wider related topics, which allow exchange of information and good practices with other Interreg/Interreg NEXT programmes.

Such capacity building activities are not budgeted separately in the current EvalPlan and should they entail participation costs for MA, these would be covered as part of the two Programmes' TA activities on a case by case basis, following internal administrative procedures. For the Evaluation Unit staff any such costs are expected to be also covered from other sources, since the evaluation function is carried for four other Interreg programmes.

Training for the other Programme structures

Evaluation-related capacity building initiatives may also be carried to support NA and JS staff of the two Programmes in performing their duties. Should such activities entail participation costs, these may also be covered as part of the Programmes' TA activities.

Training for MC members on evaluation-related aspects may also be considered, if such need arises during Programme implementation and especially if a MC working group on programme evaluation is established, to be financed under TA activities. As well, should general trainings be offered to MC members for this Programme (for new MC members, for example), then these trainings would also cover evaluation-related topics.

6. STRATEGY TO ENSURE USE AND COMMUNICATION OF EVALUATIONS

Dissemination of the evaluation reports

Final evaluation reports for each Programme shall be distributed to MC members, NA, EC, MA, JS and ECU. According to the regulations, they shall also be published on the Programme website.

Evaluation results are integrated into the Programme's structures' day-to-day work (including information and communication wise), posted on social media, used whenever relevant during technical or higher-level meetings and events.

In order to facilitate the dissemination of evaluation results in a user-friendly format, final evaluation reports shall be required to be delivered together with eye-catching one-pagers and info graphics, as well as project stories and testimonials, in order to facilitate their presentation to decision-makers and their use in future communication activities related to the Programme.

Follow-up and monitoring of evaluation recommendations

Evaluation recommendations may be accepted, marked as already implemented at the time they were proposed, rejected or deferred for later consideration (e.g. taken into account for the next programming period). In order to ensure practical use of evaluation results, where a specific course of action is decided for an evaluation recommendation, the MA will monitor the progress achieved in its implementation, by using a follow-up table. The status shall be reported by MA to the MC whenever there is significant progress or upon previous request by an MC member.

In order to support the programme bodies in implementing the recommendations, but also to ensure that the recommendations made are of practical nature, tentative action plans for implementing each recommendation are also to be requested from the evaluation teams.

7. OVERALL BUDGET FOR IMPLEMENTING THE EVALUATION PLAN

The overall budget for implementing the current EvalPlan, covering the external resources used, is 180.000 euro for ROMD Programme and 140.000 Euro for ROUA Programme, split as follows:

- for the implementation evaluation, including communication: 80.000 euro for ROMD Programme and 60.000 euro for ROUA Programme;
- for the impact evaluation, including communication: 100.000 euro for ROMD Programme and 80.000 euro for ROUA Programme.

The above-mentioned budget should cover all evaluation related external activities, including any necessary data collection, translation or interpretation, travelling.

The external resources used are backed up by the internal resources of the programmes' bodies (mainly staff), required for coordinating evaluations, collecting programme data, supporting external evaluators, decision-making, follow-up measures and dissemination and use of results. Any specific related costs are covered as part of the Programmes' TA activities.

The differentiated budget between the two Programmes reflects not only the difference that exists in their budget shares, but also the fact that for ROMD Programme there are more fields where hard projects are financed, which imply additional work, the range of evaluation questions is slightly wider and for the impact evaluation an additional specific objective also takes into account the interventions in the 2014-2020 period.

Evaluation functions and main activities	Timing	Estimated cost	Financial sources
Technical support and coordination of the MA, including Evaluation Unit	Continuously during the programming period	internal resources (mostly staff costs)	included under MA TA activities
Data provision	After calls for proposals are closed After project selection/contracting After the finalization of projects	internal resources (mostly staff costs)	included under MA/ JS TA activities
Evaluation studies	ROMD: August 2026-April 2027; April-December 2028 ROUA: April-December 2026; February-October 2028	external resources - ROMD: 180.000 euro ROUA: 140.000 euro	TA - external services
Dissemination of results and events	After performed evaluations	internal resources (mostly staff costs)	included under MA/NA/ JS TA activities
Capacity building initiatives	Continuously during the programming period	internal resources	included under MA/NA/ JS TA activities

8. QUALITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Quality assurance in implementing the current EvalPlan is a process integrated in all related steps:

1. Evaluation timing

The timing of the evaluations is planned in line with the expected evolution of the programme, so that evaluations are performed early enough to provide information to feed the decision-making process, but late enough in the programming period to benefit from a sound evaluation basis.

Timings may be adjusted in line with the actual evolution of the Programme.

2. Drafting the ToR

Ensuring quality will start with drafting the ToR in a clear manner which provides the potential bidders with the necessary information to draw up the offer, based on previous adequate planning. Clear award criteria and quality requirements are set. The ToR will be verified against the checklist in [Annex A](#) - Checklist for assessing the Terms of References. This checklist is designed to verify the pertinence of the ToR and the inclusion of all the needed items. It will be used by the Evaluation Unit while drafting the ToR to make sure that all necessary elements are included.

3. Selection of evaluators

Following the applicable public procurement rules, the evaluators will be selected by a selection committee responsible for evaluating the bids against the criteria set out in the ToR. All needed administrative steps are followed and the technical offers are thoroughly assessed against a previously established evaluation grid, which takes into account the elements in the ToR needed to perform the evaluations in a qualitative manner. The selection of the evaluators is done with a 70/30 technical score/price ratio. As a general rule, to ensure impartiality the persons appointed in the selection committee are different from the person who drafted the ToR.

4. Contract implementation

To ensure mutual understanding of the scoping, methodology to be applied and expected results, contract implementation starts with a kick-off meeting between parties to clarify all aspects of the ToR and technical offer and an Inception Report is requested. In addition, at least one mid-term progress report will keep the evaluation commissioners informed on the activities performed and further steps to be taken. The contract also includes a procedure for the early termination of the contract conditional on the quality of the work provided.

As a general rule, the person who drafted the ToR will be appointed as the MA's contract officer. Both the Evaluation Unit and the ESC have a role to play in assessing the quality of the inception and evaluation reports.

