



Evaluation of the coherence and relevance of the actions programmed and implemented within the SW Oltenia RP 2021 - 2027 - Mid-Term Review

Mid-Term Review Report



1



Contract No. 24033105/04.10.2024, having as object "The evaluation of the coherence and relevance of the actions programmed and implemented within the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 - mid-term review"

Beneficiary **South-West Oltenia Regional Development Agency**
Aleea Teatrului no. 1, Craiova, Dolj County, Romania
Tel: +40251411869

Provider **t33 Srl**
via Calatafimi 1, 60121 Ancona, Italy
Phone +390719715460

Deliverable Mid-term review Report

Date 24.03.2025

This report was prepared based on an independent evaluation conducted by t33 SRL. The opinions expressed in the report are those of the evaluation team and do not necessarily represent the views of RDA South-West Oltenia.



Table of contents

List of acronyms	5
I. Synthesis of the evaluation	7
II. The used methodology.....	10
III. General overview of the programme and of the implementation status by December 31, 2024.....	15
3.1 General overview of the programme.....	15
3.2 Analysis of the status of programme implementation by December 31, 2024	18
IV. Analysis of progress and challenges under CPR 1060/2021 and presentation of findings	59
4.1 Country-specific recommendations (CSR).....	59
4.2 Contribution to the Integrated National Energy and Climate Change Plan (PNIESC).....	70
4.3. Implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR).....	86
4.4. Analysis of the socio-economic situation	99
4.5. Progress made in achieving milestones	154
V. Results of the mid-term evaluation.....	162
5.1 The analysis conducted to answer the evaluation questions.....	163
5.2 Answer to the evaluation questions.....	181
VI. Conclusions	189
VII. Proposals.....	196
VIII. Action plan for implementing the evaluation recommendations.....	200
IX. Lessons learned for improving fund absorption and enhancing the system of indicators and statistical data required for future evaluations.....	204
X. Annexes	206
Annex 10.1 Bibliography.....	206
Annex 10.2 Literature review	206
Annex 10.3 Reconstruction of the theory of change and refined intervention logic based on evaluation findings, if applicable	206
Annex 10.4 Evaluability study	206
Annex 10.5 List of interviewed persons	206
Annex 10.6 Survey analysis Report	206



Cofinanțat de
Uniunea Europeană



Annex 10.7 Case studies.....	206
Annex 10.8 Benchmarking analysis.....	206
Annex 10.9 Expert panel consultation	206
Annex 10.10 Database.....	206
List of figures	207
List of tables	209



AUTORITATE DE MANAGEMENT
PROGRAMUL REGIONAL SV OLTENIA
www.adroltenia.ro
www.pr2021-2027.adroltenia.ro
facebook.com/adrsvoltenia

DEZVOLTĂM OLTENIA!

Conținutul acestui material nu reprezintă în mod obligatoriu poziția oficială a Uniunii Europene, a Guvernului României sau a Autorității de Management pentru Programul Regional Sud-Vest Oltenia 2021-2027.



List of acronyms

RDA	Regional Development Agency
MA	Managing Authority
PA	Partnership Agreement
RD	Research - development
RDI	Research, development, innovation
RDC	Regional Development Council
MC	Monitoring Committee
DESI	Digital economy and society index
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
GHG	Greenhouse gases
AI	Artificial Intelligence
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
NIS	National Institute of Statistics
OECD	Organization for Economical Cooperation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
PO	Policy Objective
SO	Specific Objective
EPSR/PEDS	European Pillar for Social Rights
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
INPEC/PNIESC	Integrated National Plan for Energy and Climate Change
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Plan
POCIDIF	Smart Growth, Digitalization and Financial Instruments Programme
ROP	Regional Operational Programme



RP	Regional Programme
SWO RP	South-West Oltenia Regional Programme
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation (EU) 1060/2021
CSR	Country Specific Recommendation
TDS	Territorial Development Strategy
SIDU	Integrated Strategy for Urban Development
SRE	Source renewable energy
SRTL	Long -Term Renovation Strategy
ITC	Information and Communications Technology
EU	European Union



I. Synthesis of the evaluation

The mid-term review of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 responds to the obligations established by EU Regulation 2021/1060¹, being realized in accordance with the provisions of Art. 18, according to which member states must submit to the Commission, by 31 March 2025, an evaluation for each programme regarding the outcome of the mid-term review, along with a proposal for the definitive allocation of the flexibility amount.

Therefore the Mid-Term Review Report (MTR) for the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 provides an overview on the progress registered by the programme on 31.12.2024, with emphasis on the evaluation of the programme's contributions to the national priorities Nation in the field of energy and climate change (PNIESC), on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (PEDS), reduction of the regional socio-economic disparities, addressing the country specific recommendations and the progress in achieving the milestones.

The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 aims to improve the economic competitiveness, reduce territorial disparities and increase the quality of life of citizens, investing in key sectors such as transport, education, energy efficiency and urban regeneration through 11 specific regional objectives, which contribute to the EU policy objectives.

The analysis carried out within the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 shows significant progress in its implementation, especially from the perspective of launching the calls for proposals and contracting the projects, although there are also some challenges related to the lower interest of certain potential beneficiaries. Thus, by the end of 2024, 36 calls for proposals were launched within the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme, representing about 80% of the total financial allocation of the programme, while the eligible value of the signed contracts was over 60%. However, the process of making payments and achieving the objectives set at European and national level has been slower. Despite this, based on the current state of the contracted projects, most of the priorities in the programme have considerable potential to achieve the proposed targets for 2029, both in terms of output and result

¹Regulation EU 2021/1060 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and laying down financial rules applicable to those funds, as well as to the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for financial support for border management and visa policy.



indicators. Notable exceptions are the risks associated with the achievement of indicators for SO 1.2 and SO 2.7, detailed in the report, for which corrective measures are recommended.

There is also a greater interest from beneficiaries for certain priorities, which is reflected in the total value of projects submitted under the calls of: Priorities 1, 4, 5 and 7 where there was a high level of submission higher than the allocation for the launched calls. In contrast, in the case of Priorities 2, 3, 6 and 8, the initial allocations have not yet been fully used by the submitted projects, but it is important to note that there are open calls at the time of drafting the report, and the number of submitted and contracted projects is expected to increase. The risks related to the absorption of financial allocations target the specific objectives OS 1.2 and OS 2.7.

SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 directly supports PNIESC through strategic investments in energy efficiency, green-blue infrastructure and sustainable urban mobility, under priorities 3 and 4 of the programme. Indirect contributions were also identified under SO 1.1, SO 1.3, SO 1.4 (P1), SO 3.2 (P5), SO 4.2 (P6), SO 5.1 and SO 5.2 (P7). In order to maximize the impact on the objectives of the PNIESC, a series of recommendations were proposed, summarized below and detailed in **Chapter VI. Proposals**:

- allocation of additional funds dedicated to SO 2.1;
- careful monitoring of the progress of the indicators related to SO 2.1, SO 2.7 and SO 2.8, in order to identify possible risks in achieving the established targets and to be able to take remedial measures;
- collection of information from beneficiaries, regarding the interventions that had measures to increase energy efficiency foreseen and therefore, have a contribution to the dimensions of the PNIESC, through monitoring/reporting activities or on a sample basis within the framework of future evaluations of the programme;
- in the case of SO 1.4, it is proposed, within the framework of future evaluation activities of the programme, to see also to what extent the training programs also considered the development of technical skills in the field of energy and/or other subjects related to the PNIESC;
- focusing the future activities of evaluating the impact of the SW Oltenia RP on differentiating the programme's contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Also, through the actions and measures supported, the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme contributes to the EU's 2030 headline targets on employment, skills and poverty reduction. Thus, the projects that will be supported and implemented under certain specific objectives (e.g. RSO 4.2) will directly contribute to the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights. In order to further strengthen the contribution to the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the following proposals have been formulated, which can be consulted in detail in Chapter VI:



- for RCR01 and RCR102, it is recommended to collect information on differentiated employment among women and young people, at least based on a sample of projects, and/or through ad-hoc surveys or evaluation activities.

Although the actions and interventions of the SW Oltenia RP present a high degree of compatibility with the country-specific recommendations, a number of improvements and adjustments have been identified, such as:

- reallocating any available funds from other SOs to supplement the financial allocation of Priority 1, SO 1.3, in order to stimulate the economic competitiveness of enterprises;
- intensifying the efforts towards launching the calls for proposals focused on investments in expanding RDI capacities and adopting advanced technologies (SO 1.1, Priority 1);
- introducing RSO 1.6 - Supporting investments that contribute to the objectives of the Strategic Technologies Platform for Europe (STEP platform);
- supplementing the funds dedicated to SO 2.1, by redistributing the unused amounts from SO 2.7, where the level of contracting is below expectations;
- introducing RSO 4.3 - Promoting the socio-economic inclusion of marginalized communities, low-income households and disadvantaged groups, including people with special needs, through integrated actions targeting housing and social services, to respond to country-specific recommendations on poverty reduction and promoting social inclusion, including through the provision of social housing for vulnerable households.



II. The used methodology

The methodology applied for the preparation of the mid-term review report of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 was designed to provide an in-depth analysis of the progress and challenges encountered in the implementation of the programme until the end of 2024, consisting of a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, described below. This methodological framework was structured to cover the relevant analysis criteria of the programme, so as to efficiently respond to the specific requirements of the CPR and to be able to provide objective answers to the evaluation questions proposed at the level of the Terms of Reference.

The methodological approach used to collect the data necessary for the evaluation process included the following mix of methods: i) documentary research; ii) collection of statistical and monitoring data; iii) interviews; iv) survey; v) case studies; vi) focus groups; vii) panel of experts.

Documentary research

The documentary research was the starting point for the evaluation of the interventions of the SW Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027. This involved the collection of qualitative and quantitative information from documents, data, legislative references, relevant studies for the context analysis, administrative data, etc. The evaluators considered collecting the relevant information from several documentary sources, specific to the topic of each priority of the programme, which address different aspects relevant to the evaluation process and for understanding the context of each priority. The documents consulted by the team of experts to carry out the literature review are presented in **Annex 10.1 Bibliography**, and their synthesis is presented in **Annex 10.2. Literature review**.

Collection of statistical and monitoring data

The evaluators collected quantitative information, data, context indicators, programme indicators, indicators from official data sources (e.g. Eurostat, NIS), which provided relevant information on the interventions supported by the SW Oltenia RP and the context of the implementation of the interventions. The main geographical reference for the collection of statistical data was the regional level (whenever data were available) and national level, the data being compared with EU averages. The statistical data used to analyze the socio-economic situation and the evolution of the context at the level of the sectors covered by the priorities of the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 are provided in **Annex 10.6 Database**.

As for the monitoring indicators, they were made available by the MA of the SW Oltenia RP.

Interviews





The contract foreseen, according to the technical offer submitted, the organization of interviews with key actors at the level of each priority of the SW Oltenia RP, such as MA representatives, members of the Monitoring Committee, representatives of the categories of beneficiaries supported or other relevant key actors.

The aspects pursued during the interviews mainly concerned the relevance of the actions financed within the RP, the evolution of needs within the various sectors targeted by the interventions, the barriers encountered in the preparation of the funding applications, risks regarding the implementation of projects and the achievement of the objectives established. The list of institutions/organizations interviewed for each priority of the programme can be consulted in **Annex 10.5 List of interviewees**.

Survey

The questionnaire-based survey was applied online among the beneficiaries of the priorities for which there was a relevant number of financing contracts concluded at the time of the survey design, in order to obtain their point of view on the programme interventions under evaluation, respectively among the beneficiaries of the interventions supported under priorities 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 (priorities for which there are more than 4 contracted projects). Following the application of the survey, 44 responses were collected from the programme beneficiaries.

Case studies

The case studies were proposed to highlight some experiences on the ground on how the programme operations contributed to addressing the existing needs in the different areas covered by the programme priorities and to identify potential obstacles in the preparation and implementation of projects. They envisage the use of project documents and interviews based on a semi-structured model with beneficiaries. In total, in the context of the mid-term review of the SW Oltenia RP, 12 case studies were carried out. The list of beneficiaries interviewed for the case studies can be found in **Annex 10.5 List of interviewees**.

Focus group

In the context of the mid-term review of the SW Oltenia RP, the focus group was proposed in order to obtain the point of view on the programme interventions under evaluation, in particular with regard to the conclusions and findings formulated.

The agenda of the focus group included the following topics: the relevance of the actions financed under the priorities related to the SW Oltenia RP in relation to the existing needs; aspects related to coherence and complementarity; perceptions regarding collaboration and cooperation at regional level in the areas targeted by the programme interventions; factors that favor or hinder the progress of interventions financed through the SW Oltenia RP; recommendations regarding the improvement of the management



and implementation process of the SW Oltenia RP. The focus group brought together 7 participants, representatives of beneficiaries with projects financed under the RP (including phased projects).

Panel of experts

In the case of the present evaluation, the panel of experts was composed of a group of 2 external experts, consulted by the evaluators at an intermediate stage of the evaluation process, to deepen the understanding of the implementation context of the interventions financed through the SW Oltenia RP and of the first results of the evaluation process, as well as to collect pertinent opinions, to guide the completion of the evaluation process.

One of the experts is involved in an interim evaluation of an ERDF programme in another EU Member State, while the second one has experience in the field of environment, being involved in the development of a study for DG REGIO to support the interim evaluation of the Cohesion Policy programmes for the 2021-2027 period, financed from the ERDF, the Cohesion Fund and the JTF. The panel of experts also suggested elements to be considered in the recommendations formulated regarding the contribution of the RP to the dimensions of the PNIESC and the objectives of the PEDS.

Regarding the methodological approach used to analyze the data necessary for the evaluation process, it included the following mix of methods: i) documentary analysis (including specialized literature), ii) statistical data analysis, iii) multi-criteria analysis, iv) intervention logic analysis and theory of change verification, v) stakeholder analysis, vi) mapping, vii) benchmarking analysis.

Documentary analysis (including literature review)

The documentary analysis involved the analysis of the collected data and relevant documents identified for the evaluation, such as programme documents, relevant documents at European, national, regional level and aimed at reviewing the documents in a first stage and subsequently synthesizing the analyses performed and using them in developing the findings regarding the mid-term review of the SW Oltenia RP.

The evaluators conducted the literature review at the level of each priority of the programme, which addresses different aspects relevant to the evaluation process and for understanding the context of each priority (see **Annex 10.2. Literature review**). The documents consulted by the team of experts during the literature review are presented in **Annex 10.1 Bibliography**.

The method also considered the analysis of the monitoring data provided by RDA SW Oltenia, in Chapter 3 of this report being provided an overview of the programme and the implementation status as of December 31, 2024.

Statistical analysis



The statistical analysis focused on the macroeconomic series relevant to the areas of analysis, key statistics and specific sectoral statistics that were considered relevant in relation to the evaluated interventions. The statistical data used to analyze the socio-economic situation and the evolution of the context at the level of the sectors covered by the priorities of the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 are provided in **Annex 10.6 Database**. The analysis of these data was used to develop **Chapter 4.4. Analysis of the socio-economic situation**. Regarding the period covered by the collected data, depending on the purpose of the analysis, the data were analyzed in time series, starting with 2019/2020/2021, and ending with the most updated data available at the time of drafting the evaluation report, but the analysis period also depended on the availability that exists at the level of each analyzed indicator.

Statistical data analysis was used to reconstruct the framework of the existing indicators in each relevant area for the evaluation that is the subject of the contract and facilitated the highlighting of the implementation context at the level of each priority, while supporting the analysis of existing needs at the level of the areas financed by the SW Oltenia RP, in order to identify their evolution over time.

Multi-criteria analysis

The multi-criteria analysis was used to organize, analyze and compare the information collected in the evaluation process, in order to make the evaluator's reasoning much more systematic, logical and also transparent. For example, multi-criteria analysis was used to summarize the results of the qualitative methodologies used in the different stages of the contract, which target the same evaluation question.

The multi-criteria data analysis techniques were built on the results of the documentary research and on the information collected through interviews, focus groups, case studies and the panel of experts.

Multi-criteria analysis facilitated the correlation of data and information obtained and the triangulated verification of the collected data, so that the answers to the evaluation questions included correct findings and provided adequate substantiation of the conclusions and recommendations formulated.

Analysis of the intervention logic and verification of the theory of change

The intervention logic and the theory of change are fundamental elements in the mid-term review of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027, which facilitate an in-depth understanding of the context and factors influencing the implementation of the interventions defined at the programme level.

The intervention logic refers to the strategic approach of the programme, which is designed from the planning phase to identify funding needs and to outline the general funding objectives around the identified needs, while **the theory of change** contributes to the evaluation by highlighting the key assumptions and conditions necessary for the success of the programme, based on the intervention logic of the programme. During the evaluation, this method was used as a guide for testing the initial hypotheses.



Stakeholder analysis

The stakeholder analysis was useful for highlighting their role in the design and implementation of the interventions, as well as for highlighting the target groups benefiting from the interventions, mainly supporting the evaluation of the relevance criteria. This was based on documentary analysis and data from interviews and focus groups.

Mapping

The evaluators used mapping to support and illustrate the analysis of the programme implementation, using existing data from the monitoring system. Also, graphs resulting from the statistical analysis are used in the evaluation report, to illustrate, for example, the evolution of certain context indicators.

Benchmarking analysis

Benchmarking analysis is useful for comparing interventions or certain operations with similar ones, in order to draw conclusions and lessons learned for the future. As part of this evaluation, an internal benchmarking analysis was used to highlight the relative performance of each specific objective of the programme and each priority.

An external benchmarking analysis was also carried out, which allowed highlighting an overview of the programme's performance compared to the performance of other programmes with similar interventions, as well as the programme's contribution to the PEDS and PNIESC.



III. General overview of the programme and of the implementation status by December 31, 2024

3.1 General overview of the programme

The purpose of the programme

The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme aims to improve the economic competitiveness, social cohesion and accessibility of the region, in order to increase the quality of life of citizens, the programme strategy being focused on addressing key bottlenecks in specific sectors such as transport, education, mobility, energy efficiency and urban regeneration. The programme focuses on capitalizing on the region's advantages and addressing the existing needs at the level of the 5 counties: Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt and Vâlcea.

The programme targets 11 specific regional objectives that contribute to the EU policy objectives for 2021–2027, as well as to the implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,17).

The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 is divided into eight priorities, namely: Priority 1 - Competitiveness through innovation and dynamic enterprises; Priority 2 – Digitalization for the benefit of citizens and businesses; Priority 3 – Energy efficiency and green infrastructure; Priority 4 – Sustainable urban mobility; Priority 5 – Accessibility and connectivity at regional level; Priority 6 – Modern and inclusive education; Priority 7 – Sustainable territorial development; Priority 8 – Technical assistance.

Policy objectives and specific objectives

SW Oltenia RP focuses on the following policy objectives (PO) and specific objectives (SO), as set out in the 2021-2027 programming framework:

- PO 1: A more competitive and smarter Europe, by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity
 - RSO 1.1 Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and adopting advanced technologies;
 - RSO1.2. Capitalizing on the benefits of digitalisation, for the benefit of citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities;
 - RSO1.3. Enhancing sustainable growth and increasing the competitiveness of SMEs and creating jobs in SMEs, including through productive investments;





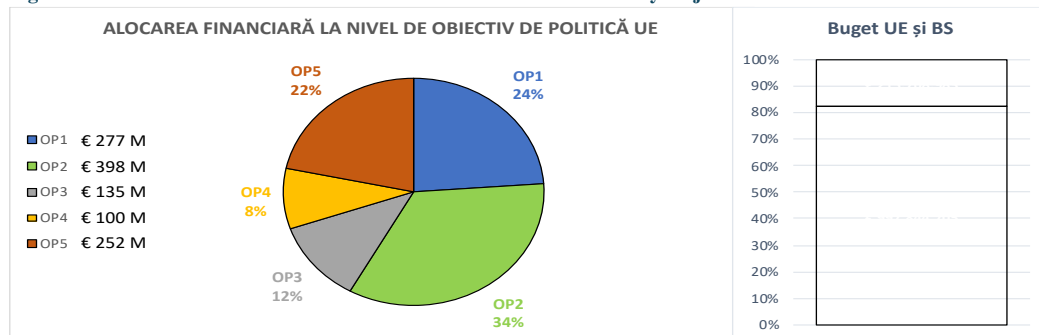
- RSO1.4. Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship.
- PO 2: A greener, resilient, low-carbon Europe moving towards a zero-carbon economy, by promoting the transition to clean and fair energy, green and blue investments, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management and sustainable urban mobility:
 - RSO2.1. Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
 - RSO2.7. Intensifying actions to protect and preserve nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, as well as reducing all forms of pollution, through dedicated actions, such as: modernizing/expanding existing green spaces, creating green spaces by converting and/or reusing abandoned, degraded spaces and lands; afforestation works; developing blue infrastructure.
 - RSO2.8. Promoting sustainable multimodal urban mobility, as part of the transition to a zero-carbon economy, through dedicated actions, such as: establishing, developing and optimizing public transport systems; supporting clean urban transport infrastructure; building/modernizing/rehabilitating depots/bus depots for local/regional public passenger transport; improvement of existing public transport stations, including the construction of new stations and intermodal terminals for public transport; infrastructure for alternative fuels, charging stations/points for public transport; measures for the digitalisation of urban transport; supporting the construction/modernisation of infrastructure for active modes of transport.
- PO 3: A more connected Europe through the development of mobility:
 - RSO 3.2. Developing and improving sustainable, climate-resilient, smart and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, by improving access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility, through dedicated actions, such as: investments in the county road network that ensure direct or indirect connectivity with the core and extended TEN-T network; construction/modernization/placement of elements to improve road safety; construction/modernization of stations and alveoli for public transport on the county road route, traffic systematization, digitalization.
- PO 4: A more social and inclusive Europe, through the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights:
 - RSO4.2. Improving access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning by developing accessible infrastructure, including by promoting

resilience for distance and online education and training, through dedicated actions such as: investments in the development of educational infrastructure for pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary education.

- PO 5: A Europe closer to citizens by promoting the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories and local initiatives:
 - RSO5.1. Promoting integrated and inclusive development in the social, economic and environmental fields, as well as culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security in urban areas, through dedicated actions, such as: restoration, consolidation and endowment activities of historical monuments of category A, B and UNESCO; tourism marketing and promotion activities; development of tourism infrastructure and public tourism assets; physical regeneration of urban public spaces; investments in buildings intended for public use for cultural and recreational, socio-cultural activities, etc.
 - RSO5.2. Promoting integrated and inclusive local development in the social, economic and environmental fields, as well as culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security in areas other than urban areas, through dedicated actions, such as: protection and valorization of cultural heritage in rural areas; development of public tourism infrastructure and public tourism assets in rural tourist resorts

The financial allocation of the programme, at the level of each EU policy objective, established in accordance with the provisions relating to the thematic concentration of ERDF resources², is shown in the graph below.

Figure 1 The financial allocation of SW Oltenia RP at the level of Policy Objectives



Source: processing of data from the monitoring system

² In accordance with the provisions of Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund



3.2 Analysis of the status of programme implementation by December 31, 2024

The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme was approved in October 2022, which generated a gap between the start of the programming period (2021) and the actual launch of the first calls for proposals. The first calls were launched in June 2023, which influenced the initial planning and execution of the projects under the programme.

The calendar of the calls for proposals under the Regional Programme was postponed following the adoption by the Government of Romania of Emergency Ordinance no. 23 of 12 April 2023 on the establishment of simplification and digitalisation measures for the management of European funds under the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy. The new rules set in the ordinance, although intended to contribute to simplifying the management of funds, generated additional obligations both for the managing authorities, who were obliged to transpose the measures established in the ordinance, and for the beneficiaries, determining the need to adapt the applicant's guides and the evaluation and contracting procedures.

The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme has made significant progress in launching the calls for proposals and contracting the projects, with a total of 36 calls being opened by the end of 2024. However, progress in terms of making payments and achieving European and national policy objectives has been slower. Given the current status of the contracted projects, most priorities have significant potential to meet the targets proposed for 2029, at the level of the output and result indicators established in the programme. The only exceptions are represented by the risk of not achieving the indicators in the case of SO 1.2 and SO 2.7, situation which is presented below and for which corrective measures are proposed.

The benchmarking analysis carried out based on data provided by the Open Cohesion Data Platform, as of 31.10.2024, provided in Annex 10.8, examines the relative positioning of the South West Oltenia Regional Programme in comparison with other regional programmes in less developed regions of Romania and other EU Member States, for the Specific Objectives that were selected by the South West Oltenia Regional Programme, namely: RSO1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 2.7, 2.8, 3.2, 4.2, 5.1 and 5.2.

The benchmarking analysis shows that the performance of the South West Oltenia Regional Programme in selecting operations is better than the average of programmes related to other less developed regions of Romania and all EU Member States. However, this performance has not yet produced tangible consequences on the performance of expenditure. Only in the case of RSO 2.1 (energy efficiency), the performance of SW Oltenia RP in terms of resources spent is similar to that recorded by regional programmes in less developed regions in Romania, but below the performance recorded by programmes in less developed regions in the EU.

