

Summary

The purpose of the elaborated evaluation was to carry out an independent assessment of the ongoing implementation of the Operational Programme Technical Assistance(OP TA) as of 31 December 2018. In order to obtain the big picture of the OP TA implementation, the basic information on the OP TA programming document, including measurable indicators, information on the organizational position of the Managing Authority for the OP TA and its administrative capacities, on performed certification verifications and audits, announced calls, contracting and the drawing of financial resources. The database created within the second part of the evaluation process allowed for the answering of individual evaluation questions. Specific findings, conclusions and recommendations were also formulated in response to the evaluation questions.

The basic programming document of the OP TA has a clear and comprehensible structure. It provides sufficient information to the Managers of the Managing Authority for the OP TA as well as to eligible applicants. The processes performed on the part of the Managing Authority for the OP TA are elaborated in detail in the Internal Manual of Procedures of the Managing Authority for the OP TA and various other internal documents. Detailed information for applicants is provided in the calls for technical assistance projects, followed by information for beneficiaries in other guides, such as the Guide for the Beneficiary or the Guide for the Control of Public Procurement. Overall, it can be stated that methodology-related activities are carried out effectively by the Managing Authority for the OP TA. Converted to Full Time Equivalent (FTE), the implementation of the OP TA as of 31 December 2018 was carried out through 20.30 administrative capacities. The number of ACs seems to be sufficient with regard to the quality of the OP TA implementation; in addition, there were 2 vacancies that could potentially have been filled within the OP TA. In some periods, such as during the parallel termination of several running projects and the simultaneous submission of new applications for a non-reimbursable financial contribution, the administrative capacities of the OP TA Project Implementation Unit may temporarily experience increased workload. Such situation, however, can be addressed by effectively redistributing standardized positions, or by accumulating multiple standardized positions within one position or by filling vacancies. With regard to the established effective system of remuneration on a monthly basis, provided education and training possibilities and other stabilization or motivation tools, administrative capacities of the MA for the OP TA are stable in the long run. There was no fluctuation of administrative capacities of the MA for the OP TA in 2018 whatsoever.

The carried-out certification verifications and audits have identified a number of findings and deficiencies of varying severity. However, it can be stated that none of the said findings was severe enough to endanger the implementation of the OP TA in a significant manner. Based on the analysis of individual findings, however, it was possible to determine that some findings were present in overlapping - and thus problematic - areas. These areas included, in particular, improper verification of the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of expenditure in the process of expert evaluation of applications for a non-reimbursable financial contribution, insufficient verification of compliance with the rules and principles of public procurement, and non-compliance with the set-out procedures and deadlines on the part of the Managers of the MA for the OP TA. Given the specific nature of the projects implemented via the MA for the OP TA, where the beneficiary is not obliged to have a public tender completed at the time of submitting their application for a non-reimbursable financial contribution, the inadequate assessment of the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of expenditure within the process of expert evaluation can only be limited, however, it will most probably not be possible to completely eliminate this deficiency. The evaluation proposed several specific tools to be implemented by the MA for the OP TA in order to improve the performance of the expert evaluation, such as the presentation of sample projects and examples of good practice, the creation of a register of expert evaluators' experience and the exchange of information with the involvement of Project Managers. As for the administrative control of public procurement – it is performed by another organizational unit; therefore the MA for the OP TA can only influence it to a certain extent. Again, the evaluation suggested some options to make the control of public procurement more effective. This mainly refers to supporting the organizational unit which performs the control of public procurement within the MA for the OP TA in justified negotiations on increasing the number of their administrative capacities, and their adequate financial evaluation and education. Failure to comply with the established procedures and

deadlines could have had objective causes, such as increased administrative burden in certain periods, or may have been caused by the human factor – i.e. negligence on the part of the managers within the MA for the OP TA. The assessment of these causes should be the responsibility of the respective senior employee, but the MA for the OP TA should have a formal tool in place to monitor the mistakes made by individual managers. In the case of repeated misconduct caused by the negligence of a particular manager, the senior employee should take this into account and adjust the monthly remuneration of the manager in question accordingly.

The evaluation further focused on achieving the values of individual measurable result and output indicators, and the risk of failure to achieve the expected results of specific objectives. The OP TA monitoring and evaluation system, which defines a set of measurable OP TA indicators, is set up appropriately, although there is a relatively large room for improvement. The definitions and methods of calculating the achieved value of some measurable indicators are not defined precisely. The calculation methods often fail to indicate whether this is a cumulative value or an average achieved over a certain period of time. Also, for example, within the definition of one of the key output indicators “Average number of employees refunded from the OP TA” , it is not stated whether this is the number of ACs in accordance with Government Resolution No. 519/2014 on the Structure of entities implementing the European Structural and Investment Funds for the 2014-2020 programming period and securing administrative capacities by 2016, or the number of all employees reimbursed from the OPTA, including the employees of entities performing support activities, or employees working based on an agreement to perform work or a contract for services. Similar uncertainties occur in relation to several measurable indicators. Several activities within the OP TA have no measurable result indicator assigned. The MA for the OP TA should elaborate a system of measurable indicators to measure each intervention area or carried-out activity. The target values of some measurable indicators were exceeded as of 31 December 2018, while others are very likely to be exceeded in the near future. The MA for the OP TA naturally set the baseline and target values of measurable indicators based on the experience gained in the previous programming period 2007 - 2013. At present, however, the MA for the OP TA has sufficient experience from the current programming period, so it should therefore update these target values so as to reflect the actual state of implementation. The expected results of individual specific objectives are often formulated in a very vague manner and there is no definition of how they are to be met. The MA for the OP TA should finalize the method of evaluation of the expected results and determine which measurable indicators are assigned to a specific expected result. We deem it important to state that the MA for the OP TA cannot influence the achievement of some expected results as they are dependent on external factors or the actions of entities that are not financed from OP TA funds.

From the point of view of the future development of the OP TA implementation, the risk of lacking funds can be considered the most problematic area. The amount of funds within the announced calls, contracting at the level of almost 60% of the allocation, and drawing at the level of more than 34% of the allocation are disproportionately high considering the phase of implementation of the programming period. In the interest of effective financial management of the program, the MA for the OP TA should pay increased attention already at the stage of preparation of calls, in which it is necessary to ensure, in cooperation with eligible applicants, the most accurate estimates of the required amounts of OP TA funds. Consequently, in the process of assessing the submitted applications for a non-reimbursable financial contribution, and in particular in the process of the expert assessment thereof, the requirements of the beneficiaries need to be rationalised in a maximum way so as to avoid artificially over-estimated contracting of financial resources. Such over-contracting of funds that will actually not be spent within the projects makes it more difficult for the MA for the OP TA to keep track of the actual expenditures of individual eligible beneficiaries. In the future, it could also reduce the flexibility of the MA for the OP TA when announcing further calls or transferring funds between specific objectives or activities as and when needed.