As regards the reports that are delivered, the Evaluation Unit shall be responsible for assessing the quality of the inception and final evaluation reports, by using the checklists presented in [Annex B](#) - Checklist for assessing the inception report and [Annex C](#) - Checklist for assessing the evaluation report. The checklist for assessing the quality of the inception report sets out the major aspects that need to be taken into account. The thorough checklist for assessing the evaluation reports includes the most important aspects for each part of a report as well as general considerations, allowing a thorough analysis of the report's quality. The checklists have two intended purposes that are related to evaluation management: (1) they represent tools for the evaluation commissioners to assess the content of the reports (2) they are practical tools to guide the evaluators, while preparing the reports. Therefore, the evaluators can self-rate their own progress during the writing phase. They can also use the checklists to identify weaknesses or areas that need to be addressed in their reports. To this end, the checklists shall also be included in the ToR for each evaluation, to serve as guidance for the evaluators in drafting the reports.

The reports are then consulted in the ESC. While the checklists will represent a tool for the MA's contract officer to verify the evolution of the reports from one version to another (from draft reports to final reports), only the final reports are sent in the ESC together with the checklist filled in by the MA's contract officer.

5. Disseminating the evaluation results

Having in mind the quality of the process of disseminating the evaluation results, the reports are required to be delivered together with highly visual summarised content. Details can be found in [Section B.6](#) - Strategy to ensure use and communication of evaluations.

6. Follow-up

The follow-up table used by MA for the progress achieved in implementing the agreed evaluation recommendations is a mean to ensure a structured way to both monitor achievements and keep the MC informed on all pending issues. As well, it ensures the practical use of the evaluation results and recommendations.

In case there will be a need to carry out evaluations internally, the Evaluation Unit will use the applicable elements of the checklist while drafting the Evaluation scope and timing and the subsequent evaluation reports, in order to ensure that the reports drafted internally follow as close as possible the standards requested from the ones commissioned to external experts.

C. PLANNED EVALUATIONS

The choices made below as regards the evaluation of the two Programmes are well rooted into [Section A.4](#) - Analysis of relevant evidence, where more details on the justification of those choices may be found. For a first evaluation exercise, focus is needed on the efficiency and effectiveness criteria and visibility. Relevance and EU added value are also important aspects that would also feed into the next programming period. Another crucial factor is the

fact that the TA funds of the two Programmes are limited (and depending on the level of eligible expenditures in the financed projects, in line with the TA flat rate approach) and have to cover the needs of programme structures, potential applicants and beneficiaries in two countries. As well, ROMD Programme benefits of a higher budget, which also translates in a higher budget available for evaluation.

The timings presented below are those anticipated at the time of writing the current EvalPlan and may be slightly adjusted in practice to the actual evolution of the programme, in order to reach the best need-benefit ratio, not requiring formal amendment of the EvalPlan. As well, practical experience has shown that timing delays may occur while applying the public procurement procedures needed to commit the evaluations. These kinds of delays are not regarded as needing to trigger EvalPlan amendments, should they not hinder the achievement of the final scope of the evaluations. However, major decisions as regards evaluation timing, scope, coverage or means of implementation need revisiting of the current document and formal EP amendment.

Assumptions on the expected evolution of the two Programmes

The following timetables as regards the finalisation of projects are taken into account in setting the timing of evaluations:

ROMD Programme						
Call for proposals/ Projects	Allocation (Interreg funds)	Launching	Deadline	Estimated contracting time	Maximum duration of projects ⁸	Estimated end date of projects
1 st Call for regular projects	40,317,100	August 10 th 2023	December 8 th 2023	1 st Quarter 2025	24+4 months	2 nd Quarter 2027
SO1.1	8,821,125					
SO1.2	2,533,247.57					
SO2.1	7,958,525.83					
SO2.2	9,796,925.11					
SO2.3	7,720,461.88					
SO3.2	3,486,813.78					
1 st Call for small scale projects	19,446,936	September 29 th 2023	January 8 th 2024	1 st Quarter 2025	18+3 months	1 st Quarter 2026
SO1.1	2,091,236					
SO1.2	1,688,832					
SO2.1	1,989,631					
SO2.2	6,531,283					
SO2.3	3,308,769					
SO3.1	3,837,184					
LIP - SO1.1	10,000,000	1 st Quarter 2024	2 nd Quarter 2024?	1 st Quarter 2025	24+4 months	1 st Quarter 2027
2 nd Call (small scale projects:	18,168,177	1 st Quarter 2025	2 nd Quarter 2025	2 nd Quarter 2026	18+3 months for small scale projects	1 st Quarter 2028 for small scale projects
SO1.1						
SO1.2						
SO2.1						
SO2.2						
SO2.3						
SO3.1						
SO3.2)						

⁸ Includes the maximum duration of extension of implementation period according to the open calls.

ROUA Programme						
Call for proposals/ Projects	Allocation (Interreg funds)	Launching	Deadline	Estimated contracting time	Maximum duration of projects ⁹	Estimated end date of projects
1 st Call for regular projects SO2.1 SO2.2	12,666,237 7,599,742 5,066,495	August 3 rd 2023	December 4 th 2023	1 st Quarter 2025	24+4 months	1 ^{2t} Quarter 2027
1 st Call for small scale projects SO1.1 SO1.2 SO2.1 SO2.2 SO3.2	15,947,535 3,893,812 1,777,152 3,324,888 4,538,735 2,412,947	September 29 th 2023	January 8 th 2024	1 st Quarter 2025	18+3 months	2 nd Quarter 2026
LIP - SO1.1	10,000,000	1 st Quarter 2024	2 nd Quarter 2024?	1 st Quarter 2025	24+4 months	1 st Quarter 2027
2 nd Call regular projects SO1.1	4,472,918	January 2024	March-April 2024	1 st Quarter 2025	24+4 months	1 st Quarter 2027
2 nd Call small scale projects: SO1.2 SO2.1 SO2.3 SO3.1 SO3.2	17,650,557 761,637 1,424,952 4,991,827 9,848,226 623,915	2 nd Quarter 2024	1 st Quarter 2025	2 nd Quarter 2025	18+3 months	2 nd Quarter 2027

The co-financing rate is 90%.

Data collection

In order to minimise the risk derived from the length of evaluations, the Programme closely monitors the physical and financial achievements of the financed projects and keeps track of projections, so that informed implementation decisions may be made in due time based on own analysis. As regards the efficiency of the implementation system, users' feedback right away would be a valuable asset. The Programme may then be able to incorporate users' perceptions into the decision-making process, as an ongoing evaluation approach to streamline the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme, which is also in line with the Programme's participatory approach.