The main achievements at the level of the entire programme refer to:

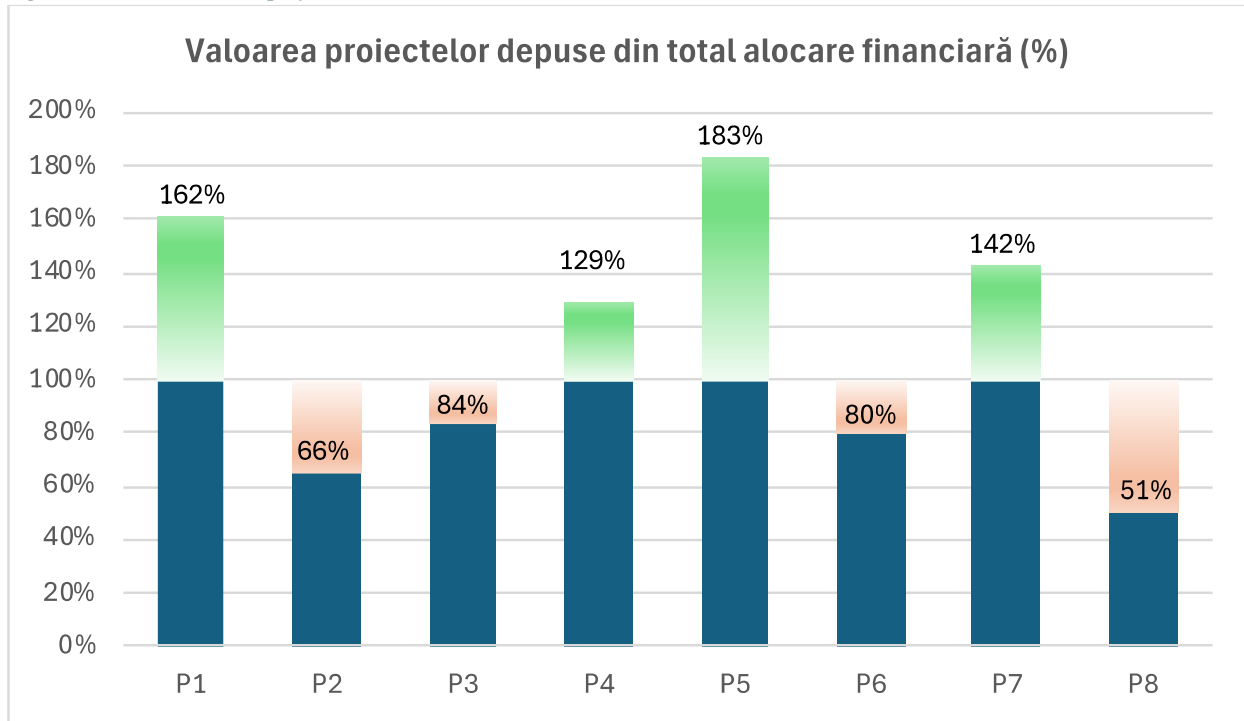




- **Calls for proposals:** 36 calls (including calls for territorial strategies) were launched at the level of the entire programme, representing over 1 billion Euros or 80% of the total financial allocation of the programme.
- **Contracting:** the non-reimbursable value (ERDF+SB) of the contracts signed by 31.12.2024 is 751 million Euros, which corresponds to a percentage of over 60% of the total budget allocated to the programme.
- **Payments made:** payments worth 37.8 million Euros were made, (ERDF+SB) representing only 5.04% of the non-reimbursable value of the contracted projects.
- The total expenditure authorized by MA SW Oltenia RP: 23,572,045.57 Euros.

At the same time, it is noted that for certain priorities there was a greater interest from beneficiaries, if we refer to the total non-reimbursable values of the projects submitted under the different calls, of the total financial allocation at priority level: Priorities 1 (over-submission of 162%), 4 (over-submission of 129%), 5 (over-submission of 183%) and 7 (over-submission of 142%). At the same time, in the case of Priorities 2, 3, 6 and 8, the initial allocations were not reached by the submitted projects (however, it must be taken into account that for certain specific objectives there are open calls at the time of drafting this report, so an increase in the number of projects submitted and contracted is expected; the specific objectives at the level of which risks related to the absorption of the financial allocation were identified are SO 1.2 and SO 2.7, situation which is detailed in the following sections).

Figure 2 Value of submitted projects out of total financial allocation as of 31.12.2024 (%)



Source: processing of data from the monitoring system

The following sections present the analysis of the implementation status of each of the 8 priorities of the programme, highlighting the calls for proposals launched, the number of projects submitted, contracted, the percentage of payments made and the progress in achieving the output and result indicators.

The data used for the progress analysis reflects the situation of the projects and the output and result indicators as of 31.12.2024, based on information from the monitoring system.

Priority: P1. Competitiveness through innovation and dynamic enterprises

Priority 1 of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 includes 3 specific objectives (RSO 1.1, 1.3, 1.4) and contributes to Policy Objective 1 - *A more competitive and smarter Europe*.

By the end of 2024, 3 calls for proposals were launched under Priority 1, all at the level of specific objective 1.3, but two of these calls also target interventions under SO 1.4. In the case of P1, the delays were caused by the technical specificities of the interventions and the extension of the consultation phase with key regional stakeholders. The consultations mainly aimed at finalizing the eligibility criteria for the applicants, the activities and expenses foreseen in the 3 specific guides for SO 1.1, as well as the establishment of a



portfolio of project ideas for RDI Infrastructures. Following the consultations organized, the main changes that were integrated into the final version of the guide aimed at eliminating the thresholds for salary expenses (RDI Guide), introducing expenses for consumable materials used in research activity (RDI Guide), eliminating the condition relating to 1 year of activity (Guide for Innovation in SMEs and TT). It is estimated that in the immediate future, project calls will be launched. Moreover, at the beginning of 2025, a new call was launched at the level of OS 1.3, targeting business structures and incubators (the first similar call targeted phased projects from the previous programming period).

At the Priority level, the situation of calls for projects and contracting status are adequate, and it can be summarized as follows:

- **Calls for proposals launched:** the 3 calls for proposals attracted a number of 563 projects, of which 52 projects are contracted, 397 are approved and another 36 are already in the contracting stage. The value of the launched calls for proposals covers 73% of the total financial allocation at the SO level;
- **Contracted projects:** The non-reimbursable value of the contracted projects, by 31.12.2024, is EUR 44.6 million, representing over 18% of the total value allocated at the priority level.
- **Payments made:** At the time of elaborating this report, no payments have been made at the P1 level.

The calls for proposals were launched starting in April 2024. A less favorable aspect is that, in the case of the call dedicated to SMEs, the period from the moment of the call's completion (May 2024) until the actual signing of the contracts (in some cases, November, December) is quite long, which may lead to future delays. However, the accelerated pace of approval and signing of projects in the last period of 2024 is noteworthy - in December, there were 52 signed projects and 433 approved or contracting projects, out of a total of 563 submitted projects.

At the same time, the non-reimbursable value of projects submitted on OS 1.3 is over 290 million euros (161% of the financial allocation at the OS level), which indicates the increased interest in accessing this type of financing. Moreover, from the research conducted on the ground (survey, interviews with beneficiaries and case studies), the contribution of financing from the SW RP for the development of the SME sector is essential and absolutely necessary for improving the regional competitiveness. Beneficiaries believe that investments could not be made without this financing, and the results and benefits of the projects are crucial for the future development of the enterprises.

In the case of SO 1.1, no calls for proposals have been launched so far, as the interventions under this objective present a high degree of complexity and it is necessary to consult, in advance, all potential key actors involved. In addition, in order to finalize the main investment directions, during 2024 there were numerous consultations with key actors, including a call for project ideas.



At the level of SO 1.4, no calls for proposals specifically dedicated to this objective were launched. However, according to the regulation and the Performance Framework, investments for skills development in the areas of smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship were proposed to be carried out in complementarity with the interventions of SO 1.3. For this reason, two of the calls of SO 1.3 (dedicated to SMEs and micro-enterprises) also include the interventions of SO 1.4, with specific selection criteria for the development of employees' skills.

At the same time, at this moment, the methodologies and evaluation criteria for the additional launch of calls for proposals, already scheduled – approved by the Monitoring Committee meeting of 17.10.2024, have already been developed, and the approval of the schemes by the Competition Council is awaited. Thus, they are estimated to be launched in 2025³.

The following tables present the summary of the calls for projects launched under P1.

Specific objective	Call for proposals code	Call title	Call type	Call for projects value (euro)	Call opening date	Call closing date
1.3	PRSVO/152/PRSV O_P1/OP1	Improving competitiveness and innovation in SMEs	Competitive with submission deadline	79.968.823,00	02.04.2024	02.05.2024
	PRSVO/217/PRSV O_P1/OP1	Improving competitiveness and innovation in microenterprises	Competitive with submission deadline	49.631.766,00	25.06.2024	10.08.2024
	PRSVO/304/PRSV O_P1/OP1/RSO1.3/PRSVO_A5	Business structures - business incubators - Phased	Non-competitive with submission deadline	2.572.399,00	08.05.2024	19.06.2024

The status of projects submitted under Priority 1 is presented in the following table:

Specific objective	No. of submitted projects	No. of rejected projects	No. of projects under evaluation	No. of approved projects	No. of projects under contracting phase	No. of contracted projects	No. of projects rejected and terminated
1.3-1.4	563	78	0	397	36	52	0

Financial situation:

³According to information from the calendar for launching the calls and the interviews conducted with the MA.



Specific objective	Financial allocation according to the programme (EU + NC) (euro)	Non-reimbursable value of the submitted projects	Percentage of non-reimbursable value of projects submitted from the OS allocation	Non-reimbursable value of contracted projects (euro)	Percentage of non-reimbursable value of projects contracted from the OS allocation	Payments to beneficiaries (euro)	Percentage of payments made to beneficiaries
1.3	181.207.058,82	292.853.420,84	161,61%	44.617.621,33	24,62%	0,00	0,00%

Among the programme modifications, approved by Decisions no. 21 bis/20.12.2023 and 36/26.04.2024, there are the introduction of a new area of smart specialization on OS 1.1, namely Health and Wellness and the updating of the targets of the indicators RCO 01 - Enterprises benefiting from support (of which: micro, small, medium, large), RCO 02 - Enterprises benefiting from support through grants, RCR01 and RCR03 - Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) introducing innovations in products or processes, following the entry into force of the new de minimis regulation.

At the same time, the reference to OS 1.4 was removed because this OS will not be used for industrial parks/business incubators.

- The indicator RCR19 was eliminated, as companies are not the direct beneficiaries of the interventions. A specific result indicator has been introduced for the intervention dedicated to industrial parks: PSR04 – Number of enterprises resident in the industrial park, Target value: 40; consequently, the target value for RCR 19 - Enterprises with increased turnover has been revised; thus, RCR 19 will be used for the operation Competitiveness and Innovation in Microenterprises and SMEs and for Financial Instruments (value 200 enterprises).
- Introduction of a specific programme indicator: PSO01 – Industrial Park resident companies (no. of SMEs located in the park) - result indicator for the intervention dedicated to industrial parks.

Status of the output and result indicators

Regarding the achievement of the indicators, the situation is presented in the following tables:

RSO 1.3 Output Indicators:

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCO01	Enterprises that benefit from support (of which: micro, small, medium, large)	enterprises	0	446	51



RCO02	Enterprises that benefit from grant support	enterprises	0	305	51
RCO03	Enterprises that benefit from support through financial instruments	enterprises	0	141	-
RCO15	Capacities created for business incubators	enterprises	0	48	1
PSO 01	Business infrastructure for SMEs	Business infrastructures	0	4	-

RSO 1.3 Result Indicators:

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Baseline value in the program	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
PSR04	Number of enterprises resident in the industrial park	Number	0	45	0
RCR01	Jobs created in entities benefiting from support	Annual FTE	0	450	0
RCR18	SMEs using services of business incubators after the creation of the incubators	enterprises /year	0	29	16
RCR19	Enterprises with high turnover	enterprises	0	200	51

RSO 1.4 Output Indicator:

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCO01	Enterprises that benefit from support (of which: micro, small, medium, large)	enterprises	53	167	51
RCO02	Enterprises that benefit from grant support	enterprises	53	167	51
RCO16	Participation of institutional stakeholders in entrepreneurial discovery processes	Participation of institutional stakeholders	23	45	18



RCO101	SMEs investing in skills for smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship	enterprises	53	167	51
PSO 02	Public entities investing in skills for smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship	entities	0	10	0

RSO 1.4 Result indicators

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Baseline value in the program	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
PSR01	Employees from public research entities completing skills training programs for smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship	Persons	0	100	0
RCR98	Employees from SMEs completing skills training programs for smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship (by type of skills: technical, management, entrepreneurship, environmental, other)	Participants	0	500	205

In the case of SO 1.3, no milestones were set for the output indicators, given the rather late launch of the calls for proposals and the quite long period until the actual signing of the contracts, so the results could not have been achieved by the end of 2024.

In relation to indicators RCO01 and RCO02 (enterprises benefiting from support), there are premises for achieving the final targets due to the increased interest in this type of financing (563 projects submitted). At this moment, 485 projects are either approved (397), under contracting phase (36), or already contracted (52), above the targets set for 2029. However, there may be financial difficulties, as the 485 projects have a total eligible value of approximately 260 million euros, well above the initial allocation (132 million euros).

Regarding the indicators on the use of financial instruments (RCO03), incubators and business nurseries, dedicated calls for proposals will be launched in the future period.



At the same time, from the analysis of the monitoring data, at the level of SO 1.3, there are difficulties in monitoring and reporting the amounts included in the intervention area 040 - Energy efficiency and demonstrative projects in SMEs. In this case, no beneficiary selected the intervention code 040, although there was an eligibility condition regarding energy efficiency measures. In this situation, it is recommended to transfer the amounts allocated at the level of intervention code 040 to intervention code 021. Through this change, the contribution to the climate change objectives is diminished, but not in a substantial way (reallocation of approximately 2 million Euros). At the programme level, the decrease in the contribution is compensated by the proposed reallocation from the level of SO 2.7 to SO 2.1, through which the amounts are transferred to the intervention code 045 - with a contribution to the environmental objectives and the climate change objectives.

In the case of SO 1.4, no separate calls were launched for this objective, however, improving employee skills was targeted at the level of the calls for proposals launched under SO 1.3 (those dedicated to SMEs and microenterprises). Thus, all the objectives of the milestone have a satisfactory degree of achievement from the perspective of signed contracts (over 90%) and there are all premises for achieving the final targets, considering the projects already approved and those contracted.

On the other hand, if in the case of all indicators relating to the private environment there is a favorable situation, for the indicators relating to the public environment (PSO02, RCR98), an analysis is necessary after the launch of the project calls.

In the case of SO 1.1, the calls for proposals were not launched – and in this case, they are scheduled for the immediately following period.

General conclusions and proposed corrective measures

At the level of Priority 1, there is significant progress in launching the calls for proposals, in their approval and contracting in the case of SO 1.3, but the implementation status of the projects is still in its early stages. Thus, there is an extremely high interest from the private sector in accessing the funding, the values of the projects submitted and those approved far exceeding the initial allocation. Moreover, there are premises for achieving the targets of the output and result indicators, but the available funding seems insufficient to cover the existing needs. For these reasons, a reallocation of any available amount is recommended, to supplement the financial allocation of Priority 1, SO 1.3.

A favorable situation is also registered in the case of SO 1.4, with many of the projects dedicated to SMEs and microenterprises covering the employee skills development component. However, interventions related to the specialization of public sector employees remain uncovered.



Future calls for proposals are already scheduled to be launched, covering all areas of intervention under Priority 1 that remain uncovered. In these cases, it is recommended to accelerate the process of verification, approval and contracting of the funding applications.

Priority: P2. Digitalization for the benefit of citizens and enterprises

Priority 2 captures specific objective SO 1.2 and contributes to Policy Objective 1 - *A more competitive and smarter Europe*.

- **Calls for proposals launched:** 2 calls for proposals were launched at the level of SO 1.2, representing 100% of the total financial allocation for Priority 2, both in the second half of 2024;
- **Contracted projects:** the non-reimbursable value of the signed contracts (4 contracts) by 31.12.2024 is over EUR 2 million, a small value so far, but it is complemented by the projects already approved and under contracting (47 projects);
- **Payments made:** a low percentage of payments were made (below 1%), due to the early status of implementation.

The call for proposals dedicated to the public environment has registered a high level of interest, with 32 projects submitted, with a total eligible value of over 18 million euros, 35% above the initial allocation of 13.3 million euros. Of these, only 4 have been contracted to date, but another 19 are in advanced stages of contracting and another 7 have already been approved. From the field research (interviews), the digitalization needs of local institutions remain significant, and the potential benefits to citizens are significant. Separately, one of the recommendations received from key stakeholders is the need for a higher financial allocation for projects carried out by the County Capital Municipalities, compared to the Authorities in smaller localities.

On the other hand, in the case of the call dedicated to the digitalization of SMEs, the interest is low. 68 funding applications were submitted, with a total eligible value of less than 5.5 million euros (26% of the initial allocation). Of these, 38 are under evaluation and 21 have already been approved. Although companies' interest in improving economic performance and increasing competitiveness is high (visible in the case of accessing to Priority 1, SO 1.3), they do not consider the financing of digitalization processes strictly as an opportunity as financing that covers a wider area of activities. Another explanation is that there are already numerous other sources of funding (at national level) that support the digitalization of SMEs.



Specific objective	Call for proposals code	Call title	Call type	Call for projects value (euro)	Call opening date	Call closing date
1.2	PRSV0/241/PRSV0_P2/OP1/RSO 1.2/PRSV0_A8	Digitalization for the benefit of SMEs	competitive	21.126.000	25.06.2024	24.08.2024
	PRSV0/224/PRSV0_P2/OP1/RSO 1.2/PRSV0_A9	Digitalization for the benefit of citizens	competitive	13.361.136,00	22.03.2024	22.06.2024

The status of projects submitted under Priority 2 is presented in the following table.

Specific objective	No. of submitted projects	No. of rejected projects	No. of projects under evaluation	No. of approved projects	No. of projects under contracting phase	No. of contracted projects	No. of projects rejected and terminated
1.2	100	11	38	28	19	4	0

Financial situation:

Specific objective	Financial allocation according to the programme (EU + NC) (euro)	Non-reimbursable value of the submitted projects	Percentage of non-reimbursable value of projects submitted from the OS allocation	Non-reimbursable value of contracted projects (euro)	Percentage of non-reimbursable value of projects contracted from the OS allocation	Payments to beneficiaries (euro)	Percentage of payments made to beneficiaries
1.2	34.487.136,00	22.622.949,61	65,60%	2.315.053,62	6,71%	28.022,73	1,21%

Status of the output and result indicators

The status of achieving the indicators is presented in the following tables.

RSO 1.2 Output Indicators:

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCO01	Enterprises that benefit from support (of which: micro, small, medium, large)	enterprises	56	281	-
RCO02	Enterprises that benefit from grant support	enterprises	56	281	-



ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCO13	The value of digital services, products and processes developed for businesses	euro	1.394.416,00	13.943.160,00	-
RCO14	Public institutions that benefit from support to develop digital services, products and processes	public institutions	0	28	4

RSO 1.2 Result Indicators

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Baseline value in the programme	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCR11	Users of new and optimized public digital services and products and processes	users/year	0	79.346	11.750
RCR13	Enterprises that achieve a high level of digital intensity	enterprises	0	281	0

In the case of the public sector, at this moment, only 4 contracts have been signed, and the indicators are far from the final targets. However, through the projects already approved, it is estimated that all targets will be achieved at the end of the implementation period.

On the other hand, in relation to the indicators related to the private sector, there are no projects contracted at this time, but there are 59 projects approved and under evaluation. However, the potential results that these projects can bring are far from the final proposed targets and there are no other optimistic premises for achieving the indicators.

General conclusions and proposed corrective measures

Regarding the digitalization of the public environment, the needs in the sector remain significant. Moreover, there is increased interest from beneficiaries and an over-submission at the priority level. Although few projects have been contracted, many others are in the final stages of signing the contracts.

In contrast, SMEs' interest in financing digitalization is low, with only 26% of the initial allocation accessed. Companies prioritize financing that covers a wider range of activities, and the existing alternatives at national level reduce the attractiveness of this call. Thus, it is recommended to reallocate the unused funds



within this call - "Digitalization for SMEs", to other priorities and specific objectives at the programme level, which present a higher interest and degree of absorption of funds (Ex. P1, SO 1.3, SO 1.6).

Priority: P3. Energy efficiency and green infrastructure

Priority 3 of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 includes 2 specific objectives, namely RSO 2.1. Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions and RSO2.7. Intensifying actions to protect and preserve nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, as well as reducing all forms of pollution, contributing to Policy Objective 2 - *A greener, more resilient, low-carbon Europe moving towards a zero-carbon economy, by promoting the transition to clean and fair energy, green and blue investments, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management and sustainable urban mobility.*

The first call for proposals under Priority 3, RSO 2.1, was launched in July 2023, while the first call for proposals under RSO 2.7 was launched in September 2023.

The analysis of the implementation status of **SO 2.1 as of 31.12.2024** highlights the following findings:

- **Calls for proposals launched:** 3 calls for proposals were launched, the total financial value of which represents approximately 80.98% of the total financial allocation for SO 2.1.
- **Contracted projects:** the non-reimbursable value of the contracted projects from the total allocated budget (EU+NC) SO 2.1 represented 76.40%, while the non-reimbursable value of the submitted projects represented 85.58% of the total budget allocated to this SO.
- **Payments made:** payments worth EUR 5,122,242.79 were made, representing 3.50% of the total value contracted under this SO.

Regarding **SO 2.7, as of 31.12.2024**, the following results have been achieved:

- **Calls for proposals launched:** 4 calls for proposals were launched, the total financial value of which covers the entire total financial allocation for OS 2.7.
- **Contracted projects:** the non-reimbursable value of the projects contracted under SO 2.7 was 48.37% of the total budget allocated to this specific objective, while the non-reimbursable value of projects submitted represented 79.29% of the total budget allocated to this SO.
- **Payments made:** at the SO 2.7 level, on 31.12.2024, no payments to beneficiaries were made.

It is therefore noted that as of 31.12.2024, Priority 3 registered notable progress in launching the calls for proposals and contracting projects (especially with regard to SO 2.1), but no significant progress was made in making the payments, the percentage of payments made to beneficiaries being 3.50% in the case of SO



2.1 and 0% in the case of SO 2.7. This level of payment is explained by the early stage of the projects contracted under these specific objectives at the end of 2024.

In the case of SO 2.7, the calls dedicated to municipalities and cities benefited from low interest from potential beneficiaries. Thus, even if the value of the launched calls covers the entire financial allocation at the objective level, the value of the contracted projects represents less than 50% of the total financial allocation, the financial allocation on this SO being unable to be absorbed even if all the submitted projects were contracted. Launching new calls for proposals is not a solution that could ensure an increase in the absorption rate at the level of this specific objective, as there is no interest from potential beneficiaries (this finding is supported by the fact that certain calls, although relaunched, continued to show low interest, while no project was submitted on the call dedicated to municipalities). The low interest of potential beneficiaries in submitting projects for funding under OS 2.7 can be justified by the limitations imposed at the programme level, derived from the need to comply with the legislative framework in the field of green spaces in Romania (*Law no. 24/2007 on the regulation and administration of green spaces in urban areas, republished, with subsequent amendments and completions*), which stipulates that the opaque surface must not exceed 10% of the project's intervention area and the fact that the budget for this intervention on opaque surface must not exceed 15% of the entire project budget.

Therefore, it is recommended to transfer the unspent amounts related to SO 2.7 (including the amounts reserved under the Flexibility Amount) to finance the projects related to the reserve list related to the call "*Investments in public buildings to increase energy efficiency*", SO 2.1, which have currently been financed from the State Budget, as well as to launch a new call "*Investments in public buildings to increase energy efficiency - Call 2*", given the particular interest shown at regional level in improving the energy efficiency of public buildings.

Interviews with beneficiaries of SO 2.1 interventions confirm the pressing needs to improve the energy performance of public buildings, given the significant increase in the costs allocated from the institutions' budgets for energy payments. The interviews also revealed that although there are alternative sources of financing for energy efficiency improvement interventions - for example, through Component 5, the renovation wave, NRRP, financing through SW Oltenia RP is preferred, on the one hand because there are limitations related to eligibility (only buildings in the public domain of the state are eligible through NRRP), and on the other hand because beneficiaries consider that in the case of NRRP communication is more cumbersome, there is not as much transparency and the verification and implementation stages are very difficult.

The following tables illustrate the main information related to the implementation status, calls for proposals launched, projects submitted and contracted, the financial situation and the situation of indicators for each specific objective within Priority 3.



Specific obiectiv e	Call for proposals code	Call title	Call type	Call for projects value (euro)	Call opening date	Call closing date
2.1	PR SVO/19/PRSV P3/OP2/RSO2.1/P RSVO A14	OPERATION A - Investments in public buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency and measures for the use of renewable energy sources	Competitive with continuous submission and deadline for closing the call	137.133.071,00	27.07.2023	12.09.2024
	PR SVO/301/PRSV O_P3/OP2/RSO2. 1/PR SVO_A14	Investments in public buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency and measures for the use of renewable energy sources PHASED	Non-competitive with submission deadline	16.048.784,00	08.05.2024	19.06.2024
	PR SVO/300/PRSV O_P3/OP2/RSO2. 1/PR SVO_A15	Investments in residential buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency PHASED	Non-competitive with submission deadline	1.993.001,50	08.05.2024	11.09.2024
2.7	PR SVO/96/PRSV _P3/OP2/RSO2.7/ PR SVO_A21	Support for the preservation, improvement or expansion of green-blue infrastructure dedicated call MRJ _ Dr Tr Severin	Non-competitive	9.615.190,00	01.09.2023	29.11.2024
		Support for the preservation, improvement of green-blue infrastructure MRJ _ Rm Vâlcea	Non-competitive	10.216.700,00		
		Support for the preservation, improvement of green-blue infrastructure MRJ _ Craiova	Non-competitive	19.893.960,00		
		Support for the preservation, improvement of the green-blue infrastructure MRJ _ Târgu Jiu	Non-competitive	9.021.400,00		
		Support for the preservation, improvement of green-blue infrastructure MRJ _ Slatina	Non-competitive	8.367.110,00		
	PR SVO/90/PRSV _P3/OP2/RSO2.7/ PR SVO_A21	Support for the preservation and improvement of green-blue infrastructure, call dedicated for municipalities	Competitive	10.544.188,00	01.09.2023	01.03.2024
	PR SVO/85/PRSV _P3/OP2/RSO2.7/ PR SVO_A21	Support for the preservation, improvement of green-blue infrastructure dedicated call for CITIES (CALL I)	Competitive with continuous submission and deadline for closing the call	20.209.694,00	01.09.2023	01.03.2024
	PR SVO/275/PRSV O_P3/OP2/RSO2. 7/PR SVO_A21	Support for the preservation, improvement of green-blue	Competitive with continuous submission and		28.05.2024	08.07.2024



Specific obiectiv e	Call for proposals code	Call title	Call type	Call for projects value (euro)	Call opening date	Call closing date
		infrastructure dedicated call for CITIES (CALL II)	deadline for closing the call			

The status of projects submitted under Priority 3 is presented in the following table:

Specific objective	No. of submitted projects	No. of rejected projects	No. of projects under evaluation	No. of approved projects	No. of projects under contracting phase	No. of contracted projects	No. of projects rejected and terminated
2.1	86	10	0	0	0	76	0
2.7	18	1	3	3	2	9	0

Financial situation:

Specific objective	Financial allocation according to the programme (EU + NC) (euro)	Non- reimbursable value of submitted projects	Percentage of non- reimbursable value of projects submitted from the OS allocation	Non- reimbursable value of contracted projects (euro)	Percentage of non- reimbursable value of projects contracted from the OS allocation	Payments to beneficiaries (euro)	Percentage of payments made to beneficiaries
2.1	191.603.530,00	163.978.624,20	85,58%	146.386.406,39	76,40%	5.122.242,79	3,50%
2.7	87.868.236,00	69.669.249,68	79,29%	42.497.712,34	48,37%	-	0,00%

Among the programme modifications, with increased relevance regarding Priority 3, the following changes are the most important, approved by decisions 21 bis/20.12.2023 and 36/26.04.2024:

- The phased projects were taken over under from ROP 2014-2020, based on Article 118a of the consolidated Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.
- The targets for indicators RCO 18, RCO 19, RCR 26 and RCR 29 have been revised.