Therefore, **questionnaires** will be used at key points to collect users' opinions, their aggregated results feeding directly into informed evidence-based decisions. These questionnaires will be applied to all applicants after the calls for proposals are closed, to all unsuccessful applicants after project selection, to successful applicants after project contracting and to all beneficiaries after project finalisation. The actual questions in each questionnaire will be proposed by the Evaluation Unit and agreed with the MA Unit, while the responses will be aggregated by the Evaluation Unit and sent to the MA Unit for consideration. This approach would also allow the beneficiaries and applicants to fill in the information while it is still fresh and prevent them from receiving very long questionnaires at the time programme evaluations are performed, generating a higher response rate. The

⁹ Includes the maximum duration of extension of implementation period according to the open calls.

aggregated responses shall also be ready to be provided to the evaluators for the subsequent programme evaluations or other programme structures and may be used in technical or MC meetings.

For the implementation evaluation performed externally, most relevant data will be available in Jems, programme strategic and implementation documents, DMCS and relevant procedures being also available. Given the 2021-2027 approach of the result indicators, it is expected that they will be measured by the Programme mostly based on Jems data, mirroring how successful EU action has been in achieving or progressing towards its objectives. Programme evaluation as regards effectiveness would therefore not have to measure the progress in achieving the indicators, but rather to analyse how the mechanisms behind worked, looking for evidence of why, whether or how the changes are linked to the EU intervention.

For some criteria (e.g. relevance) and for the impact evaluation, apart from the data available in Jems, the evaluators will have to base their work on other sources, including the statistical data in the participating countries. Therefore, collection of additional data from primary and secondary sources may be necessary to be performed by the evaluators as part of their contracts.

The territorial analysis performed for drafting the ROMD Programme revealed the lack of comparable statistical data between the two countries, as some indicators are missing or are different in the two states, the analysis of the whole area being based on the information obtained from rendering the statistical data provided by international, national and local sources, further complemented by the study of different documents relevant for the policy objectives, the document sometimes having to be adapted along the process. For the ROUA Programme the territorial analysis revealed that the main obstacles encountered in drafting the document were linked to the availability of comparable data, and also of data available at regional level. Therefore, regional data was used whenever possible to offer a better picture of the specificities of border communities, which face very different challenges as compared to the national ones. For both Programmes the analyses had to be enriched with two-step consultations with stakeholders, organised under the form of interviews and focus-groups.

A similar approach is expected to be needed for future evaluations for both Programmes, complementing and enriching the statistical data available with information from the analysis of additional documents and documentation obtained through national and regional level sources, in order to form a sound evaluation base, depending on the exact methodology applied. Stakeholders' consultations are expected to also be needed for any form of territorial analysis to be performed during the evaluation of the two Programmes.

1. LISTS AND TIMETABLE OF THE EVALUATIONS

Planned programme evaluations, for each of the two Programmes, are summarised below:

Code	Objective of the evaluation	Content and scope of the evaluation			Estimated Period	Type of evaluation	Planned Cost
		Priorities	SOs	Interventions			
OngoingEval	To collect and take on users' feedback in order to streamline efficiency and effectiveness	All	All	All	January 2024-December 2029	Data provision	Internal resources
ImplemEval	To produce specific knowledge on the efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, internal and external coherence, visibility	All	All	All	ROMD: August 2026-April 2027 ROUA: April-	Implementation evaluation, including communication	ROMD: 80.000 euro ROUA: 60.000 euro

	and commitment to horizontal principles of the programme and to contribute to its management and performance				December 2026		
ImpactEval	To capture the change brought by the cooperation programme as a whole, highlighting peak fields, while also analysing the mechanism that stand behind the effects	All	All	All	ROMD: April-December 2028 ROUA: February-October 2028	Impact evaluation	ROMD: 100.000 euro ROUA: 80.000 euro

Additional evaluations

Additional evaluations may be carried out in case of emerging urgent needs, e.g. where programme monitoring reveals a significant gap from the goals initially set or where proposals are made for the revision of the programme.

These additional evaluations can address either issues regarding the entire programme or one or several priorities or specific objectives.

These evaluations cannot be anticipated at this stage and will be carried out either by external experts or by the Evaluation Unit.

Any ex-ante and SEA evaluations for the next Programmes, for the programming period 2028+, may also be financed as part of the TA activities, starting with 2026.

Retrospective evaluation

The Commission shall carry out a retrospective evaluation to examine the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value of each fund by 31 December 2031. This evaluation shall focus in particular on the social, economic and territorial impact of the funds in relation to the supported policy objectives. Based on previous experience, Interreg is expected to be also covered under this evaluation. Should the Programmes be part of the sample of Interreg NEXT programmes to be actively covered by this evaluation, all necessary data and support will be provided to the evaluators selected by the EC.

2. FICHES OF THE PLANNED EVALUATIONS

OngoingEval - Ongoing collection, analysis and use of data on the efficiency of the implementation system of the Programme	
Priority and specific objectives covered by the evaluation	all
Types of interventions to be evaluated	all
Type of evaluation	ongoing process evaluation
Focus and rationale of the evaluation	The two Programmes aim to incorporate users' perceptions into the decision-making process in order to streamline its efficiency and