The status of the output and result indicators:

From the perspective of achieving the indicators, the situation is presented in the following tables:

RSO 2.1 Output Indicators:



ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCO18	Houses with improved energy performance	houses	0	3.745	213
RCO19	Public buildings with improved energy performance	square meters	0	244.424	154.061

RSO 2.1 Result Indicators

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Baseline value in the programme	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCR26	Annual primary energy consumption (of which: houses, public buildings, enterprises, etc.)	MWh/year	156.423,70	62.951,12	9.608,17
RCR29	Estimated greenhouse gas emissions	equivalent tons of CO ₂ /year	25.397,00	9.208,19	896,51

RSO 2.7 Output indicators:

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCO36	Green infrastructures that benefit from support for purposes other than climate change adaptation	Hectares	0	103	33,53
RCO74	Population targeted by projects carried out within the framework of integrated territorial development strategies	persons	0	779.569	585.570
RCO75	Integrated territorial development strategies that benefit from support	contributions to strategies	0	11	7

RSO 2.7 Result indicators:



ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Baseline value in the programme	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCR95	Population with access to new or improved green infrastructure	Persons	0	587.992	255.275,80

In the case of priority 3, no milestones were set for the performance indicators, given the typology of the projects and the very long implementation duration of this type of projects, but also the rather late launch of the first calls for proposals. In addition, in the case of RCO74 and RCO75, the quantification of the indicators is carried out in correlation with the completion of urban development projects related to integrated territorial strategies.

As regards RSO 2.1, the projects already signed by the end of December 2024 (76) will contribute to a large extent to achieving the target value set for 2029 for *RCO19 Public buildings with improved energy performance, which seems to reach at least 63% of the proposed target*, but to a lesser extent to the target of the indicator *RCO18 - Housing with improved energy performance, which is set at 3,745 housing units* (the expected contribution from the contracted projects being only 5.68%). It should be considered that in the case of the indicator RCO18, so far, only one call for projects has been launched, for the phased projects from the previous programming period and with a reduced allocated value (approximately 2 million euros). However, it is estimated that a separate call will be launched directly targeting the energy performance of housing, worth approximately 38 million euros, so that there are favorable premises for achieving the target values. Regarding *RCO19 Public buildings with improved energy performance*, if the recommendation to transfer unspent amounts from P3, SO 2.7 to finance projects on the reserve list of the call "Investments in public buildings to increase energy efficiency" is taken into account, as well as the launch of a new call "Investments in public buildings to increase energy efficiency – Call 2", the necessary premises will be created for achieving the indicator.

For RSO 2.7, the projects contracted by 31.12.2024 (9), have a low potential contribution to achieving the RCO36 target (32.55%) and medium to high to achieving the targets for RCO74 (75.11%) and RCO75 (63.63%), but it must be taken into account that at the time of drafting the report there were still 8 projects under evaluation, approved and under contracting phase, so at least within RCO74 and RCO75, it is estimated that the target values proposed for 2029 can be achieved.

The interviews conducted with beneficiaries of projects financed under Priority 3 of the SW Oltenia RP show that although the early status of project implementation does not allow for an accurate assessment of the potential of projects to meet the objectives and indicators, even in situations where there are slight delays in implementation (against the delays generated by the conduct of public procurement



procedures), beneficiaries are confident that by the end of the implementation period, the indicators will be achieved. The main challenge identified in achieving the indicators' targets is represented by the increase in market prices.

General conclusions and proposed corrective measures

At the level of Priority 3, significant progress is observed in terms of launching the calls for proposals and contracting projects, especially for SO 2.1, but effective implementation and payments remain at an early stage, given the start date of the projects. In the case of SO 2.7, the low interest of beneficiaries, combined with the limitations imposed by the national legislation on green spaces, led to contracting below expectations, which raises a question on the full absorption of the financial allocation.

Therefore, it is proposed to reallocate the unused funds from SO 2.7 to SO 2.1, to finance projects on the reserve list of the call "Investments in public buildings to increase energy efficiency" and to launch a new call in this area, given the high demand and positive impact of these investments, which support the needs to improve the energy performance of buildings, considering also the significant increase in costs associated with energy consumption.

Priority: P4. Sustainable urban mobility

Priority 4 of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 promotes multimodal urban mobility, through interventions aimed at developing and optimizing public transport systems (including through the purchase of zero-emission means of transport), improving existing public transport stations and creating infrastructure for alternative fuels, but also interventions dedicated to infrastructure for non-motorized travel (pedestrian paths, cycling infrastructure, etc.).

SO 2.8, funded under this priority, contributes to Policy Objective 2: A greener, more resilient, low-carbon Europe moving towards a zero-carbon economy, by promoting the transition to clean and fair energy, green and blue investments, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management and sustainable urban mobility.

By the end of 2024, six calls for proposals have been launched, with a total value exceeding EUR 119 million. The first three calls for proposals, corresponding to SO 2.8, were launched in January 2024, the fourth call, dedicated to phased projects, in May 2024, and the last two calls, in July of the same year.

The analysis of the implementation progress at the level of Priority 4, by December 31, 2024, highlights not only the advanced stage of launching the calls for proposals, but also the favorable situation of the processes aimed at submitting, approving and contracting projects. However, there is a low value of payments made to beneficiaries, a situation justified by the low maturity of the contracted projects, most of which are in the initial stages of implementing the planned investments.



The analysis of monitoring data facilitates the identification of the following key findings regarding the implementation of Priority 4:

- **Calls for proposals launched:** the 6 calls for proposals launched attracted 32 submitted applications, of which 16 are contracted, 6 are under evaluation, and 5 are approved. The value of the submitted funding applications **exceeds** the total financial allocation for this priority by approximately 30%, highlighting the high interest of applicants for this type of interventions. Information collected during the interviews with beneficiaries of SO 2.8 revealed that although there are alternative sources of financing for certain components of the projects – for example, the NRRP finances recharging points for electric vehicles (Component 10, Investment 1.3) – these do not cover the other categories of necessary investments, such as digitalization systems for urban transport, construction of terminals, creation of infrastructure for non-motorized transport, etc.
- **Contracted projects:** the non-reimbursable value of the signed contracts is 58,326,263.80 euros, which corresponds to a share of 48.84% of the total budget allocated to SO 2.8. However, if the non-reimbursable value of the approved projects, of 29,989,506.03 euros, is also considered, the funds allocated to sustainable urban mobility present favorable premises to be committed in a proportion of 73.95%.
- **Payments made:** payments were made to beneficiaries in the amount of 6,851,975.28 euros, representing only 11.75% of the total non-reimbursable value of projects contracted under SO 2.8.

The following tables illustrate the main information related to the implementation status, the calls for proposals launched, the projects submitted and contracted, the financial situation and the situation of indicators at the level of Priority 4.

Specific objective	Call for proposals code	Call title	Call type	Call for projects value (euro)	Call opening date	Call closing date
2.8	PRSV0/181/PRSV O_P4/OP2/RSO2.8 /PRSV0_A22	Support for sustainable and sustainable urban transport call dedicated to CITIES (CALL I)	Competitive with continuous submission and closing date of the call	21.233.951,00	15.01.2024	15.05.2024
	PRSV0/445/PRSV O_P4/OP2/RSO2.8 /PRSV0_A22	Support for sustainable and durable urban transport call dedicated to CITIES (CALL II)	Competitive with submission deadline		08.07.2024	08.11.2024
	PRSV0/303/PRSV O_P4/OP2/RSO2.8 /PRSV0_A22	Support for sustainable and durable urban transport - PHASED	Non-competitive with submission deadline	18.016.189,00	08.05.2024	19.06.2024



Specific objective	Call for proposals code	Call title	Call type	Call for projects value (euro)	Call opening date	Call closing date
	PRSV0/185/PRSV O_P4/OP2/RSO2.8 /PRSV0_A22	Support for sustainable and durable urban transport call dedicated to municipalities - CALL I	Competitive with submission deadline	11.078.583,00	15.01.2024	15.05.2024
	RSVO/446/PRSV0_P4/OP2/RSO2.8/P RSVO_A22	Support for sustainable and durable urban transport CALL FOR PROJECTS NO. II Dedicated to Municipalities	Competitive with submission deadline		08.07.2024	08.11.2024
	PRSV0/188/PRSV O_P4/OP2/RSO2.8 /PRSV0_A22	Support for sustainable and durable urban transport MRJ_Craiova	Non-competitive with submission deadline	20.902.218,00	15.01.2024	15.12.2024
		Support for sustainable and durable urban transport MRJ_Drobeta Turnu Severin	Non-competitive with submission deadline	10.102.501,00		
		Support for sustainable and durable urban transport MRJ_Slatina	Non-competitive with submission deadline	8.791.165,00		
		Support for sustainable and durable urban transport MRJ_Râmnicu Vâlcea	Non-competitive with submission deadline	10.734.494,00		
		OS 2.8 Support for sustainable and durable urban transport dedicated call MRJ Târgu Jiu	Non-competitive with submission deadline	9.478.613,00		

The status of projects submitted under Priority 4 is presented in the following table.

Specific objective	No. of submitted projects	No. of rejected projects	No. of projects under evaluation	No. of approved projects	No. of projects under contracting phase	No. of contracted projects	No. of projects rejected and terminated
2.8	32	4	6	5	1	16	0

Financial situation:

Specific objective	Financial allocation according to the programme (EU + NC) (euro)	Non-reimbursable value of submitted projects	Percentage of non-reimbursable value of projects submitted from the SO 2.8 allocation	Non-reimbursable value of contracted projects (euro)	Percentage of non-reimbursable value of projects contracted from the	Payments to beneficiaries (euro)	Percentage of payments made to beneficiaries



					allocation of SO 2.8		
2.8	119.430.211,00	154.414.848,64	129,29%	58.326.263,80	48,84%	6.851.975,28	11,75%

The programme modifications approved by Decision No. 21 bis/20.12.2023 and Decision No. 36/26.04.2024 also had an impact on Priority 4, namely:

- The takeover of phased projects from the ROP 2014-2020 had an impact on the allocated financial value; For the same reason, a new area of intervention was introduced – Code 093 – *Other reconstructed or modernized roads (motorways, national, regional or local roads)*, with an allocation of 4,802,500 euros.
- Revision of intervention codes in Table 6: Dimension 3 – Territorial delivery mechanism and territorial approach, considering the takeover of phased projects from the ROP 2014-2020 that cannot be included in the territorial instrument, by adding code 26. Municipalities, cities and suburbs. In Priority 4, mobility projects originating from the ROP 2014-2020, PI 3.2 will be taken over. According to the Specific Guide, there is no obligation for the project to be part of a strategy. In the SW RP 2021-2027, Priority 4 is under the Territorial Instrument, which initially involved selecting code 18 - Other types of territorial instruments - Municipalities, cities and suburbs and code 19 - Other types of territorial instruments - Functional urban areas (for the situation where the territory was a functional urban area). In the context of taking over the phased projects (from PI 4.1 and PI 3.2), it was proposed that all phased projects fall under code 26.
- Review of the intervention code allocations, the total ERDF allocation at Priority 4 level being 105,583,672.00 euros;
- Adding specific indicators PSO 04 – Rehabilitated urban streets - stage 2 (target value 20.90) and PSO 03 Infrastructure for collective public transport (target value – 5);

Status of the output and result indicators

From the perspective of the achievement of the indicators, the situation is presented in the following tables.

RSO 2.8 Output Indicators:

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCO57	Capacitatea materialului rulant ecologic pentru transportul public colectiv	pasageri	0	1.888	1.834



ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCO58	Capacity of environmentally friendly rolling stock for collective public transport	passengers	0	99,53	37,36
RCO59	Supported cycle paths	kilometers	0	76	24
RCO60	Alternative fuel infrastructure (refueling/ recharging points)	refueling/ recharging points	0	13	10
RCO74	Cities and localities with new or modernized digitalized urban transport systems	big and small cities	0	779.569	196.834
RCO75	Population targeted by projects carried out within the framework of integrated territorial development strategies	persons	0	11	6
PSO 03	Integrated territorial development strategies that benefit from support	contributions to strategies	0	6	6
PSO 04	Infrastructure for collective public transport	No.	0	20,90	-

RSO 2.8 Result Indicators

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Baseline value in the programme	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCR62	Number of users of new or modernized public transport	users/year	10.207.543	10.221.137	10.437.304,27
RCR64	Number of users of cycle paths	users/year	0	814.753	777.571,00

Under priority 4, no milestones have been set for the performance indicators, given the complex nature of the projects and the long period required for their implementation. The effects of the financed interventions will be quantified at a later stage, once a more advanced level of maturity and progress in the implementation of the investments has been achieved.

However, since the moment of preparing this evaluation, it can be noted that the projects contracted by the end of 2024 present favorable premises towards a high contribution to achieving the final targets, especially in terms of the development of infrastructure for collective public transport (100%), the capacity of ecological rolling stock for collective public transport (97.13%), respectively the number of cities and



towns with new or modernized digitalized urban transport systems (76.92%). On the other hand, the expected achievements at the level of the contracted projects, in terms of the no. km of cycle paths benefiting from support and the infrastructure for alternative fuels indicate slower progress compared to the 2029 targets.

Regarding the result indicators, the contracted projects estimate that the annual number of users of new or modernized public transport will be higher than expected (102.11%), and the number of bike lane users will be very close to the final target (95.43%).

The qualitative evaluation of the information collected through participatory research tools shows that, despite the relatively early stage of implementation of most of the projects contracted under Priority 4, the beneficiaries estimate that the objectives and indicators planned at the project level will be met. The previous experience of the beneficiaries with the implementation of similar projects in the field of urban mobility, financed by the ROP 2014-2020, represents one of the facilitating factors, which contributes to the optimal implementation of the interventions and the achievement of the expected results. The favorable factors, invoked by the beneficiaries, are the partnership relationship and good collaboration with the representatives of the MA of SW Oltenia RP, who provided constant support in all stages of preparation and implementation of the projects. Also, the optimal collaborative relationships with the providers of goods or services (e.g. designers), constitute another favorable element.

The main challenges or risks expected in achieving the indicator targets are associated with the delayed start or cumbersome conduct of public procurement procedures.

General conclusions and proposed corrective measures

At the level of Priority 4, significant progress is observed in terms of launching the calls for proposals and submitting applications for funding. The processes of project evaluation, approval and contracting are at an advanced stage. However, payments to beneficiaries remain at a low level, which is explained by the relatively recent start of project implementation.

No recommendations or corrective measures are proposed.

Priority: P5. Accessibility and connectivity at regional level

Priority 5 of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 is dedicated to increasing the level of accessibility and improving the quality of the transport infrastructure in the region, through actions aimed at making investments in the county road network for connectivity with the TEN-T network, but also actions aimed at building elements to improve road safety.



Priority 5 comprises SO 3.2. *Developing and improving sustainable, climate-resilient, smart and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improving access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility (ERDF)* and contributes to Policy Objective 3 - *A more connected Europe*.

At the level of SO 3.2, with an allocation that exceeds 135 million euros, two non-competitive calls for proposals were launched, dedicated to regional connectivity and improving access to TEN-T - the first, launched in July 2023, and the second, for phased projects, in May 2024.

The progress of the implementation of Priority 5, until December 31, 2024, highlights the very high interest of the potential beneficiaries for these categories of interventions, the value (EU+SB) of the submitted projects exceeding the allocation of SO 3.2 by 83.26%. The high level of over-contracting (182.88%) is also noteworthy.

The analysis of the monitoring data allows the identification of the following key findings regarding the implementation of Priority 5:

- **Calls for proposals launched:** the two calls for proposals launched attracted 9 financing requests, which were approved and contracted. The non-reimbursable value of the financing requests is significantly higher than the budget allocated to SO 3.2, representing 183.26% of the total allocation.
- **Contracted projects:** the non-reimbursable value of the signed contracts (247,574,012.46 euros) exceeds by 82.88% the total value allocated to Priority 5 (135,371,986.00 euros);
- **Payments made:** payments were made to beneficiaries in the amount of over 11 million euros, representing 4.84% of the non-reimbursable value of projects contracted under SO 3.2.

Thus, by 31 of December 2024, Priority 5 had made significant progress in launching the calls for proposals and contracting projects. However, the level of payments made to beneficiaries remains relatively low, given the early status of implementation of the funded projects and the complexity of the infrastructure works.

The following tables presents the main information related to the implementation status, the calls for proposals launched, projects submitted and contracted, the financial situation and the situation of indicators within Priority 5.

Specific objective	Call for proposals code	Call title	Call type	Call for projects value (euro)	Call opening date	Call closing date
3.2	PRSVO/18/P RSVO_P5/O P3/RSO3.2/ PRSVO_A19	Regional connectivity and improving access to TEN-T	Non-competitive with continuous submission with closing date	132.900.472,00	27.07.2023	27.01.2024



	PRSV0/294/ PRSV0_P5/ OP3/RSO3.2 /PRSV0_A1 9	Regional connectivity and improving access to TEN-T - Phased	Non-competitive with submission deadline	2.471.513,00	08.05.2024	19.06.2024
--	---	---	--	--------------	------------	------------

The status of projects submitted under Priority 5 is presented in the following table:

Specific objective	No. of submitted projects	No. of rejected projects	No. of projects under evaluation	No. of approved projects	No. of projects under contracting phase	No. of contracted projects	No. of projects rejected and terminated
3.2	9	0	0	0	0	9	0

Financial situation:

Specific objective	Financial allocation according to the programme (EU + NC) (euro)	Non- reimbursable value of submitted projects	Percentage of non- reimbursable value of projects submitted from the SO 3.2 allocation	Non- reimbursable value of contracted projects (euro)	Percentage of non- reimbursable value of projects contracted from the allocation of SO 3.2	Payments to beneficiaries (euro)	Percentage of payments made to beneficiaries
3.2	135.371.986,00	248.081.200,13	183,26%	247.574.012,46	182,88%	11.978.262,26	4,84%

The programme modifications, approved by Decision no. 21 bis/20.12.2023 and Decision no. 36/26.04.2024 also had an impact on Priority 5, namely:

- Taking over the phased projects from the ROP 2014-2020, based on art. 118a of Regulation (EU) 2021/10160, which had an impact on the financial value allocated for SO 5.1;
- The text referring to Operation B has been removed. Solutions to decongest traffic and increase road safety by improving secondary connections to TEN-T;
- Table 6: Dimension 3 – Territorial delivery mechanism and territorial approach has been revised, with intervention code 33 being introduced. No territorial orientation, following the elimination of Operation B.
- Specific indicators for Operation B have been removed;
- Intervention field 090 – *Other newly constructed or rehabilitated national, regional and local access roads has been eliminated*;
- The allocation dedicated to intervention code 093 – *Other reconstructed or modernized roads (motorways, national, regional or local roads) – 118,253,373 euros ERDF has been revised.*



The status of the output and result indicators

From the perspective of the achievement of the indicators, the situation is presented in the following tables:

RSO 3.2 Output Indicators:

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCO46	Length of reconstructed or upgraded roads – outside TEN-T	Kilometers	0	300	377,30

RSO 3.2 Result Indicators

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Baseline value in the programme	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCR55	Annual number of users of newly built, reconstructed, rehabilitated or modernized roads	passenger-km/year	152.133.249	276.088.481	202.063.493,58

At the level of Priority 5, no milestones have been set for the RCO46 output indicator, given the complex nature of the interventions and the long period required to carry out the investments and obtain quantifiable achievements within the projects. However, considering the planned achievements at the level of the contracted projects by the end of 2024, it is noted that there are favorable conditions for reaching or even exceeding the indicator target, more precisely the number of km of reconstructed or modernized roads – outside TEN-T.

Regarding the RCR55 result indicator, through the contracted projects, it is estimated that the annual number of users of newly built, reconstructed, rehabilitated or modernized roads will be very close to the target set for 2029 (73.18%).

The qualitative analysis of the information obtained through the application of participatory research tools highlights the beneficiaries' confidence in achieving the targets and objectives established in the projects, despite the premature status of the funded interventions. There have been identified various challenges that have generated delays in the implementation of the projects, such as the long time required to obtain authorizations and approvals or the difficulties arising from the conduct of public procurement procedures, affected by appeals and the delayed selection of contractors. Technical or climatic challenges are also expected, such as unfavorable land conditions and unfavorable weather conditions, which may contribute to the extension of the execution deadlines.

General conclusions and corrective measures





Following the analysis of the implementation of Priority 5, significant progress can be observed in terms of launching the calls for proposals and contracting the projects, with considerable over-contracting exceeding the available financial allocation. However, the actual implementation of the projects and the payment to beneficiaries remain at an early stage, given the start date of the projects, but also the various challenges encountered, such as the intrinsically complex nature of the road construction/ modernization/ expansion works or the delays recorded in the conduct of public procurement procedures.

No recommendations or corrective measures are proposed.

Priority: P6. Modern and inclusive education

Priority 6 of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 aims to develop the educational infrastructure for preschool, primary, secondary and tertiary education and includes SO 4.2 - *Improving access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning by developing accessible infrastructure, including by promoting resilience for distance and online education and training*, which contributes to Policy Objective 4 - *A more social and inclusive Europe, by implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights*.

The analysis of the implementation status of **SO 4.2 as of 31.12.2024** highlights the following findings:

- **Calls for proposals launched:** 4 calls for projects were launched, the total financial value of which represents 76.52% of the total financial allocation for SO 4.2.
- **Contracted projects:** the non-reimbursable value of the contracted projects (44) of the total budget allocated to SO 4.2 represented 76.08%, being 76,287,298.60 euros.
- **Payments made:** payments worth 1,918,785.43 euros were made, representing 2.52% of the total contracted value (EU+BS) within this SO.

By 31.12.2024, Priority 6 registered notable progress in launching the calls for proposals and contracting projects, but reduced contributions in making the payments (of only 2.52%).

The following tables present the main information related to the implementation status, the calls for proposals launched, the projects submitted and contracted, the financial situation and the situation of indicators within Priority 6.

Specific obiectiv e	Call for proposals code	Call title	Call type	Call for projects value (euro)	Call opening date	Call closing date
4.2	PRSV0/23/PRSV0_P6/OP4/RS	Investments in the development of educational	Competitive with continuous	51.331.066,00	27.07.2023	27.01.2024



	O4.2/PRSVO_A 16	infrastructure for primary and secondary education	submission and call closing date			
	PRSVO/296/PR SVO_P6/OP4/R SO4.2/PRSVO_ A16	Investments in the development of educational infrastructure for primary and secondary education - PHASED	Non-competitive with submission deadline	8.525.090,00	08.05.2024	19.06.2024
	PRSVO/295/PR SVO_P6/OP4/R SO4.2/PRSVO_ A17	Investments in the development of educational infrastructure for preschool level - PHASED	Non-competitive with submission deadline	4.419.559,00	08.05.2024	19.06.2024
	PRSVO/297/PR SVO_P6/OP4/R SO4.2/PRSVO_ A23	Investments in the development of educational infrastructure for tertiary education - PHASED	Non-competitive with submission deadline	12.461.597,00	08.05.2024	19.06.2024

The status of projects submitted under Priority 6 is presented in the following table:

Specific objective	No. of submitted projects	No. of rejected projects	No. of projects under evaluation	No. of approved projects	No. of projects under contracting phase	No. of contracted projects	No. of projects rejected and terminated
4.2	46	2	0	0	0	44	0

Financial situation:

Specific objective	Financial allocation according to the programme (EU + NC) (euro)	Non- reimbursable value of submitted projects	Percentage of non- reimbursable value of projects submitted from the SO 4.2 allocation	Non- reimbursable value of contracted projects (euro)	Percentage of non- reimbursable value of contracted projects from the allocation SO 4.2	Payments to beneficiaries (euro)	Percentage of payments made to beneficiaries
4.2	100.278.105,00	80.153.725,57	79,93%	76.287.298,60	76,08%	1.918.785,43	2,52%

Through the decisions 21 bis/20.12.2024 and 36/26.04.2024, the following programme modifications were made, with an impact on Priority 6:





- Taking over the phased projects from the ROP 2014-2020, based on Article 118a of the consolidated Regulation (EU) 2021/1060;
- Review of the intervention code assignments.

The status of the output and result indicators

From the perspective of the achievement of the indicators, the situation is presented in the following tables:

RSO 4.2 Output Indicators:

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCO66	Classroom capacity in new or upgraded childcare facilities	Persons	0	1.889	1.120
RCO67	Classroom capacity in new or modernized educational structures	Persons	0	24.833	18.101

RSO 4.2 Result Indicators

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Baseline value in the programme	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
PSR 02	Percentage of users of new or modernized mass educational structures belonging to vulnerable groups	%	7,90	8	8
RCR70	Annual number of users of new or modernized childcare facilities	users/year	777	1.889	1.120
RCR71	Annual number of users of new or modernized educational structures	users/year	16.565	22.350	19.123

Within P6, no milestones were established for the end of 2024, given the average implementation duration of the projects of this type, the delayed launch of the calls for proposals, and the fact that the deadline for the phased projects is 2025.

For these reasons, the value of the performance indicators did not register any progress based on the data available at the time of drafting this report. However, the 44 projects contracted by 31.12.2024 have a high potential to contribute to achieving the value of the performance indicators. Thus, based on the contracted projects, it is estimated that approximately 60% of the target set for indicator *RCO66 - Capacity of classrooms in new or modernized childcare structures* will be achieved and approximately 73% of the



target set for indicator *RCO67 - Capacity of classrooms in new or modernized educational structures* will be achieved.

It is also important to mention that at the time of drafting this report, there were 2 open calls, dedicated to the development of preschool educational infrastructure and investments in university educational infrastructure, which are to be closed in April 2025, after which new projects will be contracted, which will contribute to achieving the target values for the output and result indicators established under P6, and no problems are anticipated from this point of view. Interviews conducted with beneficiaries of the projects financed under SO 4.2 of Priority 6 confirm that they are confident that by the end of the project implementation period, the indicators and objectives pursued will be achieved. The main obstacles in implementation may be caused by public procurement, which is generally perceived as representing the biggest obstacle in implementation. Other risks identified by beneficiaries are represented by changes in market prices and risks related to external factors, such as legislative changes, which may cause implementation bottlenecks.

General conclusions and proposed corrective measures

The analysis of the implementation status of Priority 6 indicates significant progress in terms of launching the calls for proposals and contracting projects, even if payments made are still at a low level, given the late contracting of projects. Estimates from contracted projects suggest a significant contribution to achieving the output indicators, with a potential of 60% for RCO66 and 73% for RCO67. In addition, the existence of two open calls offers favourable prospects for contracting new projects, which will contribute to achieving the established objectives.

Given the importance of investments in educational infrastructure, supported by the context analysis carried out in *Chapter 4.4. Analysis of the socio-economic situation*, it is recommended to provide sustained support from the MA to promote open calls and provide technical assistance to potential beneficiaries, which would facilitate the process of submitting projects under this priority.

Also, given the challenges anticipated by the beneficiaries in implementing projects, it is recommended to organize information and support sessions for beneficiaries, in the more advanced stages of project implementation, which would facilitate addressing potential problems that may arise, provided that this need is identified among beneficiaries/there is interest on their part.

Priority: P7. Sustainable territorial development

Priority 7 of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027, through the 2 specific objectives (RSO 5.1 and RSO 5.2), contributes to Policy Objective 5 - *A Europe closer to citizens by promoting the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories and local initiatives*.





The SW Oltenia RP was adopted in October 2022, which generated a gap between the start of the programming period (2021) and the actual launch of the first calls for projects. The first calls for projects under Priority 7 (RSO 5.1) were launched in October 2023, which influenced the initial planning and execution of projects under the programme, which faced time constraints from the beginning.

By the end of 2024, Priority 7 had made notable progress in launching the calls for proposals, contracting the projects and making payments, with an average contribution to achieving European and national policy objectives. Among the main achievements:

- **Calls for proposals launched:** 6 calls for proposals were launched, representing 87.16% of the total financial allocation for Priority 7.
- **Contracted projects:** the non-reimbursable value of the contracted projects (37 contracts) by 31.12.2024 is 118,319,831.74 euros, which corresponds to a percentage of 46.88% of the total budget allocated to Priority 7.
- **Payments made:** payments of 3,889,223.21 euros (EU + SB) were made, representing 3.29% of the total non-reimbursable value of projects contracted under Priority 7.

At the level of specific objectives, RSO 5.1 has proven to be faster in launching the calls for proposals. Thus, under RSO 5.1, the situation at the end of 2024 is:

- **Calls for proposals launched:** 5 calls for proposals were launched, covering the entire financial allocation for this specific objective of the programme (RSO 5.1. Promoting integrated and inclusive development in the social, economic and environmental fields, as well as culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security in urban areas).
- **Contracted projects:** the non-reimbursable value of the contracted projects (36 contracts) by 31.12.2024 is 117,452,069.42 euros, which corresponds to a percentage of 54.15% of the total budget allocated to RSO 5.1.
- **Payments made:** payments were made in the amount of 3,265,900.88 euros (EU + SB), i.e. 2.78% of the total non-reimbursable value of the projects contracted under RSO 5.1.

Within RSO 5.1, one of the calls launched was dedicated to phased projects, and by the end of December 2024, 14 phased projects with a value of 17,255,173.78 euros had been contracted, representing 76.32% of the value allocated to the call for proposals. Considering the fact that all phased projects submitted had already been contracted, the call for proposals dedicated to these types of projects registered a saving of over 5 million euros at the end of 2024.

Within RSO 5.2 (Promoting integrated and inclusive local development in the social, economic and environmental fields, as well as culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security in areas other than urban areas), the situation at the end of 2024 is:





- **Calls for proposals launched:** a single call for proposals was launched in May 2024, representing 5.77% of the total financial allocation for this specific objective and being specific only to phased projects targeting rural tourism. According to the information provided by the MA, in spring 2025, it is estimated that two calls dedicated to the rural environment will be launched: sustainable local initiatives in rural areas for tourism infrastructure and sustainable local initiatives in rural areas for cultural heritage, with a value of 15,599,092 euros and 15,788,235 euros, respectively.
- **Contracted projects:** the non-reimbursable value of the contracted projects (1 single contract related to a phased project) until 31.12.2024 is 867,762.31 euros, which corresponds to a percentage of 12.42% of the total budget allocated to RSO 5.2.
- **Payments made:** payments were made in the amount of 623,322.32 euros (EU + SB), i.e. 71.83% of the total non-reimbursable value of the projects contracted under RSO 5.2.

Considering the situation presented above, the call dedicated to phased projects launched under RSO 5.2 registers savings of approximately 57% (the value of the contracted project is 867,762.31 euros), corresponding to an amount of over 1.1 million euros.

From the moment of the programme's launch until December 31, 2024, the following calls for proposals were launched under *RSO5.1. Promoting integrated and inclusive development in the social, economic and environmental fields, as well as culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security in urban areas (ERDF)* and under *RSO5.2. Promoting integrated and inclusive local development in the social, economic and environmental fields, as well as culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security in non-urban areas (ERDF)*. The potential beneficiaries for all calls launched are local public entities and other entities.

Specific objective	Call for proposals code	Call title	Call type	Call for projects value (euro)	Call opening date	Call closing date
5.1	PRSV0/133/PRSV0_P7/OP5/RSO5.1/P RSVO_A18	Support for integrated urban development - call dedicated to cities	Competitive	44.684.129	01.10.2023	01.04.2024
	PRSV0/141/PRSV0_P7/OP5/RSO5.1/P RSVO_A18	Support for integrated urban development - Municipalities call I	Competitive	23.313.459	01.10.2023	01.04.2024
	PRSV0/416/PRSV0_P7/OP5/RSO5.1/P RSVO_A18	Support for integrated urban development - Municipalities call II	Competitive		17.06.2024	17.10.2024
	PRSV0/142/PRSV0_P7/OP5/RSO5.1/P RSVO_A18	Support for integrated urban development MRJ_Craiova	Non-competitive	43.986.040	01.10.2023	20.12.2024
		Support for integrated urban development MRJ_Drobeta Tr. Severin	Non-competitive	21.259.420		



Specific objective	Call for proposals code	Call title	Call type	Call for projects value (euro)	Call opening date	Call closing date
		Support for integrated urban development MRJ_Tg. Jiu	Non-competitive	19.946.530		
		Support for integrated urban development MRJ_Rm. Vâlcea	Non-competitive	22.589.370		
		Support for integrated urban development MRJ_Slatina	Non-competitive	19.547.597		
	PRSV0/306/PRSV0_P7/OP5/RSO5.1/P RSVO_A18	Sustainable urban development - phased projects	Non-competitive with submission deadline	22.608.870	08.05.2024	19.06.2024
5.2	PRSV0/307/PRSV0_P7/OP5/RSO5.2/P RSVO_A13	Rural tourism - phased projects	Non-competitive with submission deadline	2.047.967	08.05.2024	19.06.2024

The status of projects submitted under Priority 7 is presented in the following table

Specific objective	No. of submitted projects	No. of rejected projects	No. of projects under evaluation	No. of approved projects	No. of projects under contracting phase	No. of contracted projects	No. of projects rejected and terminated
5.1	74	9	9	16	4	36	0
5.2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0

Financial situation:

Specific objective	Financial allocation according to the EU+NC programme (euro)	Non-reimbursable value of submitted projects	Percentage of non-reimbursable value of projects submitted from the SO allocation	Non-reimbursable value of contracted projects (euro)	Percentage of non-reimbursable value of contracted projects from the allocation of the SO	Payments to beneficiaries (euro)	Percentage of payments made to beneficiaries
5.1	216.887.694,12	358.520.067,96	165,30%	117.452.069,42	54,15%	3.265.900,88	2,78%
5.2	35.483.261,18	867.762,31	2,45%	867.762,31	2,45%	623.322,32	71,83%

The programme modification approved by DECISION no. 36/26.04.2024 also had an impact on Priority 7, namely:



- The takeover of phased projects from the ROP 2014-2020 had an impact on the financial value allocated for SO 5.1;
- Within RSO5.1, the takeover of the phased projects from the ROP 2014-2020, based on Article 118a of the consolidated Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 led to the modification of the text in the objective description. Within this SO, the phased projects were taken over from the ROP 2014-2020 – PI 5.1, 7.1, 13.1, 3.1. C. The activities were taken over from the ROP 2014-2020 in accordance with the priorities.
- Under RSO5.2, the amounts in the tables related to this specific objective were modified as a result of reallocation to urban regeneration, education and mobility.

The status of the output and result indicators:

From the perspective of the achievement of the indicators, the situation is presented in the following tables:

RSO 5.1 Output Indicators:

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCO74	Population targeted by projects carried out within the framework of the integrated territorial development strategies	persons	0	779.569	82.209
RCO75	Integrated territorial development strategies that benefit from support	contributions to strategies	11	11	25
RCO76	Integrated territorial development projects	projects	0	37	27
RCO77	Number of cultural and tourist sites receiving support	cultural and tourist sites	0	14	12
RCO114	Open spaces created or rehabilitated in urban areas	square meters	0	594.520	1.450.519

RSO 5.1 Result Indicators

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Baseline value in the programme	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCR77	Number of visitors to cultural and tourist sites receiving support	visitors/year	0	217.133	181.076
PSR03	Population that has access to urban development projects	persons	0	259.856	459.876

RSO 5.2 Output Indicators:

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCO74	Populația vizată de proiecte derulate în cadrul strategiilor de dezvoltare teritorială integrată	persoane	0	16.786	-



ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCO75	Population targeted by projects carried out within the framework of integrated territorial development strategies	persons	0	8	-
RCO76	Integrated territorial development strategies that benefit from support	contributions to strategies	0	8	-
RCO77	Integrated territorial development projects	projects	0	8	-

Indicatori de rezultat RSO 5.2:

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Baseline value in the programme	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
RCR77	Number of visitors to cultural and tourist sites receiving support	visitors/year	0	87.810	18.630

The performance of projects supported under P7 is justified by the late start of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme and the launch of the first calls for proposals under P7 (RSO 5.1) only in October 2023. Moreover, the first financing contracts supported under P7 were signed only in July 2024, only 6 months before the time of drafting this evaluation, which is why the value 0 registered for the output indicators by the end of 2024 is explained by the short period of time since the start of the projects, which proved insufficient for the supported projects to produce outputs or results.

However, the 37 projects already signed by the end of December 2024 (36 under RSO5.1 and 1 under RSO 5.2) have a high potential to contribute greatly to achieving the value of the output indicators set for 2029. Some relevant examples in this regard are RCO75 (Integrated territorial development strategies benefiting from support), RCO77 (Number of cultural and tourist sites benefiting from support) and RCO114 (Open spaces created or rehabilitated in urban areas), which seem to reach or even double (RCO75 and RCO 114) the targets proposed for 2029 only from the 37 projects already started.

On the other hand, the indicators RCO74 (Population targeted by projects carried out within the framework of integrated territorial development strategies) and RCO76 (Integrated territorial development projects) will not reach the target proposed for 2029 only from the 37 projects already contracted. It is important to mention, however, that in addition to the projects already contracted, within RSO 5.1 there are 29 funding applications at various stages of selection (under evaluation, approved or contracting) that may become projects that will be implemented and will contribute to achieving the target values for the output and result indicators established under P7. In addition, it should be noted that the final number of projects supported and implemented under P7 will be even higher, given the information provided by the MA, according to which, in the spring of 2025, two more calls dedicated to the rural environment will be launched: sustainable local initiatives in rural areas for tourism infrastructure and sustainable local initiatives in rural areas for cultural heritage.



The interviews conducted with beneficiaries of projects financed under SO 5.1 confirm that they are optimistic about achieving the indicators and objectives proposed within the projects. The main obstacles in the implementation may be caused by the delays in the execution of works, by the increased material costs and other administrative risks.

From the point of view of financial performance, the projects under implementation at the end of December 2024 represent 47% of the entire financial value allocated under the programme for Priority 7. From the information coming from the programme monitoring system (relating to December 2024), up to that date, payments have already been made to beneficiaries in the proportion of about 3% of the contracted value.

Given the average financial performance registered under Priority 7 by the end of December 2024, as well as the fact that the number of projects supported under this priority will increase considerably in the coming period, it is estimated that the target values for the output and result indicators proposed for 2029 will be achieved.

General conclusions and corrective measures:

The two specific objectives under Priority 7 had a different performance, given that under RSO 5.1 there were 5 calls for proposals already launched, covering 100% of the financial allocation for this specific objective. Under RSO 5.2, a single call for phased projects has been launched, but the planning for 2025 envisages the opening of calls for tourism infrastructure and cultural heritage, which should reduce the time lags registered so far.

However, the interest of beneficiaries by the end of 2024 for the funding opportunities opened under Priority 7 was high, which is also confirmed by the number of projects already contracted. Given the estimated progress of the projects contracted by the end of 2024, it seems that the targets of the indicators set for 2029 will be reached or even exceeded, if the projects to be contracted starting from 2025 under both specific objectives are not considered.

Taking into account the progress made, no changes are required under Priority 7, but it is recommended to intensify the efforts to launch all the calls for projects and to contract those already submitted, in order to ensure the necessary time for the implementation of projects and the materialization of the proposed results within them. Also, the savings resulting from the launch of phased calls for proposals can be used to address other needs identified at the programme level.

Priority 8 - Technical assistance

Priority 8 within the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 registered the following achievements (according to data from the monitoring system on 31.12.2024):





- **Calls for proposals launched:** 2 calls for proposals were launched (in July 2023 and January 2024, respectively), representing 100% of the total financial allocation for Priority 8.
- **Contracted projects:** the non-reimbursable value (EU+SB) of the signed contracts (2 contracts) by the end of 2024 is approximately EUR 14,842,514.74, which corresponds to a percentage of 30% of the total budget allocated to Priority 8.
- **Payments made:** payments of EUR 8,040,173.05 were made, i.e. approximately 54.17% of the total non-reimbursable value of projects contracted under Priority 8.

From the moment of the programme's launch until December 31, 2024, the following calls were launched:
2 calls for proposals within *SO Supporting institutions involved in the management of the SW Oltenia RP and beneficiaries/partners for the purpose of efficient and transparent implementation of the RP.*

Call for proposals code	Call title	Call type	Value of the call EU + NC (euro)	Call opening date	Call closing date	No. of submitted projects	No. of contracted projects
PRSVO/1133/8/1	Ensuring the functioning of the management system	Non-competitive with submission deadline	16.274.509	17.07.2023	31.10.2023	1	1
PRSVO/226/PRSVO_P8/AT	Ensuring the functioning of the management system	Non-competitive with submission deadline	32.549.020	22.01.2024	01.12.2027	1	1

Financial situation:

Financial allocation according to the programme (EU + NC) (euro)	Non-reimbursable value of submitted projects	Percentage of non-reimbursable value of projects submitted from P8 allocation	Non-reimbursable value of contracted projects (euro)	Percentage of non-reimbursable value of projects contracted from P8 allocation	Payments to beneficiaries (euro)	Percentage of payments made to beneficiaries
48.823.529,00	24.758.833,03	50,71%	14.842.514,74	30,40%	8.040.173,05	54,17%

The management and control system of the SW Oltenia RP is composed of the MA established at regional level, within the South-West Oltenia RDA, the MC of the SW Oltenia RP, the CPA within the Ministry of Finance and the AA within the Romanian Court of Auditors.

Technical assistance under Operational Programmes shall be granted in accordance with the provisions of Article 35 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (1): "At the initiative of the Commission, the funds may support



preparatory, monitoring, control, audit, evaluation, communication, including institutional communication on the political priorities of the Union, visibility and all actions aimed at providing the technical and administrative assistance necessary for the implementation of this Regulation and, where appropriate, with third countries".

TA interventions are directed towards:

- ensuring the functioning of the management system;
- strengthening the capacities of the MA and MC, beneficiaries and relevant partners;
- ensuring the evaluation and studies necessary for the programme, collecting data for a good programme implementation and preparing the next programming period;
- implementing information and communication activities regarding SW Oltenia RP.

Within a call for projects, several applications for funding may be submitted, within the limit of the financial allocation at the priority level. The form of support provided within the call for proposals is the non-reimbursable grant, awarded based on Article 36(4) of Regulation (EU) 1060/2021.

The main types of actions supported through this priority are:

1. Ensuring the functioning of the management and control system for the effective implementation and monitoring of the SW RP;
2. Ensuring programme evaluation and developing relevant studies for good programme implementation;
3. Strengthening the administrative capacity of the MA of SW RP, beneficiaries and regional partners to prepare and implement projects and ensuring their proper information;
4. Ensuring transparency and promotion of SW RP.

The status of output and result indicators

From the perspective of the achievement of the indicators, the situation is presented in the following tables:

Output indicators:

ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
SV180	Full-time equivalent jobs	Number	100	130	100
SV181	Studies, analyses, reports, strategies developed	Number	2	8	2
SV182	Events organized for ROP MC, CDR, potential beneficiaries,	Number	30	50	44



ID	Indicator	Unit of measurement	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)	Selected operations 31.12.2024
	beneficiaries and other relevant partners				
SV183	People trained on ROP 2021 - 2027 (MA staff, support and beneficiaries)	Number	297	626	263

The value achieved for 2024 comes from the two projects implemented by SW Oltenia RDA, as beneficiary of Priority 8, respectively: project code SMIS 161692 - Support provided to SW Oltenia RDA during 2021-2023 for the efficient and transparent implementation of SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 - and project code SMIS 321270 - Support for SW Oltenia RDA in the implementation of SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 and the closure of ROP 2014-2020.

Most of the milestones proposed for the Technical Assistance priority for 2024 were achieved and even exceeded (for example, the value for SV182 was exceeded by 47%), with the exception of SV183 - Persons trained regarding the RP 2021-2027 (MA staff, support and beneficiaries), which had a value of 263, based on the operations selected on 31.12.2024.

There is also a high probability of achieving the targets for 2029 for the performance indicators, given that the value of the indicator SV181 (Studies, analyses, reports, strategies developed) is already at 25% of the proposed target for 2029, the value of the indicator SV183 (Persons trained regarding the RP 2021-2027, MA staff, support and beneficiaries) at the end of 2024 represents 43% of the proposed target for 2029. Expectations of achieving the targets are also recorded within SV180 (the indicator value at the end of 2024 represents 77% of the proposed target for 2029), as well as within SV182 (the indicator value at the end of 2024 represents 88% of the proposed target for 2029).

In terms of financial performance, the two projects implemented by the end of 2024 represent 30.40% of the entire financial value allocated under the Technical Assistance Priority. According to the information from the programme monitoring system (until 31.12.2024), by that date, payments to beneficiaries amounting to 54.17% of the value of the contracted projects have already been made.

Perspectives and adaptability

Although significant progress has been made in launching and contracting projects under the SW Oltenia Regional Programme, it is recommended to intensify the efforts to launch the calls for proposals for specific objectives with low prospects for achieving the indicator targets, such as RSO 1.1 and 1.4; launch a new call "Investments in public buildings to increase energy efficiency – Call 2" (under SO 2.1), given the particular interest shown at regional level in improving the energy efficiency of public buildings; and



promote open calls and provide technical assistance to potential beneficiaries, which would facilitate the project submission process in the case of SO 4.2.

Also, based on the status of programme implementation at 31.12.2024, it is proposed to transfer amounts between specific objectives or intervention codes, as follows:

- Transferring an amount from code 040 - Energy efficiency and demonstration projects in SMEs to code 021 - Business development and internationalisation of SMEs, including productive investments, within P1;
- Reallocating part of the remaining funds available under Priority 2, RSO 1.2 (intervention code 013. Digitalization of SMEs) to RSO 1.3 (intervention code 021. Business development and internationalization of SMEs, including productive investments) under Priority 1;
- Transferring all unspent amounts related to SO 2.7 (including amounts reserved under the Flexibility Amount) to finance projects related to the reserve list of the call "*Investments in public buildings to increase energy efficiency*", SO 2.1, which have currently been financed from the State Budget.



IV. Analysis of progress and challenges under CPR 1060/2021 and presentation of findings

4.1 Country-specific recommendations (CSR)

The challenges from CSR relevant to the South-West Oltenia region

According to the 2024 Country Report⁴, Romania has made progress in implementing Cohesion Policy programmes, but continues to face a number of macroeconomic challenges and vulnerabilities in terms of competitiveness. According to the latest statistical data presented in the Country Report, regional disparities in Romania are still very high and highlight significant gaps in terms of labour productivity, investment and employment, between the Bucharest-Ilfov region and other regions, as well as between urban and non-urban areas. A relevant indicator for highlighting regional disparities is GDP/capita. According to Eurostat data, in 2022, in the Bucharest-Ilfov region, GDP/capita represented 177% of the EU average, a significant gap compared to less developed regions, such as South-West Oltenia (57%) and North-East (46%), which are in the last two places at national level.

The analysis of the data in a temporal profile shows that the dynamics of GDP/capita, during the 2013-2022 period, varied substantially from one region to another. If the Bucharest-Ilfov region reported an increase in the indicator by 7.4% in the reference interval (higher than the national average by 3.3%), the South-West Oltenia region contrasts with a negative trend, recording a decrease in GDP/capita by -0.2%. A similar dynamics is observed only in the case of the North-East region (-0.3%).

Differences in labor productivity are a determining factor for income polarization and deepening socio-economic inequalities between regions. In 2022, the South-West Oltenia region had the second lowest labor productivity at national level (60.3% of the EU average), at a significant difference from the value recorded in the Bucharest-Ilfov Region (156.6% of the EU average)⁵.

Moreover, the South-West Oltenia region is part, along with the North-East and South-Muntenia, of the category of regions that have been in a socio-economic development trap in the last 15 years, according to the analyses and conclusions captured in the Country Report.

⁴ European Commission (June 2024), Commission Staff Working Document, Country Report 2024 – Romania, accompanying the document on the economic, social, employment, structural and budgetary policies of Romania, [link](#), p.18

⁵ *Ibidem* 1, Annex 17. Economic and social results at regional level, p. 81



Eurostat data for the period 2012-2021 showed that most of the less developed regions in Romania faced demographic phenomena such as population aging and depopulation, affecting the availability of human capital needed for the labor market. At the national level, the population decreased by an average of 5.6%, with the most pronounced trends of demographic decline being noted in the regions of South-West Oltenia (-10.2%), West (-9.9%) and South-Muntenia (-9.4%). These trends, combined with the low and stagnant share of people with higher education, as well as the lack of economic dynamism in some regions, have led to a reduction in the number of qualified young workers. Against the background of these vulnerabilities, six of the seven less developed regions of Romania have fallen into a talent development trap, as highlighted in the Country Report and the European Commission Communication on “Unleashing Talent in Europe’s Regions”⁶.

Other important challenges, which limit the development of competitiveness at the regional level, are represented by the poor results of innovation and the low investments in the research and development sector. In Romania, the share of GDP allocated to R&D activities represented only 0.5%, well below the EU average of 2.3%. Continuing the analysis of the data in a regional profile, it is found that the South-West Oltenia region recorded the weakest intensity of the R&D sector at the national level (0.1% of GDP), explained by the low employment rate in high-tech sectors (0.9%) and the deficiencies or even the lack of R&D infrastructure. The capital region stands out, on the other hand, by performances that exceed the national average, recording a level of R&D expenditure of 1.1% of GDP.

Regarding administrative capacity, the Country Report highlights the existence of challenges at national level, which concern issues such as over-regulation, the complexity of governance structures and insufficient coordination between national, regional and local authorities, all of which generate administrative barriers and hinder the efficient implementation of Cohesion Policy programmes.

Resource constraints and the lack of effective coordination at national level affect the ability of regions to identify and address structural bottlenecks. To address these challenges, regional authorities in Romania have initiated the development of eight regional roadmaps, based on the OECD methodology, aimed at strengthening administrative capacity. These strategic documents aim to optimize human resource management in local and regional public administration, simplify procedures, increase transparency and improve decision-making through more effective consultations with stakeholders. The successful implementation of these measures, however, depends on the provision of additional support and adequate technical assistance, necessary both to support the reforms and to monitor their progress.