	<p>effectiveness.</p> <p>By collecting users' opinions, the aggregated results are available to feed directly into informed evidence-based decisions, by increasing knowledge on what works and what needs improvements and why. Questionnaires are applied to all lead applicants after the calls for proposals are closed (to assess the application process), to all unsuccessful lead applicants after project selection, to successful lead partners after project contracting (to assess the selection and contracting processes) and to all beneficiaries after project finalization (to assess the implementation process and effectiveness at project level). The support granted by the programmes' structures to applicants and beneficiaries is also envisaged to be included, as well as the ease of reaching projects' objectives and the added value of the EU intervention.</p> <p>This approach not only supports the programmes' structures to adapt to the needs of the applicants and beneficiaries, but also allows the beneficiaries and applicants to fill in the information requested while it is still fresh and prevent them from receiving very long questionnaires at the time programme evaluations are performed, generating a higher response rate.</p> <p>The actual questions in each questionnaire are set before each process is launched, based on the proposals made by the Evaluation Unit that are discussed, adapted and agreed with the MA Unit. The responses are aggregated and analysed by the Evaluation Unit and sent in a structured form to the MA Unit for consideration and use during Programme implementation. The overall themes/main evaluation questions presented below will serve as basis for formulating the questions addressed to the lead applicants/beneficiaries, adapted to the type of respondents. Additional questions than the ones derived from the themes/main evaluation question below may be added along the way to incorporate any emerging needs or aspects that need basis for decisions.</p> <p>The responses received would also be ready to be provided to programme evaluators or other programme structures and may be used by the programmes' bodies in technical or MC meetings.</p>
<p>When the evaluation will be implemented</p>	<p>January 2024-December 2029</p>
<p>Main evaluation questions</p>	<p><i>(Conducted separately for each of the two Programmes)</i></p> <p>Efficiency</p> <p>Q1. Are the application, selection and contracting processes efficient? What can be improved? <i>(users' feedback on the application form and applicant's guide, selection and contracting process)</i></p> <p>Q2. What are the major difficulties faced by the beneficiaries during the implementation of projects? <i>(feedback on difficulties faced during project implementation stages, including project finalisation)</i></p> <p>Q3. Is Jems efficient? What can be improved? <i>(feedback on the practical use of Jems)</i></p> <p>Q4. Are the simplification actions taken at Programme level appreciated by users? What can be improved? <i>(feedback on Programme level actions taken - e.g. the use of SCOs)</i></p> <p>Q5. Do the beneficiaries receive sufficient support from the Programme bodies to prepare projects and implement them? <i>(feedback on the support granted by the programme bodies to applicants and beneficiaries)</i></p> <p>Q6. Are the potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries aware of the anti-fraud measures taken by the Programme bodies? <i>(checking the beneficiaries' and potential beneficiaries' awareness - question also used as instrument to raise awareness)</i></p>

	<p>Effectiveness</p> <p>Q7. According to the beneficiaries, have the projects managed to reach their objectives? <i>(beneficiaries' perception on the extent to which project objectives were reached)</i></p> <p>Q8. Were the expected outputs and results at project level easily reachable? <i>(users' feedback on the ease of reaching the expected outputs and results)</i></p> <p>Q9. Were there any internal or external factors that affected, positively or negatively, the process of reaching the objectives/expected outputs and results? <i>(users' feedback on internal and external factors affecting project objectives/expected outputs and results)</i></p> <p>Q10. Did the needs change from project submission to project implementation? If so, did the change affect project implementation? <i>(beneficiaries' feedback on the relevance of the needs covered any effect on effectiveness)</i> - also touching relevance criterion</p> <p>EU added value</p> <p>Q11. To what extent could the projects' results and outputs have been achieved without support from the Programme? <i>(users' feedback on the added value of the Programme for reaching the results and outputs)</i></p>
Methodological approach and possible methods	<p>Method: qualitative research</p> <p>Tools: desk research, data collection through questionnaires and analysis</p>
Data sources	<p>administrative data on project lead applicants and project beneficiaries are needed to direct the questionnaires, available in Jems; to generate a high response rate, questionnaires reach the applicants and beneficiaries through their usual contact channels (e.g. JS officers, Jems)</p>
How the evaluation will be implemented	<p>internal expertise used, covering all calls for proposals and contracted projects</p>
Planned cost (Euro)	<p>internal resources used</p>

ImplemEval - Implementation evaluation of the Programme, including communication	
Priority and specific objectives covered by the evaluation	all
Types of interventions to be evaluated	all
Type of evaluation	implementation evaluation
Focus and rationale of the evaluation	<p>The risk of decommitment and the achievement of objectives in terms of output and result indicators, as well as forecasting based on the contracted and selected projects, is constantly monitored by the programme bodies in order to make informed decisions, therefore it is not included in the evaluation process. User's feedback on efficiency aspects is also collected constantly and feeds the decision-making process.</p> <p>Since the management and control systems of the two Programmes are a roll-over of the previous one and feedback from the applicants and beneficiaries is collected after each step as part of the OngoingEval to allow constant improvements, the evaluation does not cover in detail each</p>

	<p>and every part of this system and the procedural workflows. Instead, it investigates whether there are bottlenecks or major issues faced and whether the new elements were effective in practice - as the use of SCOs, TA flat rate.</p> <p>As regards efficiency, the evaluation focuses on identifying any underused simplification opportunities.</p> <p>To deepen knowledge on the two Programmes, but also to feed into the next programming process, the evaluation also covers aspects related to the Programmes' relevance.</p> <p>Therefore, the implementation evaluation is performed in order to produce specific knowledge on the efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, coherence and visibility of the two Programmes and to contribute to their management and performance.</p> <p>The findings collected so far through the ongoing process evaluation shall also be provided to the evaluators to be used in their analysis.</p>
<p>When the evaluation will be implemented</p>	<p>ROMD: August 2026-April 2027</p> <p>ROUA: April-December 2026</p>
<p>Main evaluation questions</p>	<p><i>(Conducted separately for each of the two Programmes; some of the questions are only applicable for ROMD Programme, marked accordingly)</i></p> <p>Effectiveness</p> <p>Q1. To what extent is the Programme delivery taking place as expected initially? <i>(whether the evolution of the programme is in line with the initial expectations of the Programme bodies)</i></p> <p>Q2. Are there any internal or external factors that foster or affect the process of achieving the Programme's objectives and outcomes, at programme level or by specific objective? <i>(how does the delivery mechanism work and which factors have a contribution to achieving Programme outputs and results - e.g. use of SCOs, types of projects financed)</i></p> <p>Q3. To what extent is the administrative and financial capacity of the Programme bodies and of the beneficiaries a success or hindering factor? <i>(whether the capacity of programme bodies and beneficiaries affects or supports Programme delivery towards objectives; advance payments and TA flat rate are also to be investigated under this question)</i></p> <p>Q4. Did the Programme take the necessary measures to effectively involve relevant partners in programme management and delivery? <i>(whether the measures taken by the programme to involve relevant partners in programme management and delivery are effective)</i></p> <p>Efficiency</p> <p>Q5. Are there any bottlenecks or major issues affecting the efficiency of the Programme's implementation system, by implementation phase? <i>(whether the efficiency of the Programme is affected by deficiencies in the implementation system - project application, assessment, selection, contracting, implementation, finalisation)</i></p> <p>Q6. To what extent does the Programme use the available options to streamline and simplify operations? <i>(whether the Programme found the right balance to streamline and simplify operations or more options should be taken into account)</i></p> <p>Relevance</p> <p>Q7. To what extent did the programme strategy respond to the needs identified at programming stage? <i>(whether the Programme strategy responded in practice to the needs</i></p>