⁶ European Commission (January 2023), Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Harnessing talent in Europe's regions, [link](#)



Another critical point identified in the Country Report concerns the development of effective urban policies. In this regard, institutional reforms are needed to improve and facilitate coordination between local, regional, national and European funding sources. At local level, administrative limitations and the lack of a comprehensive land registry system hinder the implementation of priorities related to sustainable and inclusive urban development. The problems are more acute in small cities or cities with demographic decline, where local governments face difficulties in implementing integrated territorial projects due to limited financial resources and experience. On the other hand, cooperation between municipalities is hampered by the insufficient legislative framework for metropolitan associations and functional partnerships. Clearer regulation would support these entities to develop integrated projects at urban and peri-urban level and to stimulate connections between urban and rural areas, making more efficient the use of available territorial instruments.

In this context, one of the general recommendations formulated by the Council of the European Union⁷ aims to accelerate the implementation of Cohesion Policy programmes and the Recovery and Resilience Plan, including the chapter on REPowerEU, ensuring the completion of reforms and investments by August 2026, by guaranteeing effective governance and by strengthening administrative capacity. At the same time, in what concern the interim evaluation, the Council of the European Union recommends the continuation of the agreed priorities, maintaining their relevance, while adopting measures that better respond to the needs related to social housing, related social services and the development of smaller urban areas, while taking into account, at the same time, the opportunities offered by the "Strategic Technologies for Europe" (STEP) platform initiative to increase competitiveness.

Regarding the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme, the Country Report for 2024 highlights, in addition to the challenges, needs or difficulties mentioned above, relevant to the South-West Oltenia region, a series of specific proposals or recommendations⁸, aimed at optimizing the implementation of Cohesion Policy interventions, such as:

- Developing administrative capacity, with a focus on strengthening the role of regional and local authorities in addressing key investment needs;
- Improving labour productivity and the capacity of enterprises to innovate, with a focus on targeted support to enterprises, including public-private collaboration and participation in European research and innovation initiatives;
- Improving energy efficiency, in order to support the green transition and reduce dependence on unsustainable energy resources;

⁷ European Commission (June 2024), Council Recommendation on the economic, social, employment, structural and budgetary policies of Romania, [link](#), p.11

⁸ *Ibidem* 1, p. 18



- Investments in sustainable urban transport;
- Reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion, including the provision of social housing and social services for vulnerable households;
- Sustainable development of smaller urban areas facing persistent deficits in administrative capacity.

Contributions of the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 to the challenges from CSR

The SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 addresses the needs and challenges highlighted in the 2024 Country Report, through strategic and operational investments in strengthening administrative capacity, strengthening enterprise competitiveness and developing RDI activities, increasing energy efficiency, developing sustainable transport and reducing territorial disparities. Detailed information on the programme's contributions and potential impact on the challenges from CSR is presented below:

- 1. Administrative capacity and governance:** SW Oltenia RP allocates significant financial resources for the development and consolidation of administrative capacity at the level of institutions involved in the program management and control system, by organizing working meetings, exchanges of experience and good practices, respectively through specific training sessions in areas of interest for accessing and implementing structural funds (e.g. public procurement, project management, technical skills, state aid etc.). At the same time, the programme supports the strengthening of administrative capacity at the level of beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries/regional partners, by organizing specific training sessions (conferences, round tables, seminars, workshops etc.), in order to improve knowledge and skills regarding project preparation and efficient implementation of funded interventions. According to monitoring data (December 31, 2024), within Priority 8 – Technical Assistance, 2 projects dedicated to strengthening the capacity of institutions involved in the management of the SW Oltenia RP and of regional beneficiaries/partners were contracted, the value of which exceeds 14 million euros and represents 30.4% of the total financial allocation dedicated to this priority. Payments made to beneficiaries were approximately 8 million euros, meaning 54.17% of the non-reimbursable value of the contracted projects.

The analysis of contributions to the development of administrative capacity shows that the contracted projects will support 100 full-time equivalent jobs (output indicator SV180) and 263 people will be trained - MA staff, support and beneficiaries in relation to the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 (SV183).





At the same time, the RDA SW Oltenia has developed a roadmap⁹ through which the key initiatives to be implemented in the coming years are established to strengthen the administrative capacity at regional level, both for the structures involved in the management system of the South-West Oltenia Regional Development Programme, and for the direct beneficiaries of the interventions supported by the programme. Approved in February 2024, the roadmap includes a plan of short and medium-term measures that the RDA SW Oltenia intends to implement for the efficient management of the 2021-2027 programming period. The document is dynamic in nature, to be monitored, evaluated and updated periodically, depending on the emergence of needs or emerging elements in the field of strengthening administrative capacity.

The implementation status of the roadmap for strengthening administrative capacity, as of January 31, 2025, highlights important progress, out of the total of 48 measures established in the Action Plan, 39 being implemented. The areas whose measures have been fully implemented (100% progress) are: support for SMEs and digitalization for the benefit of citizens (PO1), energy efficiency and green infrastructure (PO2), accessibility and connectivity at regional level (PO3), modern and inclusive education (PO4), cultural and tourist heritage (PO5) and the reporting IT system (horizontal priority).

The impact of interventions financed under Priority 8 of the programme is expected to be manifested on several levels. At the institutional level, the financed actions will contribute to increasing the management, monitoring and control capacity of the programme, but also to improving administrative efficiency for the staff of the MA SW Oltenia RP. At the level of beneficiaries, the financed actions are expected to contribute to improving the chances of success in accessing funds and reducing or avoiding errors in project implementation.

2. **Enterprise competitiveness and RDI activity:** Within Priority 1 (SO 1.3) of the programme, investments are planned to improve competitiveness and innovation in microenterprises and SMEs, by developing production capacities, modernizing technological capacities and encouraging industrial transition etc. The establishment, expansion and operationalization of business structures (incubators, business accelerators, industrial parks, etc.) is also supported, in order to develop and increase the resilience of enterprises in the region. According to monitoring data (December 31, 2024), significant financial resources, of over 181 million euros, have been allocated at programme level to improve sustainability and increase the competitiveness of SMEs, respectively job creation. At the level of SO 1.3, 52 projects were contracted, with a non-reimbursable value of 44.6 million euros, to which are added another 36 projects, currently in the

⁹ Agenția pentru Dezvoltare Regională Sud-Vest Oltenia (2024), Foaie de parcurs pentru consolidarea capacității administrative a beneficiarilor PR și ADR ca AMPR



contracting process, worth 34.7 million euros, representing 43.79% of the total allocation for this OS. Taking into account also the high number of approved projects (397), it is noted that the programme is recording significant progress in terms of absorption of funds allocated to improve competitiveness and innovation in SMEs.

The analysis of data on funding requests submitted under SO 1.3 highlights the very high interest in this category of interventions, the non-reimbursable value of the submitted applications being approximately 61% higher than the SO allocation.

Regarding the contribution of interventions to the achievement of country-specific recommendations in the field of competitiveness, through projects contracted by the end of 2024, it is estimated that 51 enterprises will be registered as beneficiaries of financial support (output indicators RCO01 and RCO02), with increased turnover (result indicator RCR19). Of these, 16 will use the services of business incubators (RCR18).

On the other hand, in order to respond to country-specific recommendations regarding the intensification of investments in the RDI sector, SW Oltenia RP supports, through the interventions planned at the level of Priority 1 (SO 1.1), the stimulation of investments in research and development activities and the encouragement of innovation among enterprises, in order to increase their performance and transform them in a smart and sustainable way. Partnerships between academia, local public authorities and SMEs are envisaged with the aim of facilitating the acquisition of equipment and technologies necessary for the creation of innovative products and services. At the same time, the aim is to stimulate demand for innovation through projects that support private investment in R&D, the introduction of innovations in SMEs' processes and products and their development for production and marketing. Another category of actions aims at implementing technology transfer, which involves adapting and capitalizing on research results or existing technologies to the specific needs of companies, through technology transfer entities or other research units, thus facilitating the preparation for manufacturing and commercial use of innovations.

The total financial allocation dedicated to investments related to SO 1.1 exceeds 60 million euros (EU+NC). By reporting on the implementation stage, it is noted that by the end of December 2024, no calls for projects were launched under SO 1.1, the delay being justified by the high complexity of the interventions and the need to consult the key stakeholders involved. By the time of the preparation of this analysis, the methodologies and criteria provided for the selection of operations associated with SO 1.1 had been approved within the MC of SW Oltenia RP, the launch of specific calls being planned in the first quarter of 2025.



- 3. Energy efficiency:** In accordance with the recommendations on the green transition, SW Oltenia RP supports substantial investments to ensure/increase the energy efficiency of residential and public buildings, including measures for the use of renewable energy sources. As for public buildings, the program prioritizes for financing buildings with social functions - hospitals, educational infrastructure and social infrastructure.

According to monitoring data (December 31, 2024), 76 projects were contracted to increase the energy efficiency of buildings, with a non-reimbursable value of over 146 million euros, representing 76.4% of the total allocation of OS 2.1. Payments made to beneficiaries are over 5 million euros and represent 3.5% of the non-reimbursable value of the contracted projects.

The analysis of the contribution of the signed projects to the fulfilment of the country-specific recommendations in the field of improving energy efficiency shows that important achievements are expected in terms of improving the energy efficiency of public buildings (the RCO19 output indicator will reach at least 63% of the proposed target). On the other hand, the contribution to increasing the number of housing with improved energy performance is relatively limited (the contracted projects cover only 5.68% of the RCO18 output indicator target). It is important to note that, in the case of the RCO18 indicator, only one call for projects has been launched so far, for phased projects from the previous programming period, with a modest financial allocation (approximately EUR 2 million). However, a new call is expected to be launched exclusively dedicated to improving the energy performance of housing, with an allocation of approximately EUR 38 million, which creates favourable conditions for achieving the established target values. The funded interventions will also generate results in terms of reducing annual primary energy consumption (RCR26) and greenhouse gas emissions (RCR29), although the estimated data within the contracted projects indicate a still limited contribution to achieving the targets for 2029.

- **Sustainable urban transport:** Considering the strategic objectives through which the EU aims to reduce emissions from transport by 60% by 2050, as well as the specific country recommendations that encourage sustainable, ecological and non-polluting transport, SW Oltenia RP supports, within Priority 4 (SO 2.8), interventions dedicated to improving the efficiency and attractiveness of the local public transport system and encouraging active modes of transport (e.g. pedestrian routes, cycling infrastructure, bicycle rental systems, etc.). The monitoring data for December 2024 indicate that, at the level of Priority 4, 16 projects promoting sustainable multimodal urban mobility have been contracted, the non-reimbursable value of which exceeds 58 million euros and represents 48.84% of the total financial allocation dedicated to this priority. If the value of the projects already approved, of 29,989,506.03 euros, is also taken into account, it is found that the funds allocated to sustainable urban mobility present favorable premises to be committed in a proportion of 73.95%. Payments made to beneficiaries are worth 6.8 million euros and represent 11.75% of the total non-reimbursable value of the contracted projects.



It is estimated that the projects contracted by the end of 2024 will contribute to the creation of 6 new infrastructures for collective public transport (the PSO 03 output indicator being estimated to be achieved at 100%), to the increase in the capacity of ecological rolling stock for collective public transport by 1834 passengers (the RCO57 indicator being covered at 97.13%), respectively to the increase by 10 in the number of cities and localities with new or modernized digitalized urban transport systems (the estimates regarding the achievement of the RCO60 output indicator being 76.92%).

Regarding the results of the interventions, through the contracted projects it is estimated that the annual number of users of new or modernized public transport will be over 10.4 million people (having achieved the target of the RCR62 indicator).

The expected impact of these interventions is to significantly improve the quality of urban life, by reducing carbon emissions generated by transport and promoting a sustainable mobility model, aligned with European environmental and green transition objectives. At the same time, the projects will contribute to increasing the accessibility and safety of the public transport system, facilitating connectivity between different urban and peri-urban areas. These interventions will support local economic development, reducing urban congestion and pollution, improving public health and environmental quality, and reducing dependence on individual motorized transport, in favor of efficient and environmentally friendly mobility solutions.

- **Reducing territorial disparities and developing small urban areas:** SW Oltenia RP promotes the integrated and inclusive development of urban areas and functional urban areas, by providing specific support for economic, social and environmental challenges, including by addressing issues aimed at promoting culture, valorizing natural heritage and developing tourism infrastructure. The interventions programmed at the level of Priority 7, SO 5.1, are implemented, similarly to SO 2.7 (P3) and SO 2.8 (P4), through the governance mechanism of SDT/SIDU, ensuring complementarity with other projects within the strategies and facilitating the addressing of multiple functions within the same project (economic, social, environmental, etc.).

It is worth noting that through the actions foreseen under SO 5.1, the programme also supports the improvement of the administrative capacity of local public authorities in specific areas of urban development and the preparation of strategic documents. In this regard, it is planned to organize exchanges of experience and training sessions to consolidate knowledge in relation to the physical regeneration of urban spaces and the sustainable exploitation of cultural heritage and tourism potential, including increasing the attractiveness and improving the quality of life of local communities. The programme thus addresses the problems of public authorities in urban areas and small localities, which do not have sufficient experience or knowledge to implement



participatory and integrated territorial projects, thus contributing to the fulfillment of the country-specific recommendations in this area.

According to monitoring data for December 2024, 36 projects dedicated to integrated territorial development in urban areas were contracted at the level of SO 5.1, with a non-reimbursable value of 117.4 million euros, representing 54.15% of the total budget allocated to this SO. Payments made to beneficiaries are over 3.2 million euros, meaning 2.78% of the total non-reimbursable value of projects contracted under SO 5.1.

The differentiated analysis at the level of calls for proposals indicates a very high interest of funding applicants for the call PRSVO/133/PRSVO_P7/OP5/RSO5.1/PRSVO_A18, dedicated exclusively to cities, where the non-refundable value of the submitted applications was almost double (+90.26%) compared to the call allocation.

Regarding the contribution to the reduction of territorial disparities and the balanced development of urban areas, the monitoring data show that 25 integrated territorial development strategies (2 times more than the target set for the RCO75 performance indicator) and 27 integrated territorial development projects in the social, economic and environmental fields will be supported. The contracted projects will also contribute to the rehabilitation and valorization of 12 cultural and tourist sites (85.1% of the RCO77 performance indicator target), but also to the rehabilitation or creation of open spaces (1.4 thousand km) in urban areas (expected to exceed the target for the RCO114 indicator by 2.63 times).

The contribution of interventions and actions supported through the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 to addressing the challenges, difficulties and vulnerabilities highlighted by the CSR are summarized in the following table:

CSR Challenge	SW Oltenia RP actions	Contribution to CSR
Developing administrative capacity, with a focus on strengthening the role of regional and local authorities in addressing key investment needs	Priority 8: 2 projects dedicated to strengthening the capacity of institutions involved in the management of the SW Oltenia RP and of regional beneficiaries/partners, with a non-reimbursable value of over 14 million euros (30.4% of the total financial allocation dedicated to this priority).	Contributes to strengthening administrative capacity at regional level, both for the structures involved in the management system of the South-West Oltenia RP, and for the direct beneficiaries of interventions supported by the programme.



CSR Challenge	SW Oltenia RP actions	Contribution to CSR
Improving labour productivity and the capacity of enterprises to innovate, with a focus on targeted support to enterprises, including public-private collaboration and participation in European research and innovation initiatives	Priority 1, SO 1.3: 52 contracted projects, with a non-reimbursable value of 44.6 million euros + 36 projects under contracting, with a non-reimbursable value of 34.7 million euros (43.79% of the total allocation dedicated to SO 1.3)	Supports the competitiveness of SMEs, through the development of production capacities and technological modernization. Contributions to the increase in the turnover of the supported enterprises are expected. The establishment, expansion and operationalization of business structures is also supported, with results expected regarding the use of the services offered by these structures.
Improving energy efficiency, in order to support the green transition and reduce dependence on unsustainable energy resources	Priority 3, SO 2.1: 76 contracted projects, with a non-reimbursable value of over 146 million euros (76.4% of the total allocation of SO 2.1)	Contribution to improving the energy efficiency of public buildings (159,061 m ²) and residential buildings (213 homes). Also, the funded interventions are expected to contribute to reducing annual primary energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.
Investments in sustainable urban transport	Priority 4, SO 2.8: 16 contracted projects, whose non-reimbursable value exceeds 58 million euros (48.84% of the total allocation of SO 2.8)	Contribution to the development of infrastructure for collective public transport, increasing the capacity of environmentally friendly rolling stock for public transport and reducing greenhouse gas emissions generated by transport.
Sustainable development of smaller urban areas facing persistent deficits in administrative capacity	Priority 7, SO 5.1: 36 projects dedicated to integrated territorial development in urban areas, with a non-reimbursable value of 117.4 million euros (54.15% of the total budget allocated to SO 5.1)	Contribution to the reduction of territorial disparities and the development of small urban areas.



Ajustările necesare pentru îmbunătățirea contribuției programului la realizarea RST

From a *strategic point of view*, the South-West Oltenia Regional Program largely responds to the challenges and recommendations set out in the 2024 Country Report, directly contributing to the national and European objectives for 2030, especially in the areas of *administrative capacity building, green transition, social inclusion and integrated territorial development*. Although the actions and interventions of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme are *highly compatible with the country-specific recommendations*, the need for improvements and adjustments is noted, such as:

- Given the significant role in stimulating the economic competitiveness of enterprises, increasing turnover and generating new jobs at regional level, as well as the insufficient financial resources to cover their needs, it is necessary to reallocate any available funds from other SOs to supplement the financial allocation of Priority 1, SO 1.3.
- To enhance the program's contribution to meeting country-specific recommendations on the development of the research, development and innovation sector, it is advisable to intensify efforts towards launching calls for projects focused on investments in expanding RDI capacities and adopting advanced technologies (SO 1.1, Priority 1).
- To support the European objectives regarding the digital and green transition, the MA SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 proposes to introduce SO 1.6 Supporting investments contributing to the objectives of the Strategic Technology for Europe Platform (STEP platform) in the Programme, referred to in art. 2 of Regulation (EU) 2024/795, within a new priority, namely Priority 9. Strategic Technologies. In this context, it is considered appropriate that the actions dedicated to supporting the economic environment, aligned with the STEP initiative, be associated with intervention areas 188 (Productive investments in large enterprises mainly related to the field of clean and resource-efficient technologies), 190 (Productive investments in large enterprises mainly related to the field of biotechnologies) and 192 (Productive investments in large enterprises mainly related to the field of digital technologies and innovations in deep technologies). The choice of intervention codes is justified by the specifics of the regional economy and the higher probability that large enterprises can implement projects in high-tech fields. In order to ensure the necessary resources, it is proposed to reallocate the savings obtained under Priority 2, call for projects PRSVO/241/PRSVO_P2/OP1/RSO1.2/PRSVO_A8 - Digitalization for SMEs.
- Regarding the improvement of energy performance, given the high interest of beneficiaries in these categories of interventions, it is necessary to supplement the funds dedicated to SO 2.1, by redistributing unused amounts from SO 2.7, where the level of contracting is below expectations.
- In line with the 2024 Country Specific Recommendations, the European Commission underlines the need to increase access to social housing, especially in regions with a major deficit of affordable housing. In this regard, the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 will propose strategic changes to



integrate social housing financing within Priority 6 (to be renamed Modern Education and Inclusion), SO 4.3 Promoting socio-economic inclusion of marginalized communities, low-income households and disadvantaged groups, including people with special needs, through integrated actions targeting housing and social services. In this context, actions dedicated to the construction/rehabilitation/modernization/expansion of social housing will be supported (intervention code 126 Housing infrastructure (other than for migrants, refugees and persons seeking or under international protection)), for which financial resources can be provided by relocating savings from Priority 7, the calls for phased projects: PRSVO/306/PRSVO_P7/OP5/RSO5.1/PRSVO_A18 - Sustainable urban development - phased projects (OS 5.1) and PRSVO/307/PRSVO_P7/OP5/RSO5.2/PRSVO_A13 - Rural tourism - phased projects (OS 5.2).

4.2 Contribution to the Integrated National Energy and Climate Change Plan (PNIESC)

Presentation of the PNIESC and its relevant objectives

At European level, the challenges in the field of energy and climate change have led to the adoption of policies, strategies and norms through which a series of priority objectives have been established to be met by the end of 2030, as set out below:

- Reducing the EU's net greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels;
- Reducing final energy consumption by at least 11.7% compared to projected energy consumption in 2030 (based on the 2020 baseline);
- Adopting renewable energy sources (at least 42.5% by 2030, but aiming to reach the 45% target).

To achieve the energy and climate objectives, each Member State sets an indicative national contribution in terms of energy efficiency, based on final energy consumption, with a view to collectively achieving the binding Union target on final energy consumption. At the level of Romania, this contribution is reflected in the **Integrated National Energy and Climate Change Plan (PNIESC)**¹⁰, a document that includes 91 additional policies and measures aimed at increasing the share of renewable energy sources (RES), significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and implementing innovative solutions in all economic sectors. The key objectives of the plan include:

¹⁰ Ministerul Energiei, Planul Național Integrat Domeniul Energiei și Schimbărilor Climatice, 2024, [link](#)



- reducing net GHG emissions by 85% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, and achieving climate neutrality before 2045, thus advancing the previous deadline set for 2050;
- the share of RES in gross final energy consumption to be at least 38.3% by 2030, with wind and solar energy as the main drivers and the use of heat pump technologies for the heating and cooling process.

The Integrated National Energy and Climate Change Plan is structured around five dimensions, which follow the key dimensions assumed at European level, after the signing of the Paris Agreement, namely: **i. decarbonization; ii. energy efficiency; iii. energy security; iv. internal energy market and v. research, innovation and competitiveness.**

For each of the five dimensions of the PNIESC, presented in the table below, 91 policies or measures (P&M) were proposed to align with the established national and European targets and objectives, a policy/measure being able to contribute to one or more dimensions.

PNIESC dimension	Description of the dimension.
Decarbonization	<p>The dimension addresses issues related to GHG emissions and absorption and renewable energy.</p> <p>To meet national targets, Romania has set sectoral targets for reducing GHG emissions in 2030 and 2050, compared to 1990 levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Energy sector: an 87% reduction in GHG emissions in 2030 compared to 1990 is targeted, achieved primarily by decommissioning coal and lignite production capacities and by expanding production capacities from renewable energy sources (RES). - Transport sector: the sectoral target indicates an increase in GHG emissions limited to no more than 40% in 2030 compared to 1990, the limitation being possible primarily by supporting the development of road transport with hybrid and electric vehicles. - Buildings Sector: a 19% reduction in GHG emissions is targeted in 2030 compared to 1990, achieved by improving the energy performance of buildings and increasing the use of heat pumps and solar thermal collectors. - Industry Sector: the sectoral target aims to reduce GHG emissions by 77% in 2030 compared to 1990, which will be achieved mainly by replacing fossil fuels with electricity from RES and by increasing the efficiency of the technologies used. - Agriculture Sector: GHG emissions will decrease by 44% in 2030 compared to 1990, by adopting measures regarding adequate animal nutrition and feed management. - LULUCF sector: an 87% increase in GHG absorptions is targeted in 2030 compared to 1990, which will be achieved mainly by improving forest fire management.



PNIESC dimension	Description of the dimension.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Waste Sector: GHG emissions will be reduced by 25% in 2030 compared to 1990 through appropriate waste reduction, reuse and recycling. - For renewable energy, Romania's objective is to achieve a share of RES in gross final energy consumption of at least 38.3% by 2030. Projections indicate that, by 2025, the share of RES will reach 31.0%.
Energy efficiency	<p>The primary energy consumption target for Romania in 2030 was set at 30.2 Mtoe, according to the Energy Efficiency Directive (recast). The forecasts assumed by the PNIESC regarding primary energy consumption indicate the achievement of a target of 28.7 Mtoe in 2030, below the target set by the Energy Efficiency Directive (recast) in 2023. The target of 28.7 Mtoe will mark a 9% decrease in primary energy consumption compared to 2022. Also, gross final energy consumption is expected to register a slight decrease of 6% in 2030 compared to 2022, without affecting productivity, also complementary to measures to increase the share of energy produced from renewable sources, reaching an absolute value of 22.5 Mtoe in 2030.</p>
Energy security	<p>Producția de energie electrică: aims to develop domestic sources of energy production. In the electricity production sector, the aim is to diversify production sources and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The target for 2030 is to reach an installed capacity of 31.3 GW, approximately 76% of which comes from RES.</p> <p>Alimentarea cu gaze naturale: Romania is continuously improving its natural gas transmission network, including interconnections with neighboring countries, to diversify its natural gas supply sources and reduce its dependence on Russia. This involves Romania's participation in various cross-border projects, ongoing or planned.</p> <p>This dimension also aims to reduce Romania's dependence on imports of crude oil, solid fossil fuels and natural gas by 2030 by intensifying electrification processes, decommissioning coal-fired power plants and diversifying supply sources.</p> <p>In addition, Romania aims to implement battery energy storage solutions, in particular by developing battery storage, planning to put into operation a total electricity storage capacity of 1,200 MW or 2,400 MWh by 2030 and 2,000 MW by 2035.</p>
Internal energy market	<p>Romania's approach to its internal energy market, in the context of the Energy Union Strategy, focuses on interconnection, aiming to achieve the 15% interconnection target by 2030 by expanding cross-border transmission capacity and increasing installed generation capacity, but also by taking steps to address price differentials. Romania is and will be part of key projects and modernization initiatives targeting both electricity and gas transmission infrastructure, with a particular focus on the implementation and completion of projects of common interest. The national plans aim to integrate markets, allowing non-discriminatory participation of RES, demand response and storage, while actively promoting self-generation and new technologies. At the same time, Romania attaches great importance</p>



PNIESC dimension	Description of the dimension.
	to the flexibility of its energy system, with a focus on energy storage, in particular battery-based, and aims to increase the competitiveness of its retail energy sector, protect energy consumers and address energy poverty. The main objective is to create a resilient, sustainable and highly interconnected energy system in Romania.
Research, innovation and competitiveness	In relation to its innovation performance, as reflected in the European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS), Romania's objective is to become a moderately innovative country (i.e. to have an innovation performance between 70% and 100% of the EU average).

Contribution of SW Oltenia RP to PNIESC

As highlighted in the previous section, the Integrated National Energy and Climate Change Plan is structured around five dimensions, which follow the key dimensions assumed at European level, after the signing of the Paris Agreement.

The analysis of data relating to the areas of intervention included in Annex I of the CPR, at the end of October 2024 (the latest date available on the Cohesion data platform) provides a comparative overview of three indexes:

- Share of EU climate amount $\frac{\text{Planned EU climate amount}}{\text{Planned EU amount (EU programme budget)}}$
- Performance of decided EU climate amount $\frac{\text{Decided EU climate amount}}{\text{Planned EU climate amount}}$
- Performance of spent EU climate amount $\frac{\text{Spent EU climate amount}}{\text{Decided EU climate amount}}$

These indexes cannot highlight a precise and specific contribution to the objectives of the PNIESC, but represent an indicative opportunity to compare the performance of the programme in terms of climate objectives.

As show in the following table, it is clear that Sout-West Oltenia Regional Programme has a similar focus on planning for climate change to other Romanian and EU ERDF programmes in less developed regions, while having a lower capacity to spend. Nonetheless, it is interesting to notice that the performance in terms of selecting operations is much better, this is due to the very good performance of RSO 2.1, which decided for almost the total planned EU amount at the end of October 2024.

Tabel no. 1 Overview of EU climate amount performance (October 2024)

	$\frac{\text{Planned EU climate amount}}{\text{Planned EU amount}}$	$\frac{\text{Decided EU climate amount}}{\text{Planned EU climate amount}}$	$\frac{\text{Spent EU climate amount}}{\text{Decided EU climate amount}}$
South-West Oltenia Programme	30,1%	67,5%	0,8%



Romanian ERDF programmes in less developed regions	30,3%	47,6%	2,5%
ERDF programmes in less developed regions	32,7%	27,5%	6,4%

Source: Own elaborations based on Cohesion data platform (October 2024)

Data in December 2024 completes the previous overview with more specific elements and updates which can be useful to give a more quantitative dimension to the programme contribution in the progress to PNIESC objectives. Overall, there is no progress of RSO 1.1 and 1.3 to the dimensions of PNIESC. Meanwhile, the RSO 2.1 shows a strong contribution (based on selected operations and spent amount) to i. decarbonization; ii. energy efficiency; iii. energy security. RSO 2.8 contributes substantially to the decarbonisation of the local public transport services.

Tabel no. 2 Overview of EU climate amount performance at the level of SW Oltenia RP (October 2024) – Values are in EUR

Intervention field	RSO	Total planned	Total decided (eligible costs of selected operations)	Total expenditure declared by beneficiaries	PNIESC dimensions
029 Research and innovation processes, technology transfer and cooperation between businesses, research centers and universities, with a focus on the low-carbon economy, resilience and adaptation to climate change	1.1	11818823,53			i. decarbonization v. research, innovation and competitiveness.
030 Research and innovation processes, technology transfer and cooperation between businesses with a focus on the circular economy	1.1	2352941,18			v. research, innovation and competitiveness.
040 Energy efficiency and demonstration projects in SMEs or large enterprises and support measures that comply with energy efficiency criteria	1.3	3970588,24			v. research, innovation and competitiveness.
042 Energy efficiency in housing - deep renovation	2.1	40000000,04			i. decarbonization ii. energy efficiency iii. energy security



Intervention field	RSO	Total planned	Total decided (eligible costs of selected operations)	Total declared beneficiaries	expenditure by	PNIESC dimensions
045 Energy efficiency renovation or energy efficiency measures related to public infrastructures, demonstration projects and support measures that comply with energy efficiency criteria	2.1	151603529,6	151427598,7	2683260,33		i. decarbonizayion ii. energy efficiency iii. emergy security
079 Nature and biodiversity protection, natural heritage and natural resources, green and blue infrastructure	2.7	87868235.39	43371983,78	0		Impact indirect mai mult asupra subiectelor legate de natură și biodiversitate decât asupra schimbările climatice, chiar dacă este atribuită o valoare financiară acestui domeniu de intervenție
081 Clean urban transport infrastructures	2.8	40576470.73	37142248,1	5169095,43		i. decarbonization
082 Clean urban transport rolling stock		34705882.47	13260817,84	0		i. decarbonization
083 Infrastructure for cyclists		23529411.84	0	0		i. decarbonization
085 Digitalization of transport, when it aims in part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions: urban transport		9705882.39	9123091,31	396154,96		i. decarbonization
086 Alternative fuels infrastructure		7411764.73	0	0		i. decarbonizare

Source: Own elaborations based on Cohesion data platform (October 2024)

To determine the contribution of the SW Oltenia RP to the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (PNIESC), the evaluators started from mapping the specific objectives and priorities of the program, by identifying the correspondence between the relevant specific objectives and the PNIESC objectives, which would highlight the role of each priority in supporting the objectives targeted by the PNIESC, presented below. It is to be mentioned that the table includes the main objectives/aspects targeted by the PNIESC measures, to the achievement of which the interventions financed through the SW Oltenia RP have the potential to contribute, namely decarbonization; energy efficiency and energy security.



<i>PNIESC dimension</i>	<i>PNIESC objectives</i>	<i>Relevant priorities SW Oltenia RP</i>	<i>Specific objectives SW Oltenia RP</i>	<i>Contribution of SW Oltenia RP</i>
Decarbonization P&M 22 Increasing the installed capacity of electricity production P&M 26 Construction of photovoltaic power plants on rooftops P&M 27 Installation of solar thermal collectors in the residential sector P&M 35 Improving the energy performance of public buildings at central level P&M 36 Improving the energy performance of public buildings at local level P&M 37 Renovation of residential buildings P&M 39 Rehabilitation of public lighting P&M 43 Increasing the share of heat pumps	Commitment to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 85% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, including by setting sectoral targets, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building sector: a 19% reduction in GHG emissions is targeted in 2030 compared to 1990. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority: P3. Energy efficiency and green infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSO2.1. Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions • RSO2.7. Intensifying actions to protect and conserve nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, as well as reducing all forms of pollution 	Investments in public buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency; Investments in residential buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency; Investments to preserve, improve or expand green-blue infrastructure. Interventions supported under SO 2.1 and SO 2.7 will lead to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the improvement of air quality.
Decarbonization P&M 48 Increasing the share of passenger vehicles powered by alternative fuels P&M 49 Modernizing urban public transport P&M 56 Alternative mobility P&M 58 Modernizing road transport infrastructure	Commitment to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 85% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, including by setting sectoral targets, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transport sector: the sectoral target indicates an increase in GHG emissions limited to no more than 40% in 2030 compared to 1990, the limitation being possible primarily by supporting the development of road transport with hybrid and electric vehicles. 	Priority: P4. Sustainable urban mobility	RSO2.8. Promoting sustainable multimodal urban mobility as part of the transition to a zero-carbon economy	Investments for the development of ecological urban transport and bicycle infrastructure.



<i>PNIESC dimension</i>	<i>PNIESC objectives</i>	<i>Relevant priorities SW Oltenia RP</i>	<i>Specific objectives SW Oltenia RP</i>	<i>Contribution of SW Oltenia RP</i>
Energy efficiency P&M 26 Construction of photovoltaic power plants on rooftops P&M 27 Installation of solar thermal collectors in the residential sector P&M 35 Improving the energy performance of public buildings at central level P&M 36 Improving the energy performance of public buildings at local level P&M 37 Renovation of residential buildings P&M 39 Rehabilitation of public lighting P&M 43 Increasing the share of heat pumps P&M 44 Increasing the use of efficient technologies in the residential sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The primary energy consumption target for Romania in 2030 was set at 30.2 Mtoe, according to the Energy Efficiency Directive (recast) Long-term sectoral projections on final energy consumption illustrate that policies and initiatives aimed at improving the energy efficiency of buildings and promoting the use of more efficient technologies will have a significant impact on the residential sector. Their implementation will lead to a decrease in the share of the residential sector in gross final energy consumption at the national level from 33% in 2022 to 29% in 2030 and to 16% in 2050. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priority: P3. Energy efficiency and green infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RSO2.1. Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions 	Investments in public buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency; Investments in residential buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency;
Energy security P&M 26 Construction of photovoltaic power plants on rooftops P&M 27 Installation of solar thermal collectors in the residential sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the national capacity for producing energy from RES; Reducing energy costs and increasing energy efficiency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priority: P3. Energy efficiency and green infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RSO2.1. Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions 	Investments in public buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency and measures for the use of renewable energy sources.



It is noted that the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 directly supports the PNIESC through strategic investments in energy efficiency, green-blue infrastructure and sustainable urban mobility, within priorities 3 and 4 of the programme. More details regarding the main contributions and progress made are provided below. In addition, for SO 1.1, SO 1.3, SO 1.4 (P1), SO 3.2 (P5), SO 4.2 (P6), SO 5.1 and SO 5.2 (P7), an indirect contribution to the PNIESC objectives was identified, through the specifics of the financed actions (according to the aspects described below).

Direct contributions

The way in which interventions supported under the SW Oltenia RP contribute to the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (PNIESC) is described below, by reference to the 3 specific objectives defined within the programme, for which a correspondence with the objectives pursued under the PNIESC was identified.

➤ Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions (RSO2.1)

This SO supports investments to improve energy efficiency in the SW Oltenia region, which will lead to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the improvement of air quality. Thus, this SO finances thermo-modernization projects that include intervention measures in accordance with the energy efficiency criteria for the existing residential and public stock, by using the renovation packages provided for in the SRTL.

SO 2.1 supports investments in the deep renovation of existing public buildings in urban and rural areas and investments in residential buildings in order to ensure/increase energy efficiency, as well as the completion of phased projects (public buildings, residential buildings, public lighting) from the previous funding period (these meet the previously established support conditions, but will also contribute to SO 2.1).

In order to achieve the greatest possible impact and an increased contribution to achieving the PNIESC objectives, at the level of the programme/applicant's guidelines, a series of conditions or project award criteria have been defined, which favor projects with a high impact on improving energy efficiency, including:

- Cost-effective renovation of education, health, social, office and administrative buildings (including ancillary storage and warehousing spaces that have a heating/cooling regime for operation) will include measures from the SRTL deep renovation package, which will substantially reduce energy consumption. The maximum renovation package - P3 package (deep renovation) assumes a deep renovation standard, including all renewable energy options, such as rooftop photovoltaic panels, solar domestic hot water preparation or geothermal heat pumps. Complementary measures according to SRTL may also be included.
- Thus, within the call for projects PR SVO/19/PRSV0 P3/OP2/RSO2.1/PRSV0 A14 - OPERATION A - Investments in public buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency and measures for the use of



renewable energy sources, **only projects leading to a thorough renovation of existing public buildings (including public heritage buildings) in urban and rural areas were financed, which has the effect of reducing primary energy consumption by over 60%.** Furthermore, investments proposed under this call, which have an expected lifetime of at least five years, must demonstrate climate proofing in accordance with the requirements of the European Commission Communication on Technical Guidance on Climate Proofing Infrastructure 2021-2027. Climate proofing is a process that integrates climate change mitigation and adaptation measures into the development of infrastructure projects.

- Within the call for projects PR SVO/19/PRSV0 P3/OP2/RSO2.1/PRSV0 A14 - OPERATION A - Investments in public buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency and measures for the use of renewable energy sources, the projects were scored based on cumulative criteria of a technical, economic and social nature, starting with the buildings with the lowest performance (those that consume the highest amount of energy), with long-term occupancy rates, built before 2000 and those that require relatively low investments for structural and safety improvements.
- The South West Oltenia RP supports at least the moderate renovation of residential buildings, in compliance with the conditions defining the intervention code 042. For multi-family residential buildings, among the ways to prioritize access to financing taken into account will be: the size of the building (no. of apartments), the energy performance of the building, the ambition of the proposed projects in terms of reducing energy consumption and reducing energy poverty, the share of tenants in energy poverty, social housing, etc. At the time of drafting this report, no call for projects dedicated to Operation B Investments in residential buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency has been launched (except for the call for phased projects).
- Inclusion in the Applicant Guide of criteria to encourage green solutions (green roofs, green walls, etc.) in line with the European Green Infrastructure Strategy and promoting resource efficiency. The aim of the projects is energy efficiency in terms of reducing energy consumption compared to the annual heating energy consumption before renovation.

Within this SO, 3 calls for projects were launched, of which one call dedicated to investments in public buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency and measures for the use of renewable energy sources (Operation A) and two calls dedicated to phased projects, respectively investments in public buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency and measures for the use of renewable energy sources and investments in residential buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency.

The non-reimbursable value of the projects contracted under SO 2.1 is 146,386,406.39 euros, representing 76.40% of the financial allocation of the programme for this specific objective. These data confirm the existence of a high interest from the beneficiaries for this type of projects and an increased potential contribution to achieving the objectives of the PNIESC. The high interest from the beneficiaries was also



confirmed in the field research activities, which highlighted that there is still a need to finance this type of interventions.

As of 31.12.2024, the value of the performance indicators based on the contracted projects was 0, but this is justified by the typology of the projects financed under this SO, which have a very long implementation period of about 4 years. Therefore, the proposed milestone for the performance indicators related to SO 2.1 was also set at zero.

The projects already contracted will contribute to the PNIESC objectives, by improving the energy performance of 213 households and 159,061 sq m of public buildings. It should be noted that in the case of indicator RCO18 (Housing with improved energy performance), to date, only one call for projects has been launched, for the phased projects from the previous programming period and with a reduced allocated value (approximately 2 million euros), but it is estimated that a separate call will be launched that will directly target the energy performance of households, worth approximately 38 million euros, so that there are favorable premises for improving the energy performance of 3,745 households, by the end of 2029. In the long term, the expected results aim at reducing the annual primary energy consumption of households and public buildings targeted by the interventions and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In the opinion of the beneficiaries, the main challenge identified in achieving the indicator targets is represented by the increase in market prices.

➤ **Intensifying actions to protect and conserve nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, as well as reducing all forms of pollution (RSO2.7)**

The interventions supported under SO 2.7 aim to ensure an optimal conservation status of habitats, ecological reconstruction of degraded ecosystems and the restoration of native populations, in accordance with the Priority Action Framework for Natura 2000 in Romania for the period 2021-2027.

Among the types of activities proposed within the projects related to SO 2.7 are:

- modernization / expansion of existing green spaces, creation of green spaces by reconversion and / or reuse of abandoned, degraded spaces and lands, other urban lands and their transformation into green areas, including the creation / expansion of green corridors in urban areas;
- primary actions undertaken to improve and increase green infrastructure (afforestation, grassing, etc.);
- development of blue infrastructure: wetlands (swamps), lakes, protection of lakes and watercourses (bank area and area above the banks) only within projects that include a green infrastructure component.



Interventions to preserve, improve or expand green-blue infrastructure contribute to improving the urban ecosystem, the situation regarding climate change issues, restoring biodiversity, reducing the carbon footprint and other forms of pollution, proper management of water, soil and improving air quality.

By the nature of the activities targeted, related to the restoration and conservation of green infrastructure, environmental and climate challenges are addressed, the interventions supported by this SO thus being relevant to the PNIESC objectives related to decarbonization. In addition, the conditions established at the level of the Applicant Guide encourage interventions aimed at providing ecosystem services (improving biodiversity, maintaining lower temperatures, improving air quality, retaining rainwater etc.) and exclude from funding the regeneration of urban parks solely for the purpose of making them more attractive to the population. However, within this SO there are no indicators through which a direct contribution to the PNIESC can be measured.

Within this SO, 4 calls for projects were launched, of which one call dedicated to support for the conservation and improvement of green-blue infrastructure at the level of county capitals, another dedicated to municipalities and two dedicated to cities.

The non-reimbursable value of the contracted projects is 42,497,712.34 euros, representing 48.37% of the financial allocation of the programme for SO 2.7.

At the time of this evaluation, the value of the output indicators was 0, but this is justified by the typology of projects financed under this SO - large-scale investments, with an implementation period of over one year plus the duration of the selection procedure. In addition, the quantification of RCO 74 and RCO 75 indicators is carried out in correlation with the completion of urban development projects related to integrated territorial strategies. Therefore, the proposed milestone for the output indicators related to SO 2.7 was also set at zero.

Given the lack of a direct connection between the indicators related to SO 2.7 and the objectives of the PNIESC, an exact contribution of this SO cannot be highlighted, but the qualitative analysis of the projects contracted on 31.12.2024 shows that the projects financed under this SO are relevant to the objectives regarding decarbonization, the financed investments mainly aiming at the modernization of green areas in parks and the rehabilitation and revitalization of degraded green infrastructures.

➤ **Promoting sustainable multimodal urban mobility as part of the transition to a zero-carbon economy (RSO2.8)**

SO 2.8 supports interventions aimed at ensuring sustainable and durable urban transport, financing the following types of activities that are connected to the objectives pursued by the PNIESC, of limiting GHG emissions from transport, to an increase of no more than 40% compared to 1990, mainly based on the development of road transport with hybrid and electric vehicles:



- establishing, developing and optimizing public transport systems through investments in the acquisition of clean urban transport rolling stock (tram, bus, trolleybus etc.), supporting clean urban transport infrastructure;
- building/modernizing/rehabilitating depots/bus depots related to local/zonal public passenger transport, including the related technical infrastructure;
- infrastructure for alternative fuels, charging stations/points for public transport;
- development of park and ride systems outside city centres, integrated with public transport;
- support for the development/modernisation of infrastructure for active transport modes: creation/modernisation of pedestrian routes, investments in cycling infrastructure, bike rental systems, etc.

This SO contributes to the PNIESC through the specificity of the funded activities, which address environmental and climate challenges, through investments in public transport, which contribute to reducing carbon emissions.

The applicant's guide requires the demonstration of the impact of the funded projects on the reduction of GHG emissions, by comparing the "without project" (the "Do minimum" scenario) and "with project" (the "Do something" scenario) scenarios for the first year after the completion of the project implementation (the first year of operation). This comparison should result in a reduction in GHG emissions, also based on an increase in the modal share of public passenger transport and/or non-motorized modes. The reduction in GHG emissions will be maintained for the duration of the financing contract, as shown by the comparison of the "without project" and "with project" scenarios for the duration of the financing contract.

Within this SO, 6 calls for projects were launched. The value of the submitted funding applications exceeds by approximately 30% the total financial allocation for this priority, highlighting the high interest of the applicants for this type of interventions. On the other hand, the non-reimbursable value of the contracted projects is 58,326,263.80 euros, representing 48.84% of the financial allocation of the program for SO 2.8. However, if the value of the approved projects is also taken into account, the premises are ensured for the commitment of 73.95% of the funds allocated to sustainable urban mobility.

At the time of this evaluation, the value of the output indicators was 0, but it should be noted that no milestones were set for this SO, given the specific nature of the interventions, which have a high complexity and a longer implementation period. However, the beneficiaries estimate that the objectives and indicators planned at the project level will be met. Also the analysis of data from the monitoring system indicates the existence of favorable premises for the contracted projects towards achieving the final targets, especially in terms of the development of infrastructure for collective public transport (100%), the capacity of ecological rolling stock for collective public transport (97.13%), respectively the



number of cities and localities with new or modernized digitalized urban transport systems (76.92%). All these indicators contribute directly to the PNIESC objective in the field of urban mobility, to limit the growth of emissions from transport.

The previous experience of the beneficiaries with the implementation of similar projects in the field of urban mobility, financed by the ROP 2014-2020, represents one of the facilitating factors, which contributes to the optimal implementation of the interventions and the achievement of the expected results, along with the partnership relationship and good collaboration with the representatives of the MA of SW Oltenia RP, and the optimal collaboration relationships with the providers of goods or services (e.g. designers). On the other hand, the main challenges in achieving the indicators' targets are associated with the delayed start or cumbersome conduct of public procurement procedures.

Indirect contributions

Within the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme there are also other specific objectives that support, to some extent, the objectives in the field of energy and climate, even if not through direct activities, the main examples being given below:

- Actions supported under *RSO1.1. The development and enhancement of research and innovation capacities and the adoption of advanced technologies target the RIS3 areas*, within which 5 areas of smart specialization were selected that contribute to increasing the IR potential of the region: Transport Systems, Industrial Engineering and Materials, Agri-Food, ICT and Digitalization, Creative Industries, as well as two horizontal areas, relevant to the PNIESC: green economy and circular economy. The SWO RP 2021-2027 will contribute to the RES policy agenda by improving the transposition of RDI results into the regional economy. As of 31.12.2024, no calls for projects had been launched under this SO, allowing an analysis of how the contracted projects, through the specifics of the financed actions, contribute to the PNIESC objectives.
- In the case of *RSO1.3. Intensifying sustainable growth and increasing the competitiveness of SMEs and creating jobs in SMEs, including through productive investments, within productive investment projects*, measures to increase energy efficiency can be implemented, as complementary measures, and with limited financial allocations. Regarding industrial parks, SW Oltenia RP supports project proposals that demonstrate compliance with the key commitments of the European Green Deal regarding the use of clean energy and the circular economy. Thus, in the evaluation and selection phase, projects that have provided measures regarding green energy (solar panels, renewable sources, etc.) and the circular economy (material recycling/reuse technologies, sustainable materials, etc.) will receive additional points. Within SO 1.3, on 31.12.2024, 52 projects were contracted, there being a very high interest in the calls launched





within this specific objective (evidenced by the large number of projects submitted – 563). The analysis of the data available from the monitoring system confirms that some of the projects contracted within SO 1.3 also provide for systems to increase energy efficiency.

- SO 1.4 has as result indicators PSR01 - Employees from public research entities completing skills training programmes for smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship and RCR98 - Employees from SMEs completing skills training programs for smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship (by type of skills: technical, management, entrepreneurship, ecological, others), the staff of SMEs and public authorities to be trained including also the field of ecological skills.
- In the case of SO 3.2, related eligible activities also include protective parapets, bank defences and slope reinforcements, rockfall barriers, forest curtains for traffic protection against the effects of extreme weather conditions, other additional investments to protect the respective road against the effects of extreme weather conditions. Infrastructure investments with an expected lifetime of at least five years must also demonstrate climate change immunity in accordance with the requirements of the European Commission Communication on Technical Guidance on Climate Change Immunisation of Infrastructure for the period 2021-2027 published on 16 September 2021 (2021/C 373/01).
- In the case of RSO4.2. *Improving access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through the development of accessible infrastructure, including by promoting resilience for distance and online education and training*, activities that will target the construction/expansion or renovation of educational infrastructure will comply with the legal provisions on the energy performance of buildings.
- Also in the case of RSO5.1. *Promoting integrated and inclusive development in the social, economic and environmental fields, as well as culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security in urban areas* and RSO5.2. *Promoting integrated and inclusive local development in the social, economic and environmental fields, as well as culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security in areas other than urban areas*, activities that will target the construction/expansion or renovation of cultural or tourist infrastructure will comply with the legal provisions regarding the energy performance of buildings.

Last but not least, it should be noted that for all specific objectives, the proposed investments must ensure compliance with the principle of "do no significant harm" (DNSH).

Conclusions and adjustment measures

The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 contributes to the implementation of the objectives established by the National Integrated Plan for Energy and Climate Change (PNIESC), through





support for investments in energy efficiency, green infrastructure and sustainable mobility, within Priorities 3 and 4 of the programme (SO 2.1, 2.7, 2.8).

In addition to the interventions related to these objectives with a direct contribution to the PNIESC, a series of specific objectives were identified that indirectly support the objectives in the field of energy and climate, through the specifics of the funded actions and/or the criteria included in the applicant's guidelines, namely SO 1.1, SO 1.3, SO 1.4 (P1), SO 3.2 (P5), SO 4.2 (P6), SO 5.1 and SO 5.2 (P7).

To maximize the impact of the SW Oltenia RP on the objectives of the PNIESC, the following recommendations can be considered:

- In order to intensify the contribution of the SW Oltenia RP to the PNIESC, it is recommended to allocate additional funds dedicated to SO 2.1, given that this specific objective presents the most concrete and relevant contribution to the PNIESC objectives.
- Also, given the absence of milestones for the indicators related to SO 2.1, SO 2.7 and SO 2.8, determined by the specific nature of the interventions, careful monitoring of the progress of the indicators is recommended, in order to identify possible risks in achieving the established targets and to be able to take remedial measures (monitoring can be carried out annually, starting with the second year of investment implementation).
- In the case of SO 4.2, 5.1, 5.2, for which the Programme provides activities that will target the construction/expansion or renovation of educational infrastructure, respectively cultural or tourist infrastructure, it may be considered to collect information from beneficiaries, regarding the interventions that had measures to increase energy efficiency and therefore, have a contribution to the dimensions of the PNIESC. This could be achieved on a sample basis within the framework of future program evaluations.
- In the case of SO 1.4, for which the result indicators PSR01 - Employees from public research entities completing skills training programs for smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship and RCR98 - Employees from SMEs completing skills training programs for smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship (by type of skills: technical, management, entrepreneurship, ecological, others) are proposed, it is proposed, within the framework of future programme evaluation activities, to analyse to what extent the training programs also considered the development of technical skills in the field of energy and/or other subjects related to the PNIESC.
- It is recommended that future impact evaluation activities of the SW Oltenia RP focus also on differentiating the programme's contribution to climate change mitigation (through interventions targeting energy efficiency, for example) and climate change adaptation.