	<p><i>identified initially in the programming stage)</i></p> <p>Q8. To what extent is the programme strategy relevant to the current needs of the people in the cross-border area? <i>(whether the needs of the Programme area changed over time and are addressed by the Programme strategy)</i></p> <p>Coherence</p> <p>Q9. To what extent are the interventions under the Programme internally coherent and able to create synergic effects? <i>(how well the Programme interventions work together and whether their interaction is capable of creating synergic effects)</i></p> <p>Q10. To what extent is the Programme coherent with other EU interventions having similar objectives which also cover the eligible territory? - ROMD Programme only <i>(how well the Programme works with the other EU interventions - complementarities, gaps)</i></p> <p>Q11. To what extent is the Programme coherent with the strategies and initiatives in place? - ROMD Programme only <i>(e.g. EUSDR, New Bauhaus Initiative, green infrastructure, green procurement, strategic use of public procurement)</i></p> <p>Communication and visibility</p> <p>Q12. Do the communication activities/actions carried out by the programme authorities lead to the achievement of the main communication objectives set out in the Programme?</p> <p>Q13. Which are the instruments and tools that have the highest outreach to potential beneficiaries/beneficiaries/stakeholders/general public?</p> <p>Q14. How could the Programme's visibility be increased?</p> <p>Q15. How effective was the programme in supporting project communication activities? - ROMD Programme only <i>(this set of questions targets the evaluation of the communication strategy of the Programme, aims to point at what would be needed to reach more people in terms of Programme visibility)</i></p>
Methodological approach and possible methods	<p>Method: mix of quantitative and qualitative methods</p> <p>Tools: data collection and analysis, desk research, interviews, surveys, stakeholder analysis, case studies</p>
Data sources	programme strategic and implementation documents, DMCS and relevant procedures, Jems data, findings of the ongoing process evaluation
How the evaluation will be implemented	evaluation commissioned externally, following public procurement applicable rules (open procedure)
Planned cost (Euro)	80.000 euro for ROMD Programme and 60.000 euro for ROUA Programme

ImpactEval - Impact evaluation of the Programme	
Priority and specific objectives covered by the evaluation	all
Types of interventions to be evaluated	all
Type of evaluation	impact evaluation
Focus and rationale of the evaluation	For both Programmes, the type of programme and their financial size represent significant constraints for being able to bring a sizeable

	<p>contribution to the financed policy objectives. In this context, it is also appropriate to explore impact evaluation from the perspective of their overall cross-border aim, taking into account the overall scope in the regulations.</p> <p>Therefore, the impact evaluation also aims to capture the effects in deepening the relations with and among the participating countries (from the NDICI perspective) and in promoting an integrated and harmonious regional development in the cross-border region, while also analysing the mechanisms that stand behind the effects.</p> <p>Effects in the financed fields will still be analysed, having in mind the cross-border character of the two Programmes.</p> <p>Besides the impact, the criteria directly covered are EU added value, sustainability (for ROMD Programme) and visibility. Other criteria, as effectiveness, relevance or coherence might need to be taken into consideration for answering certain evaluation questions (pointing to internal and external success or hindering factors). In assessing visibility, the impact of the communication activities/actions taken at Programme level shall also be evaluated.</p> <p>The evaluation findings will be available and may also be integrated into the final performance report to be submitted to EC by 15 February 2031.</p>
<p>When the evaluation will be implemented</p>	<p>ROMD: April-December 2028</p> <p>ROUA: February-October 2028</p>
<p>Main evaluation questions</p>	<p>General impact</p> <p>Q1. How do the cross-border interventions of the Programme contribute to deepening the relations between the two participating countries? <i>(to capture the impact at programme level from the external cooperation perspective, also analysing the “why”; the extent to which the Programme contributed to the cooperation of key actors in the Programme area should be a central point)</i></p> <p>Q2. To what extent do the cross-border interventions of the Programme contribute to promoting an integrated and harmonious regional development in the cross-border region? <i>(to capture the impact at programme level from the CBC point of view, also analysing the “why; integrated and harmonious regional development is also to be regarded from the point of view of: coordination, balanced development, environmental sustainability, cultural aspects, cooperation governance)</i></p> <p>Q3. Are there any unintended or spill-over effects of the cross-border investments, inside or beyond the eligible area? <i>(to identify any unintended/spill-over effects of the Programme)</i></p> <p>Q4. What are the internal and external factors fostering or affecting the effects of the Programme? <i>(to analyse relevant influencing factors and point out the most important ones)</i></p> <p>Policy fields</p> <p>Q5. Which are the fields where the Programme brings the highest effects and why? <i>(to highlight the wider or more narrow fields where the programme has the highest impact; the effects in the financed fields should be examined bearing in mind the limited funds available and the specific cross-border scope of the Programme; in analysing the effects both the current and expected contribution should be taken into account - based on the finalised and contracted projects;</i> <i>given the cross-border character, the overall analysis should take account of the following wider scopes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - enhanced risk preparedness and disaster resilience and