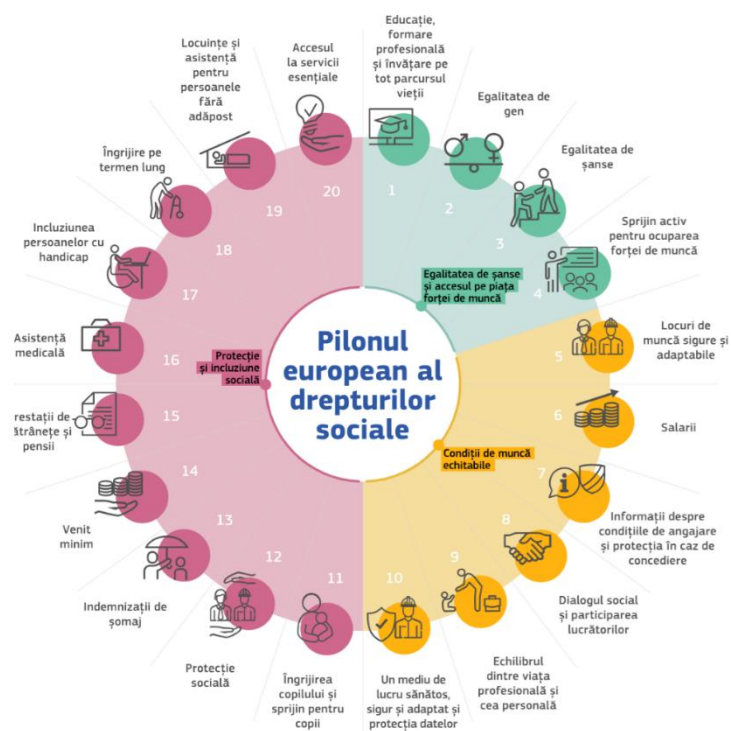
- Introduction of RSO 1.6. STEP.

4.3. Implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) is a strategic framework adopted by the European Union in 2017, which sets out rights and principles to create more sustainable and inclusive European societies. The European Pillar of Social Rights also sets out 20 key principles, agreed by EU Member States, to achieve sustainable and inclusive societies.

The 20 essential principles are structured into three categories:

- *equal opportunities and access to the labour market (4 principles):* Principle 1: Education, vocational training and lifelong learning; Principle 2: Gender equality; Principle 3: Equal opportunities; Principle 4: Active support for employment.
- *fair working conditions (6 principles):* Principle 5: Secure and adaptable workplaces; Principle 6: Wages; Principle 7: Information on employment conditions and protection in the event of dismissal; Principle 8: Social dialogue and worker participation; Principle 9: Work-life balance; Principle 10: A healthy, safe and adapted working environment and data protection.
- *social protection and social inclusion (10 principles):* Principle 11: Childcare and support for children; Principle 12: Social protection; Principle 13: Unemployment benefits; Principle 14: Minimum income; Principle 15: Old-age benefits and pensions; Principle 16: Health care; Principle 17: Inclusion of persons with disabilities; Principle 18: Long-term care; Principle 19: Housing and assistance for the homeless; Principle 20: Access to essential services.



The European Pillar of Social Rights is essential for:





- Implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- Supporting the green and digital transition;
- Reducing disparities between EU Member States and creating a common standard of social rights.

The EU Action Plan on EPSR sets out actions at European level to turn principles into concrete actions. Adopted in 2021, the Action Plan sets clear targets for 2030, such as a 78% employment rate, 60% of the adult population participating in vocational training and reducing the number of people at risk of poverty by 15 million.

According to the annex to the Communication from the European Commission¹¹ on the Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights:

- the category “Equal opportunities and access to the labour market” is associated with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4. Quality education, SDG 5. Gender equality, SDG 10. Reduced inequalities;
- the category “Fair working conditions” corresponds to SDG 8. Decent work and economic growth;
- the category “Social protection and inclusion” is correlated with SDG 1. No poverty and SDG 3. Good health and well-being.

This section analyzes how the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme contributes to achieving the EPSR objectives, starting from the analysis of interventions with a direct and indirect contribution to supporting the EPSR, while in the second part of the chapter a quantitative analysis of the contribution of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme to the SDGs is carried out.

The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 supports the implementation of the principles and contributes significantly to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, by supporting strategic priorities and projects that promote social cohesion, inclusion and economic development directly (for example through RSO 4.2 and by introducing RSO 4.3). The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme also indirectly supports actions that contribute to equal opportunities (all projects must respect the principles of equal opportunities) and to social protection and inclusion (see, for example, Priorities 1, 2, 3 and 7).

Direct contribution

Through the specific objective RSO 4.2 (Improving equal access to quality and inclusive services in education, training and lifelong learning by developing accessible infrastructure, including by promoting

¹¹ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:b7c08d86-7cd5-11eb-9ac9-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_2&format=PDF



resilience for distance and online education and training), the programme aligns with national and European priorities for achieving the EU 2030 objectives.

Policy objective	Specific objectives with direct contribution to the EPSR	Indicative correlation with the principles of the EPSR
<i>PO 4: A more social and inclusive Europe, through the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSO4.2: Improving equal access to quality and inclusive services in education, training and lifelong learning by developing accessible infrastructure, including by promoting resilience for distance and online education and training • Priority 6 – Modern and inclusive education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle 1: Education, training and lifelong learning • Principle 3: Equal opportunities • Principle 10: Healthy and well-adapted working environment • Principle 20: Access to essential services

Description of the programme actions with a direct contribution to the European Pillar of Social Rights

RSO 4.2. within the SW Oltenia RP responds to the challenges addressed in the program strategy, aiming to contribute to building a more accessible education system, more adapted to the needs of the labor market and more inclusive, in non-segregated institutions, especially for Roma and students with disabilities. The foreseen interventions will provide the opportunity to address the regional deficiencies faced by the education system, as also reported in the recommendations of the Country Report, and are intended to improve access to inclusive and quality education in non-segregated institutions for disadvantaged and marginalized communities, to promote the equity of the educational act, to reduce educational disparities between the urban and rural levels, etc.

This specific objective supports the development of educational infrastructure, which facilitates access to education for children and students. Investments in educational infrastructure provide essential access to quality education services. Under this SO, the following operations are financed:

- Investments in the development of educational infrastructure for preschool level;
- Investments in the development of educational infrastructure for primary, secondary education;
- Investments in the development of educational infrastructure for tertiary education;
- Phase II of the operations selected in the period 2014-2020, which meet the criteria of art.118a, CPR (phased projects).

The investments respect the principles of desegregation and non-discrimination and aim to address and combat spatial and educational segregation at all educational levels, focusing on promoting access to inclusive basic services in education, especially for marginalized groups, such as Roma, migrants, people with disabilities and other special needs etc. The issue of school non-segregation in mainstream education will be supported through investments aimed at the inclusion of children and young people with special educational needs or with minor or moderate disabilities (appropriate furniture for people with disabilities, elevators, ramps, securing educational and play spaces, arranging spaces for psycho-pedagogical activities, accessibility of information for people with hearing or vision impairments), equipping schools with assistive technologies etc..



The SW Oltenia RP is aligned with the objectives of the EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030, on ensuring increased access of the Roma population to pre-school education, reducing the gap in participation in pre-school education and care, reducing the gap in high school graduation. The interventions supported by the funds are part of the National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2027. The priority aims to ensure that the results of the projects allow persons with disabilities access to the physical environment, to information and communication products, to the services and programs that society makes available to its members, under conditions of equality and non-discrimination.

Actions taken:

Until December 31, 2024, SW Oltenia RP supported the development of educational infrastructure to reduce disparities in access to education. The projects implemented to date contribute to achieving the following results that can support and bring benefits to vulnerable groups:

- Supporting 44 projects that support the development of educational infrastructure and the reduction of school dropout;
- Modernizing 2 school centers for inclusive education, which support the implementation of educational activities for children/students with special educational needs (SEN);
- Financing 4 projects that contribute to supporting, in particular and as a priority, the participation in the mainstream educational process of children from vulnerable/disadvantaged groups, children who are at increased risk of dropping out of school and leaving school early, such as: children from families with low socio-economic status, Roma children or from other disadvantaged groups, etc.
- Creating facilities for people with disabilities (including arranging a dormitory room for people with disabilities) that will contribute to increasing the quality of education and the educational process within 2 projects;
- Expansion/rehabilitation/modernization/equipment of 19 educational infrastructures in rural areas that support increased accessibility to an adequate educational offer and the reduction of school dropout and early school leaving for children in rural areas (over 43% of the funded projects are implemented in rural areas);
- Reaching the value of 1830 people for the indicator relating to the capacity of classrooms in new or modernized educational structures (people).

Planned actions:

During the period 2025-2027, SW Oltenia RP will continue to expand the educational infrastructure network.





The contribution of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme to the EPSR will be evaluated through the output and result indicators that will be achieved from the actions planned within the 44 projects already contracted under SO 4.2. Thus, the actions planned for the immediate period within SW Oltenia RP with a direct contribution to the EPSR will lead to:

- Completion of the 44 educational infrastructure development projects.
- Modernization of educational childcare infrastructure that will benefit 1,120 people (Classroom capacity in new or modernized childcare facilities - RCO66- and Annual number of users of new or modernized childcare facilities - RCR70).
- Modernization of classroom infrastructure that will cover a number of 18,101 people (Classroom capacity in new or modernized educational structures - RCO67).
- The percentage of vulnerable people who will effectively benefit from the modernized educational infrastructure from the 44 contracted projects is 8%, corresponding to a number of 1,500 people belonging to vulnerable groups (PSR 02- Percentage of users of new or modernized mass educational structures belonging to vulnerable groups).
- Modernization of educational infrastructure for an annual number of 19,123 (RCR71) users of educational structures.

Indirect contribution

Within the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme there are other specific objectives that support, to some extent and sometimes indirectly, equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, social protection and social inclusion. These specific objectives, together with the principles of the EPSR to which they contribute, are summarised in the following table.

Priority	Specific objectives	Indicative correlation with the principles of the EPSR	Actions taken
P1 - Competitiveness through innovation and dynamic enterprises	RSO1.1: Developing and increasing research and innovation capacities and adopting advanced technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle 1: Education, training and lifelong learning - by supporting the development of skills of employees in SMEs, as well as employees of research entities. • Principle 5: Secure and adaptable jobs - creating research jobs in supported entities 	Until 31.12.2024, no calls for projects have been launched, which is why the analysis from the perspective of expected results cannot be carried out. However, by analyzing the typologies of activities foreseen in the programme for these specific objectives and corroborating this information with the intention of the Managing Authority to launch these calls in 2025, it is considered that SW Oltenia RP has created the context to contribute to the integration of these principles within the EPSR in the future.



Priority	Specific objectives	Indicative correlation with the principles of the EPSR	Actions taken
P2 - Digitalization for the benefit of citizens and businesses	RSO1.3: Intensifying sustainable growth and increasing the competitiveness of SMEs and creating jobs within SMEs, including through productive investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle 4: Active support for employment - by supporting SMEs for development and internationalization, thus facilitating job creation. • Principle 5: Secure and adaptable jobs - creating research jobs in supported entities • Principle 12: Social protection - contributes indirectly by supporting economic development and creating sustainable jobs. 	<p>By 31.12.2024, SW Oltenia RP has contracted 52 projects, in which SMEs are supported for development and internationalization, thus facilitating job creation. Within these projects, the aim is to create jobs in the entities that benefit from support, as well as to support economic development.</p> <p>A number of 433 projects are in various stages of selection (under evaluation, approved, under contracting), to be implemented in the period 2025-2027, with the potential to contribute to principles 4, 5 and 12 of the EPSR.</p>
	RSO1.4: Developing skills for smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle 1: Education, training and lifelong learning - by supporting the development of skills of employees in SMEs, as well as employees of research entities. 	<p>Until 31.12.2024, no calls for projects have been launched, which is why the analysis from the perspective of expected results cannot be carried out. However, by analyzing the typologies of activities foreseen in the programme for these specific objectives and corroborating this information with the intention of the Managing Authority to launch these calls in 2025, it is considered that SW Oltenia RP has created the context to contribute to the integration of these principles within the EPSR in the future.</p>
	RSO1.2: Harnessing the advantages of digitalization, for the benefit of citizens, companies, research organizations and public authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle 20: Access to essential services - by developing, testing and piloting innovative digital solutions, digital applications, digital products and processes, improving citizens' access to public services. • Principle 16: Healthcare – through the development of screening and monitoring applications for people from vulnerable groups etc. 	<p>By 31.12.2024, SW Oltenia RP has contracted 4 projects, which support development measures, testing and piloting of innovative digital solutions, digital applications, digital products and processes, improving citizens' access to public services.</p>
P3 - Energy efficiency and green infrastructure	RSO2.1: Promoting energy efficiency measures and reducing greenhouse gas emissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle 16: Healthcare - by improving air quality and reducing pollution, it indirectly contributes to public health. • Principle 20: Access to essential services - energy efficiency in public and residential buildings improves citizens' access to 	<p>By 31.12.2024, SW Oltenia RP has contracted 76 projects, which support the improvement of air quality and the reduction of pollution and which indirectly contribute to public health and compliance with Principle 16 (Healthcare) of the EPSR. These projects also pursue Principle 20: Access to essential services, as energy</p>



Priority	Specific objectives	Indicative correlation with the principles of the EPSR	Actions taken
P7 - Sustainable territorial development		energy-efficient housing and contributes to reducing energy poverty.	efficiency in public and residential buildings improves citizens' access to energy-efficient housing and contributes to the reduction of energy poverty.
	RSO2.7: Intensifying actions to protect and conserve nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, as well as reducing all forms of pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle 16: Healthcare - by reducing pollution, we indirectly contribute to public health. • Principle 20: Access to essential services - access to green areas and ecological corridors 	By 31.12.2024, SW Oltenia RP has contracted 9 projects, which support pollution reduction and indirectly contribute to public health and compliance with Principle 16 (Healthcare) of the EPSR. The projects also contribute to Principle 20: Access to essential services, by creating access to green areas and ecological corridors.
	RSO5.1: Promoting integrated and inclusive development in the social, economic and environmental fields, as well as culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security in urban areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle 3: Equal opportunities - urban regeneration measures also give priority to disadvantaged neighbourhoods and communities beyond the central and historic areas • Principle 12: Social protection - contributes indirectly by supporting economic development and creating sustainable jobs. • Principle 20: Access to essential services - by modernizing cultural and tourist infrastructure, facilitating access to quality services. 	<p>By 31.12.2024, 36 projects were contracted under SO 5.1, which include urban regeneration measures in disadvantaged neighborhoods and communities, as well as actions to support sustainable tourism, which creates economic and social inclusion opportunities for communities, as well as access to essential services for the population in urban areas.</p> <p>A number of 29 projects are in various stages of selection (under evaluation, approved, under contracting), to be implemented in the period 2025-2027, with the potential to contribute to the following principles within the EPSR: Principle 3: Equal Opportunities; Principle 12: Social Protection and Principle 20: Access to Essential Services.</p>
	RSO5.2: Promoting integrated and inclusive local development in the social, economic and environmental fields, in the fields of culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism, as well as security in areas other than urban areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle 12: Social protection - contributes indirectly by supporting economic development and creating sustainable jobs. • Principle 20: Access to essential services - by modernizing cultural and tourist infrastructure, facilitating access to quality services. 	By 31.12.2024, only one project was contracted under SO 5.2, which includes measures to modernize cultural and tourism infrastructure, facilitating access to quality services, which create economic opportunities and social inclusion for communities in areas other than urban areas, thus contributing to the following principles within the EPSR: Principle 12 - Social Protection and Principle 20 - Access to Essential Services - by modernizing cultural and tourist infrastructure, facilitating access to quality services.



Cross-cutting contribution

The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme also provides for horizontal measures that contribute to the implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which have been introduced at the level of all calls for projects. Thus, the Programme aims to apply the horizontal principles regarding equal opportunities, inclusion and non-discrimination by respecting the national and European provisions (EU Charter of Fundamental Rights) in force, a condition of eligibility for accessing funds.

Compliance with the national provisions in force regarding equal opportunities, inclusion and non-discrimination constitutes an eligibility condition within the applicant's guidelines. Thus, the programme ensures the fulfillment of these objectives at the level of the funded interventions, by including clear conditions in the applicants' guidelines regarding equal opportunities between women and men, the prohibition of any actions that have the potential to discriminate, the prohibition of any actions that contribute, in any form, to segregation or exclusion; facilitating access for people with reduced mobility.

Quantitative analysis - Comparative perspective on the programme's contribution to the progress of the European Pillar of Social Rights

Based on the areas of intervention in Annex I of the Regulation and the data available in the Cohesion data platform regarding the indicative correlation with the SDGs, it is possible to highlight the contribution of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme to the SDGs and related categories mentioned above. This analysis should be seen as a complementary tool to the qualitative analysis already carried out for this evaluation report. The added value of this analysis consists in providing a comparative picture between the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme and other programmes, while the qualitative analysis explains the supported actions, as well as the selection criteria and the relevant elements related to the programme indicators. The performance of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme is compared with the ERDF programmes in Romania in less developed regions (which also includes the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme) and with other EU programmes financed by the ERDF in less developed regions (which also includes the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme) based on the data available for October 2024 from the EU Cohesion data platform (latest available data).

The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme presents a greater potential, compared to other ERDF-funded programmes in less developed regions in Romania and the EU, to contribute to the principles of the EPSR, with a percentage of 34% of the total financial allocation planned for actions contributing to achieving the EPSR objectives, while this value is 26% in ERDF programmes in less developed regions in Romania and 24% in ERDF programmes in less developed regions in other EU Member States.

The financial allocation within the SW Oltenia RP shows a potentially greater contribution of the programme with a focus on the following sustainable development objectives:





- SDG 1. (No poverty) with investments in social infrastructure for social inclusion under RSO 5.1 and future SO 4.3;
- SDG 4. Quality education through interventions supported under RSO 4.2;
- SDG 8. Decent work and economic growth in several specific objectives, such as RSO 1.3, RSO 1.4, RSO 5.1 and RSO 5.2.

Despite this potential related to the financial contribution of the programme to the EPSR objectives, SW Oltenia RP has proven, by October 2024, a lower capacity in deciding and spending the allocated resources compared to the other two groups of programmes considered (ERDF programmes in less developed regions in Romania and in the EU).

Also, taking into account the latest data available in December 2024, it seems that the specific objective with the greatest potential to commit the financial allocation that will contribute to the EPSR pillars is RSO 5.1, for which there is no progress in implementation for intervention area 127 even at the end of December 2024.

For SDG 4. Quality Education, there has been an acceleration of infrastructure investments for primary and secondary education and tertiary education, while early childhood education and care are still behind schedule at the end of 2024. In the case of SDG 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth, the implementation of interventions supported under RSO 1.3, RSO 5.1 and 5.2 (culture and tourism sector) has started, while RSO 1.4 requires the acceleration and intensification of efforts to contract projects and commit their related expenditures.



Tabel no. 3 Overview of the performance and contribution of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme to the European Pillar of Social Rights – Values are expressed in EUR

SDGs	South-West Oltenia Regional Programme			Programmes from less developed regions of Romania			Programmes from less developed regions of EU		
	Total planned	Total committed	Total spent	Total planned	Total committed	Total spent	Total planned	Total committed	Total spent
SDG 1. No poverty	1.194.614,12			292.440.193,4	75.831.529,83	556.469,66	4.501.550.386	712.210.922	37.120.502,47
SDG 3. Health and well-being				2.939.251.988	1.907.634.223	4.417.619,09	8.445.624.730	3.240.570.970	83.191.272,43
SDG 4. Quality education	96.944.771,66	77.889.709,48	492.547,93	711.642.695,5	327.521.544,4	8.507.800,02	6.143.455.184	1.425.493.378	125.304.746
SDG 8. Decent work and economic growth	313.847.844	46.947.262,35		2.279.198.379	314.659.908,4	8.967.100,7	26.594.844.021	9.252.010.123	1.314.784.222
Total value of the program(s)	1.213.553.688	688.085.496,8	8.462.922,23	23.653.070.190	1.2436.498.330	520.591.001,1			
Share of SDGs related to EPSR	34%	18%	6%	26%	21%	4%	23%	27%	35%
General assessment	The South-West Oltenia programme has a greater potential than other ERDF programs in less developed regions in Romania and the EU to contribute to the principles of the EPSR but a lower capacity to commit and spend the allocated resources until October 2024.								

Source: Own elaborations based on data available on the Cohesion data platform (data relating to October 2024)



Tabel no. 4 Overview of the performance and contribution of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme to the European Pillar of Social Rights for the selected areas of intervention (October and December 2024) – Values are expressed in EUR

Areas of intervention	31 October 2024			31 December 2024	
	Total planned	Total committed	Total spent	Eligible costs	Expenditures
SDG 1. No poverty	1.194.614,12	0	0	0	0
127	1.194.614,12	0	0	0	0
SDG 4. Quality education	96.944.771,66	77.889.709,48	492.547,93	77.861.536,78	1.540.555,86
121	12.000.000	4.091.818,46	0	4.090.338,45	0
122	56.522.823,33	62.744.096,39	492.547,93	64.046.534,10	624.560,79
123	28.421.948,33	11.053.794,63	0	9.724.664,23	915.995,07
SDG 8. Decent work and economic growth	313.847.844	46.947.262,35	0	96.826.331,83	1.031.344,54
21	154.321.176,5	0	0	56.045.105,21	0
23	1.470.588,24	0	0	-	0
25	9.411.764,71	8.616.259,28	0	3.700.459,56	0
165	67.716.276,66	10.951.031,46	0	6.589.058,38	294.371,68
166	80.928.037,88	27.379.971,61	0	30.491.708,68	736.972,86

Source: Own elaborations based on data available on the Cohesion data platform (data relating to October 2024) and data from SFC (December 2024)



Assessing the contribution to the EU's 2030 objectives

According to the latest statistical data in the Country Report, regional disparities in Romania remain pronounced, reflecting significant differences in labour productivity, investment and employment between the Bucharest-Ilfov region and other regions, but also between urban and rural areas. Labour productivity is a key factor contributing to income polarization and increasing socio-economic inequalities between regions. In 2022, the South-West Oltenia region recorded the second lowest labour productivity in the country, representing only 60.3% of the EU average, a significantly lower value than that of the Bucharest-Ilfov region, which reached 156.6% of the EU average.

The Romania 2024 country report highlights that the tertiary education completion rate remains low. In 2023, only 22.5% of young people aged 25 to 34 had completed tertiary education, placing Romania among the countries with the lowest rates in the EU, where the average is 43.1%. This situation is explained by high early school leaving, unfavorable socio-economic factors, low pass rate in the baccalaureate exam and high dropout rates in tertiary education. According to Eurostat data, the South-West Oltenia region has an even lower rate, of only 17.3% in 2023, below the national average, which confirms the needs identified within the programme. Also, the analysis of the evolution of this indicator shows a decrease compared to the period 2019-2022, a trend similar to the national one, but in contrast to the European level, where the percentage of tertiary education graduates in this age category recorded a constant increase in the analyzed period.

The implementation of actions within the SW Oltenia Regional Programme concretely responds to the challenges identified in Annex 14 of the 2024 Country Report, focusing on reducing the school dropout rate and improving access to education for a total estimated number of 22,350 students by 2029 (8% represents the percentage of users of new or modernized mass educational structures belonging to vulnerable groups).

Conclusions and aspects that can be considered in the future

Through the actions and measures supported, the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme contributes to the EU's 2030 headline targets on employment, skills and poverty reduction. Although the programme is still at an early stage of implementation, the projects that will be supported and implemented under certain specific objectives (e.g. RSO 4.2 and the future SO 4.3) will directly contribute to the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Although the implementation of the actions in the SW Oltenia RP is still ongoing, the programme seems to meet its expectations in relation to the European Pillar of Social Rights, taking into account the timing of the launch and initiation of the calls for projects. In order to increase the programme's capacity to create an impact in this area, it is nevertheless recommended that the regional needs and challenges are





regularly assessed and the resource allocation adjusted, if necessary, so as to ensure a significant contribution to achieving the 2030 EPSR objectives.

In order to further strengthen the coherence of the programme and its contribution to the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the following proposals are made (including based on the results of the panel of experts):

- Increasing access to social housing plays a fundamental role in implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights, in particular by improving equal opportunities and access to the labour market. The MA of South-West Oltenia Regional Programme proposes to integrate funding for social housing under Priority 6, Specific Objective 4.3, by allocating funds for the construction/rehabilitation/modernisation/extension of social housing. These measures directly contribute to reducing social exclusion and improving the quality of life in disadvantaged communities. The availability, accessibility and sustainability of decent housing are increasingly important concerns for EU citizens, especially for the most vulnerable groups.
- Investments in strategic STEP industries, such as AI, cybersecurity and automation, support the development of a skilled workforce and the creation of quality jobs, aligning with the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme proposes to finance large enterprises in the STEP sectors investments in clean technologies, biotechnologies and digital and deep technologies, thus contributing to reducing regional disparities in digital skills and increasing employment in high value-added industries.
- Job creation is a key element in programmes that finance jobs and economic growth. Where RCR01 and RCR102 are used and monitored, it is recommended to collect information on differential employment among women and youth, at least on a sample of projects, and/or through ad hoc surveys or evaluation activities.

Based on issues related to the use of indicators and areas of intervention, future evaluation activities may also be oriented towards analysing the information collected through the monitoring system on specific elements of interest for the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Thus, it is considered appropriate to also analyse, within the future programme evaluation activities, the direct contribution of the programme to some of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, such as equal opportunities, gender equality, active support for employment, childcare and child support, healthcare, inclusion of people with disabilities and vulnerable people, housing and assistance for homeless people, access to essential services, education, training and lifelong learning. It is known that a programme supported by the ERDF, such as the SW Oltenia RP, does not represent the sole or main source of funding for covering these principles, but understanding the direct contribution of the programme to



achieving these objectives can help to demarcate the funds and highlight its added value from a quantitative and qualitative perspective.

4.4. Analysis of the socio-economic situation

Priority P1. Competitiveness through innovation and dynamic enterprises

For the European Union, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent 99% of all businesses in the EU, employing over 100 million people. SMEs are also considered to play an important role in innovation, climate change, resource efficiency and social cohesion.