	<p><i>diminished material damages and loss of human lives in the border area communities (analysis also taking into account 2014-2020 interventions)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>enhanced protection and preservation of nature, protected areas and biodiversity in the cross-border region</i> - <i>improved access to and quality of education, training and lifelong learning in the cross-border area</i> - <i>increased access to healthcare services in the cross-border region (analysis also taking into account 2014-2020 interventions)</i> - <i>development of the cross-border area as a touristic destination (for ROMD Programme only, analysis also taking into account 2014-2020 interventions)</i> - <i>reduced disparities in terms of institutional capacity and public policies in the cross-border area</i> - <i>coherent response provided at the external EU border (analysis also taking into account 2014-2020 interventions)</i> <p>EU added value</p> <p>Q6. To what extent has the Programme brought outputs and results that cannot be adequately achieved at national level? Can specific examples be provided?</p> <p><i>(whether the results and outputs would have been reached without EU funds - e.g. by the participating states acting alone with national funds or by the beneficiaries without grants received for cooperation)</i></p> <p>Sustainability - ROMD Programme only</p> <p>Q7. Are the Programme's outputs and results sustainable on long term? <i>(whether the benefits are likely to continue beyond the interventions)</i></p> <p>Visibility</p> <p>Q8. Is the Programme successful in raising the awareness of the beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries/general public on the positive impact of the EU financial contribution?</p> <p>Q9. Which communication activities/actions or instruments/tools were the most effective?</p> <p>Q10. How could this effect be increased in the next programming period? <i>(this set of four questions aims to capture the impact achieved by the Programme's communication activities/actions)</i></p>
<p>Methodological approach and possible methods</p>	<p>Method: theory-based evaluation (realist evaluation and contribution analysis are taken into account at this stage, but the exact combination of methods is requested from the external evaluators)</p> <p>Tools: desk research, interviews, focus groups, expert panels, case studies, surveys</p>
<p>Data sources</p>	<p>programme strategic and implementation documents, DMCS and relevant procedures, Jems data, findings of the ongoing process evaluation</p>
<p>How the evaluation will be implemented</p>	<p>evaluation commissioned externally, following public procurement applicable rules (open procedure)</p>
<p>Planned cost (Euro)</p>	<p>100.000 euro for ROMD Programme and 80.000 euro for ROUA Programme</p>

ANNEXES

ANNEX A - CHECKLIST FOR ASSESSING THE TERMS OF REFERENCES

The present ToR Checklist¹⁰ was produced as part of the Guide for Drafting the Evaluation Plans of the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy in Romania and it was adjusted.

A checked box by a question indicates that item is not problematic.

Checklist	Yes
1. The administrative specifications	
1.1. Is the weight of price in comparison to the other selection criteria balanced and not excessive?	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2. Is the structure of the technical offer indicated (main contents, chapters, length, etc.)?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The technical specifications	
2.1. Context, objectives and scope	
2.1.1. Is the policy context of the evaluation (EU regulation, Evaluation Plan, OP and other EU or national relevant decisions) explained?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.1.2. Are the main objectives and the users of the evaluation identified?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.1.3. Is the type of evaluation (e.g. preliminary study, implementation or process, impact, mix of different types) defined?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.1.4. Are the interventions to evaluate, the territory to cover and the period to examine (the scope of the evaluation) well-defined and clearly distinguishable?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.1.5. Is a brief description of the implementation and the advancement of the interventions to evaluate provided?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.1.6. Are the key stakeholders of the evaluation identified?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.1.7. Are the evaluation questions clearly stated? Are the key evaluation questions well-defined?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.1.8. Is the ToC of the interventions to evaluate clarified? Or, is the evaluator requested to identify the pertinent ToC?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2. Methodology	
2.2.1. Is the general methodological framework suggested? And, is a request for major specification of the methodological approach made?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2.2. Is expected data to use defined? And, is a request for major specification of necessary data and collection tools made?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2.3. Is a request for clarifying the main methodological techniques and analyses to use clearly made?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2.4. Are the main tasks to fulfil in the evaluation identified?	<input type="checkbox"/>

¹⁰ The checklist uses different sources and adapts their contents according to the experience of the authors; in particular see: Evaluation Checklist, Gary Miron (2004); Checklist for preparing the Evaluation Report ILO (2021); EVALSED: The resource for the evaluation of Socio-Economic Development (2013)

Checklist	Yes
2.2.5. Is a request for specifying the methods used to validate results and findings of the evaluation made?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2.6. Are the main deliverables (reports, meetings) of the evaluation defined? And, are their main expected contents specified?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2.7. Are a risk assessment of the evaluation process and a specific quality control requested?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.3. Professional qualifications	
2.3.1. Are requirements for skills and experience of the team clearly defined? And, are these requirements coherent with the service requested?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.3.2. Are requirements for skills and experience clearly interpretable, sufficiently wide to be found in the market and not limit competition?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.3.3. Is the multidisciplinary composition of the team expressly detailed (if necessary)?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.3.4. Is the request of specifying the distributions of roles and responsibilities in the team made?	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Budget and Payment	
3.1. Is the maximum price for the evaluation stated?	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.2. Is specified how the budget of the evaluation has to be presented (total cost, detailed budget for main voices, etc.)?	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.3. Are the timing and the amount of the payments unambiguously defined?	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. General	
4.1. Is the number of objectives and evaluation questions not excessive? Can they be addressed in a unique evaluation?	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.2. If doubts on the feasibility of the evaluation exist, is a feasibility analysis included in the requests and a potential “plan B” defined (e.g. alternative approaches or the break of the contract)?	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.3. Is the language used clear, simple and always well-focused on the main elements?	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.4. Are all the requests sufficient and adequate to assess the proposals according to the adopted selection criteria?	<input type="checkbox"/>

ANNEX B - Checklist for assessing the inception report

The present Inception Report Checklist¹¹ is used for assessing the quality of inception reports. A checked box by a statement indicates that item is not problematic. Details are included below each statement

Checklist	Yes
1. General quality statements	
1.1. All provisions in the Terms of Reference and in the Technical Offer are addressed	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Details: ...</i>	
1.2. All aspects agreed in the kick-off meeting are addressed	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Details: ...</i>	
1.3. The approach for data collection is reasonable, feasible and likely to provide all information needed to answer the evaluation questions (particularly as regards data availability at beneficiary level)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Details: ...</i>	
1.4. The ratio between desk research and fieldwork is adequate to provide the information needed to answer the evaluation questions	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Details: ...</i>	
1.5. Statistical or other appropriate data analysis methods are proposed, whether the data are obtained from the national administrations or are generated by the consultant through surveys or by gaining access to administrative data	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Details: ...</i>	
1.6. Fieldwork is described and research methods are appropriate - such as interviewing methods - online, telephone or face to face, interviews with stakeholders, focus groups; the proposed questionnaires include all the appropriate questions (balance between open and closed questions, impartiality, clarity, specificity etc.) and the forms/models proposed are appropriate	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Details: ...</i>	
1.7. Identification of regions and projects for case studies is based on statistical or other appropriate analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Details: ...</i>	
1.8. In case there is an association between economic operators, the coordination mechanism between the consortium members is established	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Details: ...</i>	
1.9. Quality control procedures for all deliverables are established	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Details: ...</i>	

¹¹ This checklist was also used for the 2014-2020 programming period.

ANNEX C - Checklist for assessing the evaluation report

The present Evaluation Report Checklist¹² was produced as part of the Guide for Drafting the Evaluation Plans of the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy in Romania.

Instructions: Rate each component of the report using the following rubrics. Place a check mark in the cell that corresponds to your rating on each checkpoint. If the item or checkpoint is not applicable to the report, indicate the "NA" cell to the far right. Comments may be added in the dedicated row in each section.

1=Not addressed, 2=Partially addressed, 3=Fully addressed, NA=Not applicable

Checklist	1	2	3	NA
1. Executive Summary				
1.1. The programme/ IP/ SO/ theme evaluated is well described	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2. Evaluation questions and purpose of the evaluation are presented	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.3. A brief description of methods and analytical strategy (if appropriate) is provided	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.4. A summary of main findings and policy implications or recommendations is included	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.5. Length is adequate (in general no more than 10-12 pages, or around 10% of the report)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.6. Comments:				
2. Introduction				
2.1. The introduction helps the reader in approaching the report	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2. An overview of the report and the description of report structure are available	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.3. Objectives and scope of the evaluation are clearly presented	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.4. The programme/ intervention to evaluate, its expected use and relevant users are specified	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.5. References of the evaluation to the Evaluation Plan and other possible decisions of the MC are included	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.6. Evaluation questions and how they have been identified (e.g. interviews, surveys, discussion with the MA, meetings with MC and the stakeholders, etc.) are clearly described	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.7. Evaluation criteria included in the analysis are specified, as well as their relations with the evaluation questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.8. The target population of the programme/ IP/ SO (as relevant) and territorial areas covered by the intervention are clearly identified	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

¹² The checklist uses different sources and adapts their contents according to the experience of the authors; in particular see: Evaluation Checklist, Gary Miron (2004); Checklist for preparing the Evaluation Report ILO (2021); EVALSED: The resource for the evaluation of Socio-Economic Development (2013)

Checklist	1	2	3	NA
2.9. The main stakeholders of the evaluation are clearly identified	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.10. Comments:				
3. Background and context				
3.1. A description of the programme/ IP/ SO/ theme being evaluated (its strategy in terms of economic and social cohesion, strategic importance in the OP, etc.) is included	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.2. The cause-effect relations underlying the programme/intervention are explicitly presented (a ToC or other interpretative framework)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.3. The implementation of the programme/ intervention is well described and allows to understand possible bottlenecks or difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.4. The main interactions with other relevant European or national policies are identified and described	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.5. A well-focused review of the related literature is available to identify what is already known (including aspects on previous and similar financing and lessons learned etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.6. Comments:				
4. Methodology				
4.1. Evaluation approach and its rationale are clearly described and fit the ToC and the evaluation questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.2. Sources of information and data are adequately presented (e.g. primary or secondary data, sampling method, statistical error, questionnaires, timing of data collection, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.3. Analytical techniques are well described and allow to understand the reliability of the results	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.4. The strategy of combining methods/approaches (if any) is justified and allows to answer the evaluation questions properly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.5. Possible limitations of the evaluation are specified (e.g. limitations related to methods, data sources, potential sources of bias etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.6. Comments:				
5. Main findings				
5.1. The methodology is correctly applied	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.2. Details of analyses and findings are clearly and logically described	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.3. Analyses and findings cover all main aspects as deriving from the cause-effect relationships identified with the help of the ToC or other interpretative framework used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.4. Discussion of evaluation findings is objective and complete, including - where relevant - both negative and positive findings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.5. Findings are supported by evidence and are consistent with methods and data used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.6. All evaluation questions are addressed, and an explanation is included for questions that could not be answered	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.7. Findings with regard to the examined evaluation criteria and the evaluation questions are presented	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Checklist	1	2	3	NA
5.8. Unintended and unexpected results are discussed (if the case, applying to impact evaluations)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.9. Factors contributing to the success/failure of the programme /intervention are identified and discussed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.10. Comments:				
6. Conclusions, lessons learned and emerging good practices				
6.1. Answers to all evaluation questions and values of interventions/ themes in relation to the evaluation criteria are provided	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.2. Conclusions are formulated by synthesizing the main findings into summary judgments of merit and worth (any limitations of the results should be also explained)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.3. Conclusions are fair, impartial and consistent with the findings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.4. Conclusions are clear, concise and their potential generalization (at the level of a larger target groups, in time or in the space) is clarified	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.5. Conclusions reflect the analysis of horizontal or cross-cutting themes (including trans-territorial relationships in ETC, gender and environmental sustainability) conducted in the evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.6. Lessons learned, including context and applicability are included (if the case)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.7. Emerging best practices, including context and applicability are included (if the case)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.8. Comments:				
7. Recommendations and policy implications				
7.1. Recommendations logically follow from conclusions, lessons learned and good practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.2. Recommendations indicate the action needed to improve the performance of the programme/intervention in a concise manner. Long sentences and paragraphs are avoided	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.3. Recommendations are based on priority or importance (e.g. high, medium, low)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.4. Recommendations are sufficiently detailed (who is called upon to act, time frame for their implementation, costs and/or complexity, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.5. Recommendations were discussed and validated with implementers and stakeholders (if requested or useful)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.6. Comments:				
8. Annexes and references				
8.1. A suitable style or format is used consistently for all references	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.2. Annexes included useful information, that could not be detailed in the text and help to understand context or other aspects presented	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.3. All annexes are referenced in the text and are included in the Annexes section, in the order they are referenced	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.4. Data and information in the annexes are clearly presented and actually integrate the text	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Checklist	1	2	3	NA
8.5. Comments:				
9. General considerations				
9.1. The report is written clearly and set out logically	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.2. The report presents an independent point of view and is not influenced by any stakeholder	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.3. Specialized concepts are used only when necessary and clearly described (when useful, a glossary is included)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.4. Cross-cutting issues such as: (i) gender; (ii) tripartite and social dialogue issues (iii) international labour standards, (iv) environmental sustainability and (v) medium and long- term effects of capacity development action are assessed (if requested)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.5. All data is disaggregated by sex, age, ethnic group or other relevant demographic categories, where feasible;	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.6. Charts, tables and graphs are understandable and appropriately and consistently labelled	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.7. The report addresses the demand of the commissioner/s and is useful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.8. Comments:				

ANNEX D - PROCEDURAL ASPECTS

The current annex presents the procedural aspects regarding the drafting and implementation of the EvalPlan.

Drafting of preparatory documents for commissioning evaluations externally

Planning for the evaluations that will be carried out by external experts shall begin at least 9 months in advance of their intended start date. The first stage in the process will be the drafting of the ToR, which builds upon the information included in this EvalPlan.

Drafting of the ToR is one of the key tasks of the Evaluation Unit. The ToR document serves as a guide to drafting offers and performing evaluations and is a central part of the public procurement dossier for contracting the evaluation services.

After it is agreed with the MA Unit, the draft ToR document is consulted in the ESC, following the procedural flow described in Section B.2 - The evaluation process. Once the ESC has approved the draft ToR and once funds have been secured in the MDPWA budget in order to finance the evaluation, the public procurement process can begin. The ToR approved by ESC may be adjusted during the internal institutional approval process prior to launching the public procurement. The contracting time depends on the evolution of the public procurement process.

Carrying out evaluations with internal expertise

If the evaluations are carried out with internal expertise, the following steps should be followed:

1. Drafting a document on the Evaluation scope comprising the methodology to be used in order to perform the evaluation and a timetable for the activities to be carried out;
2. Producing a draft evaluation report (deadline - 6 months from the approval of the Evaluation scope and timing)
3. Submitting the draft evaluation report to ESC for comments;
4. Drafting the final evaluation report based on the comments from the ESC;
5. Sending the final evaluation report to ESC members for approval;
6. Approval of the final evaluation report by ESC, after treating any additional comments or observations.

ESC consultations

After the ToR (for evaluations commissioned externally)/the Evaluation scope and timing (for evaluations carried out internally) is finalised by the Evaluation Unit and agreed with the MA Unit, the ESC consultation process may be launched.

The Evaluation Unit informs the members of the ESC, by e-mail, about the intention to launch an ESC consultation procedure and about the topics to be analysed. The members of the ESC will be asked either to confirm, by e-mail, their availability to participate, or to appoint, also by e-mail, a designate to take part in this process.

In case one member does not confirm participation and does not appoint a designate, the activity of the ESC can continue without the respective member. However, the consultation process cannot be held without the participation of the head of MA (or his/her designate) and at least one representative of the Evaluation Unit.

During an evaluation exercise, the number of consultations among ESC members will depend on the complexity and duration of the evaluation. For evaluations commissioned externally, the Evaluation Unit performs a first quality check on the deliverables received from the evaluators prior to their submission to ESC. The deliverables are sent to the ESC for consultation or approval

only after they pass this first quality check. ESC members should take the necessary time to study the circulated documents so that they are in a position to contribute effectively to the ESC consultation. The decisions shall be taken by **consensus**.

In order to provide the members with the opportunity to thoroughly consult the documents, as a general rule the consultations shall take the form of written procedure, via e-mail. If deemed necessary by the members of ESC, an online consultation meeting may be convened.

Steps for the **written procedure**:

1. For the written consultation procedure, the Evaluation Unit submits to the ESC members via e-mail the necessary documents, with delivery and read receipt. Any additional points or comments from the participating institutions regarding the presented documents shall be sent to the Evaluation Unit by the member in the ESC, in the form of a consolidated position.
2. The objections or the agreement on the documents transmitted according to the written consultation procedure can be submitted to the Evaluation Unit by e-mail within maximum 5 working days from the date the documents were transmitted for interim evaluation reports and within maximum 7 working days for final reports. The deadline may be extended at the written request of one member, should the implementation calendar of the contract allow such extensions. Deadlines may be also set shorter.
3. If no objection was received by the deadline, the proposal is considered approved in the sent format.
4. In case objections are received, the Evaluation Unit formulates its position and sends it to the ESC members, together with the revised report, if necessary. The lack of reaction on proposals/objections is equivalent with the agreement with the received position.
5. The Evaluation Unit submits to the ESC members the final version of the documents adopted under the written consultation procedure.
6. Material errors in approved documents may be corrected under the condition that the Evaluation Unit consequently informs all the ESC members and all interested parties.

The Evaluation Unit, at the time of announcing via e-mail the intention to launch a consultation procedure, or the ESC members, while replying to this e-mail, may propose to organise an online meeting of the ESC instead of a consultation via written procedure.

Evaluation Unit/MA's staff's tasks related to the evaluation function

General tasks

- coordinating the evaluation activities of the Interreg programmes in line with the relevant regulations;
- drafting, revising and implementing the Evaluation Plans; organising timely programme evaluations and following the monitoring of the resulting recommendations;
- managing procurements and contracts for evaluation activities;
- supporting evaluation teams for programme evaluations carried out at the initiative of the Commission or of ECU;
- representing the Interreg programmes at evaluation coordination events organised by ECU (e.g. Evaluation Working Group);
- participating in training and evaluation capacity building activities organised by ECU, Interact or other bodies;
- being the key liaison point with major stakeholders for evaluation purposes;
- contributing to developing and refining indicators for the Interreg programmes;
- ensuring the evaluation reports are disseminated and made available to the public;
- tracking progress on the follow-up given to the findings of evaluations.

Tasks related to the evaluation, commissioned externally

- convening the Evaluation Steering Committee and participating in its decision-making process;
- attending and reporting to meetings of the MC or facilitating the participation of the contracted experts, if required;
- commissioning of evaluation contracts (preparing tender documentation, drafting ToR, participating in the evaluation committee for choosing successful tenderers);
- once contracted, monitoring and supervising the activities undertaken during the evaluation exercise (facilitating the meetings of key stakeholders with the evaluators, liaising with the evaluators contracted to provide evaluation services, facilitating suitable levels of access for consultants to key stakeholders during the course of their evaluation work, ensuring proper access for evaluators to the relevant monitoring and other available data, managing the Unit repository, which holds all relevant evaluation materials);
- quality controlling of all evaluation reports submitted under the terms of an evaluation contract (endorsing inception reports, ensuring evaluators meet deadlines for report submissions, commenting on draft reports, assessing the final evaluation reports against the evaluation grids and submitting the reports to the ESC).

Tasks related to the evaluations carried out internally (should such evaluations be deemed necessary)

- drafting the Evaluation scope and timing and submitting them to ESC consultation and endorsement;
- carrying out the evaluations (undertaking activities to support the evaluation project - collection of relevant data, including desk research, consultations with relevant stakeholders within the evaluation scope, etc., drawing up draft evaluation reports and final evaluation reports and submitting them to ESC for consideration).