In the current programming period, the **Partnership Agreement**¹² provides for the need to accelerate investments in the RDI sector, ensure technology transfer and cooperation between the business environment and RDI, implement new technologies for industrial expansion and modernization, and highlights the need for the transition to a sustainable and digital economy. All these development pillars are supported by the **Strategy for Research and Innovation 2020-2024**¹³, the **National Competitiveness Strategy 2021-2027**¹⁴, the **National Strategy for Research, Innovation and Smart Specialization 2022-2027**¹⁵.

Last but not least, at the regional level, the **Regional Development Plan of the South-West Oltenia Region 2021-2027**¹⁶ and the **Regional Strategy for Smart Specialization RIS3 South-West Oltenia 2021-2027**¹⁷ establish the RDI sector, as well as those smart specialization sectors to improve regional competitiveness.

In this context, the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme identifies the following main needs in terms of competitiveness:

- Developing and strengthening the capacity of the RDI sector;
- Intensifying innovation activities in SMEs;
- Increasing the number of scientific publications and patent applications;
- Creating and strengthening links between education, research and the business environment;
- Increasing the capacity of universities to transfer RDI results to the economy;

¹² Ministry of Investments and European Projects, Partnership Agreement 2021-2027, [Link](#)

¹³ European Commission, Research and Innovation Strategy 2020-2024, [Link](#)

¹⁴ Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism, National Competitiveness Strategy 2021-2027, [link](#)

¹⁵ Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, National Strategy for Research, Innovation and Smart Specialization 2022-2027, 2021, [link](#)

¹⁶ South-West Oltenia Regional Development Agency, Regional Development Plan of the South-West Oltenia Region 2021-2027, 2022, [link](#)

¹⁷ South-West Oltenia Regional Development Agency, Regional Strategy for Smart Specialization RIS3 South-West Oltenia 2021-2027, 2020, [link](#)



- Increasing the performance of entrepreneurial activity at regional level;
- Increasing the number of newly created active enterprises;
- Reducing the unemployment rate at regional level;
- Improving access to financing for enterprises;
- Increasing investments made by enterprises;
- Developing business structures;
- Improving professional skills for employees in SMEs and public research entities;
- Strengthening the sustainability of the regional institutional innovation system.

Next, the main socio-economic aspects analyzed for the assessment of the current context regarding regional competitiveness are detailed, broken down at the level of analysis of the competitiveness of enterprises and the research, development, innovation sector.

Current developments and challenges

Enterprise competitiveness

The Regional Competitiveness Index¹⁸ (2022) is measured through 11 pillars (Institutions, Macroeconomic Stability, Infrastructure, Health, Basic Education, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning, Labor Market Efficiency, Market Size, Technological Readiness, Business Complexity, Innovation pillar) with the aim of determining the long-term potential of a region.

In 2022, the regional competitiveness index recorded values well below the European Union averages and the last positions in the European ranking for each region in Romania (except for the Bucharest-Ilfov region). In fact, the Bucharest-Ilfov region occupies position 129/234 at European level. On the other hand, significant disparities are recorded in the case of all other development regions, despite positive developments compared to 2016 and 2019.

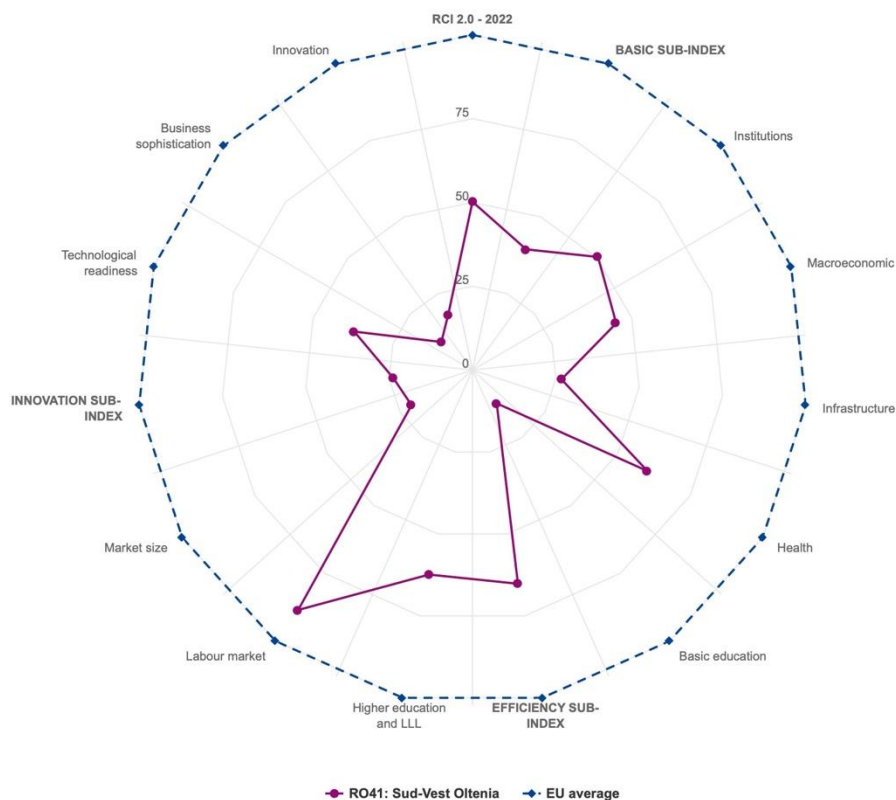
The South-West Oltenia region ranks 231/234 in the European ranking, presenting somewhat higher scores in the case of the pillars regarding the Labor Market, Health and Tertiary Education, but extremely low in the case of Technological Readiness, Business Complexity or Innovation, which indicates the increased need to increase competitiveness at the regional level.

Figure 3 Regional competitiveness index in the South-West Oltenia region, compared to the European Union average

¹⁸ Regional competitiveness index 2.0 – 2022, [link](#)



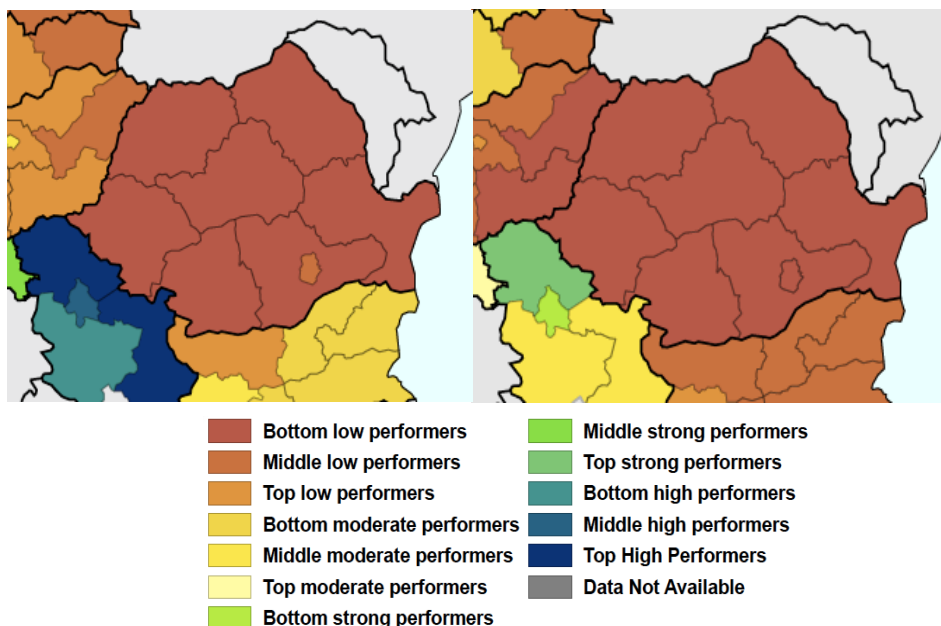
EU Regional Competitiveness Index 2.0 - 2022 edition



Regarding the competitiveness of SMEs, according to the Regional Innovation Scoreboard¹⁹ (RIS 2023) data, Romania ranks last in the European ranking in terms of investment made or added value brought by SMEs. In addition, the share of SMEs that have introduced product and process innovations reflects the attention paid by the sector to increasing business competitiveness, with Romania once again ranking last in the European ranking.

Figure 4 SMEs that introduced product innovations - left and SMEs that introduced innovative business processes - right (% of total SMEs)

¹⁹ Tabloului de bord Regional privind Inovarea (RIS 2023), [link](#)



Source: Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS) 2023

Business Demographics

According to statistical data collected through the NIS, the number of newly created enterprises is continuously increasing in all development regions, which can have a positive effect on improving the competitiveness of Romania and the SME sector, as well as the overall increase in employment. In the South-West Oltenia region, this growth rate is somewhat lower compared to the other development regions.

The resilience of newly created enterprises is important, noting that in recent years (2021-2022), only 73% of the newly created enterprises in the previous year remain active. In the South-West Oltenia region, the share of enterprises remaining active is even below the national average and many other development regions (approximately 63%).

Tabel no. 5 Întreprinderi nou create active, la un an de la înființare (UM: nr. întreprinderi)

Development regions	Year 2020 (%)	Year 2021 (%)	Year 2022 (%)
Romania	68,8	77,2	73,6
North-East Region	73,2	76,8	77,6
South-East Region	66,1	71,8	68,7
South-Muntenia Region	59	62,5	60,1
South-West Oltenia Region	61,2	60,6	66,1

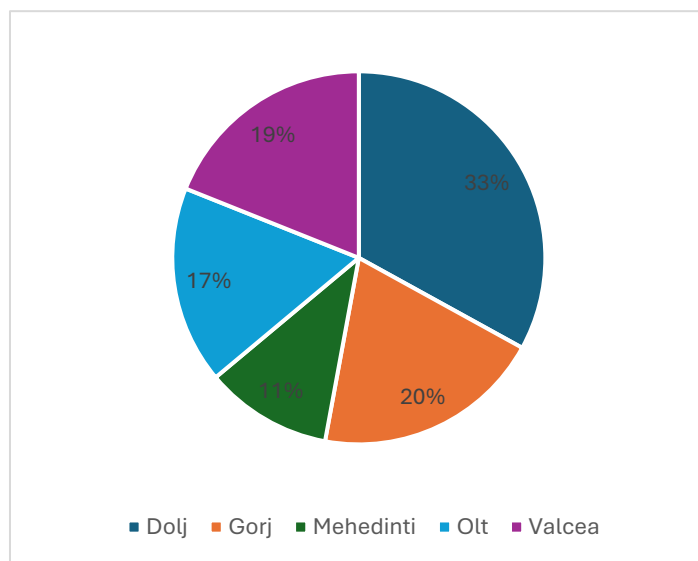
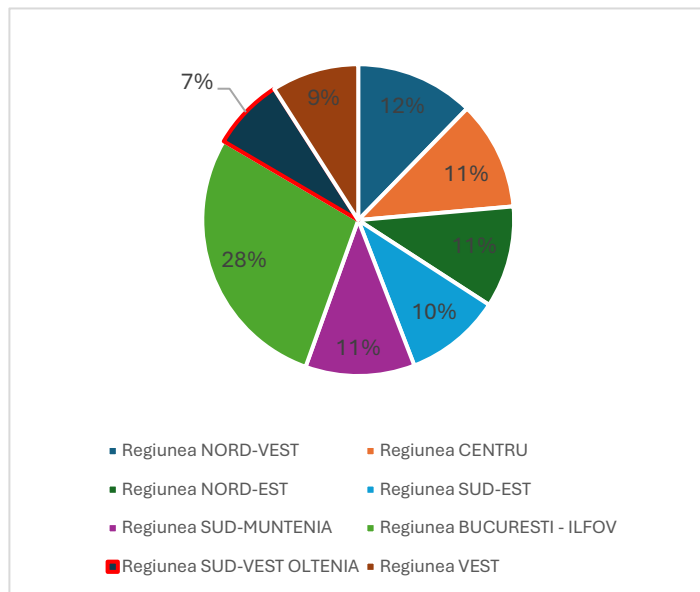


Development regions	Year 2020 (%)	Year 2021 (%)	Year 2022 (%)
West Region	55,2	57,5	71,6
North-West Region	72,9	83,8	77,2
Center Region	75,2	85,5	81,4

Source: NIS Tempo

Situația economică

GDP has seen a steady evolution in Romania, reaching 1.19 trillion lei in 2021²⁰, an increase of +39% compared to 2017. Similar to the national evolution, all development regions have recorded approximately similar increases in recent years. More importantly, the South-West Oltenia region continues to rank last in terms of the region's share in national GDP, 7% of the total, thus requiring the maintenance of higher financial support or its supplementation in the case of this region, in order to reduce disparities. At the same time, at the level of the counties of the South-West Oltenia region, Dolj occupies the first position (33% of regional GDP), followed by Gorj (20%), Vâlcea (19%), Olt (17%), Mehedinți (11%).



Source: NIS TEMPO data

²⁰ The year 2021 represents the last year for which data for this indicator is available at the level of the National Institute of Statistics..



Another problem related to the competitiveness of enterprises is determined by the excessive dependence on activities with low added value. The analysis of statistical data on active enterprises and the average number of employees, by activities of the national economy, shows that in 2021, most active enterprises were operating in the field of wholesale and retail trade; industry and in agriculture, forestry and fishing. However, services with potentially higher added value - information and communication technology, financial intermediation and insurance, real estate transactions, can be considered underrepresented, which justifies the additional funding to increase regional competitiveness.

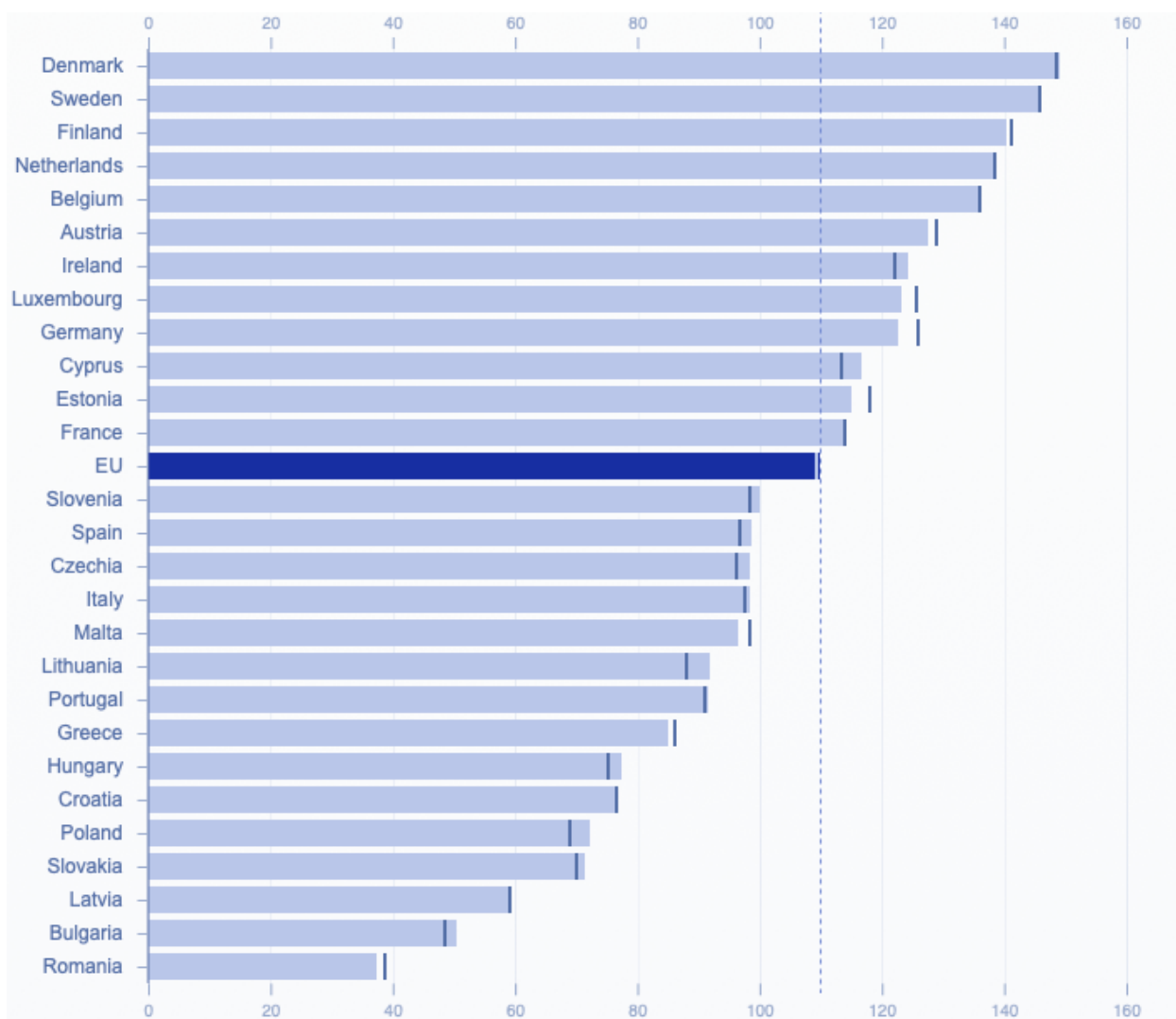
The analysis of the indicator relating to the employed population by activities of the national economy shows that the South-West Oltenia region is at the bottom of the national ranking, with 36% representing the employed population of the total population. More importantly, this share decreases in the years 2021-2022 (from approximately 40% in the period 2017-2020).

Research, development, innovation

The European Commission reports strong differences between the development levels of different EU regions and territories in the field of research and innovation. According to the European Commission's 2024 European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS²¹), Romania is classified as an Emerging Innovator and occupies the last position in the European ranking.

Figure 5 RDI performance, aggregated EIS indicators

²¹ European Innovation Scoreboard 2024 – European Commission. [Link](#)



Source: European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS 2024)

Since the EIS ranking is the product of merging a multitude of indicators related to innovation and research, it can be considered a good indicator of the intensity of needs in these areas. Moreover, the rankings resulting from previous EIS exercises provide an idea of the general evolution of the Romanian territory in terms of innovation (for the period 2017-2024) - and in this case, Romania is well below the EU average and shows a regression in performance in recent years.

Thus, Romania remains deficient in terms of RDI capacity, recording weak developments (or even involutions) for most of the analyzed indicators, while recent years bring an even greater gap compared to the EU average.

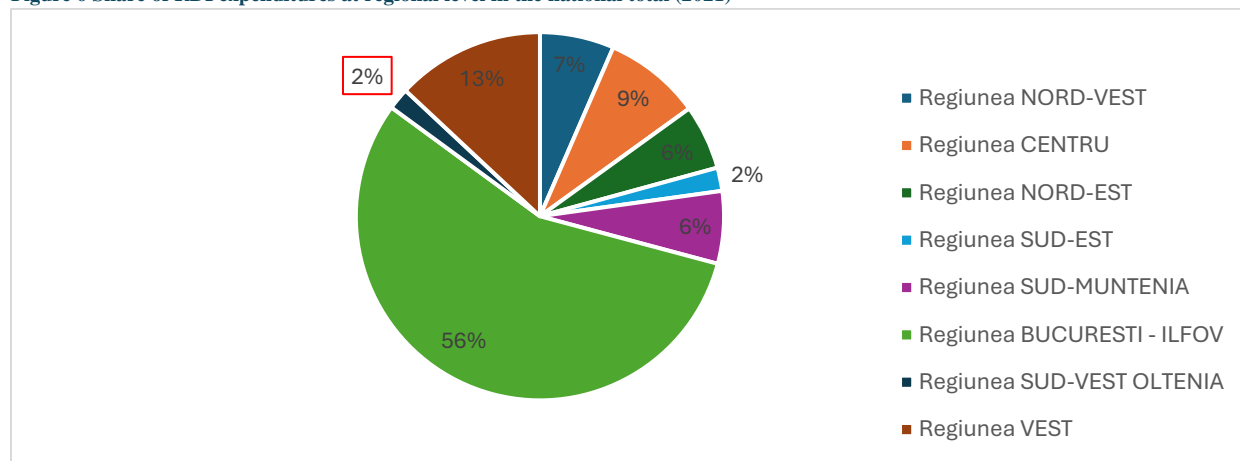


General R&D resources

A more specific indicator of a territory's inclination towards Innovation and Research is represented by the **level of expenditure allocated to research and development**. These expenditures (private and public) still represent only a small percentage of Romania's national GDP (below 0.5% - equivalent to 5.61 billion lei, in 2021), among the lowest values recorded at EU level (the EU 27 average is over 2%). Moreover, although the level of expenditure allocated to RDI is constantly increasing, it has remained relatively constant as a share of GDP. In the previous programming period, through SNCDI 2014-2020 and Partnership Agreement, the target was set to invest 2% of GDP in R&D by 2020, which is far from being achieved at present, with the difference compared to European countries being accentuated and the need to accelerate investments in the sector being underlined, including in the current programming period.

At the territorial level, according to 2021 statistical data, Romania continues to concentrate most of its RDI resources in the Bucharest-Ilfov region. The growth rate of regional RDI spending follows the national trend (growth), with small differences between regions. However, a strong positive evolution is recorded in the West region, which doubles its RDI spending in 2021, compared to 2017, thus becoming the second region in Romania in terms of RDI investment values (13% in 2021, as a share of the national total).

Figure 6 Share of RDI expenditures at regional level in the national total (2021)



Source: Elaboration based on NIS data

At the level of the South-West Oltenia region, RDI expenditures remain at an extremely low level (106 million lei in 2021) and constant during the period 2017-2021. Moreover, they represent only 2% of the total RDI expenditures at the national level and an allocation of 0.12% of the regional GDP. Thus, the share of GDP allocated for RDI at the level of the South-West Oltenia region may further influence the increase in the gaps between regions. Moreover, due to the concentration of university centers (Dolj, Gorj) and



RDI units and large industries in the territory (Dolj, Vâlcea, Olt, Gorj), the region records significant discrepancies at the county level.

Tabel no. 6 RDI expenditures in the South-West Oltenia region and share in total county GDP (2021)

	Value (million lei)	% of regional/county GDP
SOUTH-WEST Oltenia Region	106,99	0,12%
Dolj	32,942	0,11%
Gorj	2,235	0,01%
Mehedinți	0	0,00%
Olt	13,437	0,09%
Vâlcea	58,376	0,35%

Source: Elaboration based on NIS data

The source of financing for RDI activities has experienced a shift in recent years, from predominantly public funds to predominantly from enterprises, noting the increasing interest of enterprises to invest in RDI activities and the relatively constant support from government institutions. In 2022, 54.5% of financing came from enterprises, 30.9% public funds and 12.3% funds from abroad²².

Another resource that supports the development of the RDI sector is represented by the **research infrastructure**, measured by the indicator number of active centers/units. Romania has an extensive research, development and innovation system, which has remained relatively constant in the public sector (small decreases), however, the private sector has registered a significant decrease in the period 2017-2022 (from 437 units to 304). At the level of the South-West Oltenia region, there are 3 universities (2 – Dolj, 1- Gorj) various institutes, research centers and research stations (predominantly in Dolj and Vâlcea, but also one each in Olt and Gorj) and numerous commercial companies whose object of activity is research (predominantly in Dolj). The least represented county is Mehedinți.

In terms of **human resources**, the percentage of research and development personnel and researchers in total employed persons is much lower than the EU average. In addition, their share remains relatively constant in the period 2017-2022, amplifying the difference with the Member States. This demonstrates the low interest of the economic, institutional and educational environment to dedicate its human resources to the field. In this case, the South-West Oltenia region records the weakest representation of all regions, with 2 employees in RDI activities per 1000 employed persons. It is worth noting that this indicator is continuously increasing in the case of the West region, a region that has significantly accelerated spending in the field.

Tabel no. 7 1 Employees in RDI activity, per 1000 employed persons

²² Rapoarte privind activitatea de cercetare dezvoltare, pe ani – Institutul Național de Statistică



	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
National	5,4	5,3	5,2	5,4	6,2	6,3
NORTH-WEST	2,8	2,9	3,1	3,6	4,0	4,0
CENTER	3,8	3,9	4,1	4,1	4,5	5,4
NORTH-EAST	3,5	3,4	3,7	4,0	4,9	4,9
SOUTH-EAST	2,4	2,6	2,4	2,5	3,0	3,5
SOUTH-MUNTENIA	2,1	2,4	2,4	2,5	2,7	2,8
BUCHAREST - ILFOV	16,6	16,8	15,5	15,3	16,4	15,8
WEST	26,7	23,4	22,6	26,7	31,7	30,7
SOUTH-WEST OLTEA	2,8	1,9	1,6	1,4	1,9	2,0
Dolj	7,4	4,4	4,0	3,5	4,3	4,7
Gorj	0,5	0,4	0,4	0,3	0,3	0,4
Olt	0,1	0,6	0,7	0,7	0,8	0,6
Vâlcea	1,8	1,7	1,1	0,9	2,0	2,0

Source: Elaboration based on NIS data

RDI activity

The recent evolution of investments in RDI activity shows a greater concentration of **resources on applied research** (over 50% of total expenditure), to the detriment of fundamental research, while experimental development research has remained at the same level²³.

Considering the **sectoral R&D expenditures**, in recent years, Romania has registered a significant increase in R&D expenditures for the business environment – reaching 3.7 billion in 2022 – thus becoming the sector with the highest R&D investments in Romania (59% of the total, in 2022). This increase is due to the acceleration of private investments by economic operators for applied research. On the other hand, in the case of the other sectors (government, higher education and private non-profit) the evolution is insignificant in recent years.

²³ Rapoarte privind activitatea de cercetare dezvoltare, pe ani – Institutul Național de Statistică



From the perspective of the **areas** on which RDI activities were focused, most investments in 2022 were allocated to engineering and technological sciences (including industrial production); natural and exact sciences; and agriculture.

Although the direct link between RDI investments in areas with smart specialization potential, as established at national level and regional RIS3, is noted, it is not clear how technological transfer to operators in the territory is achieved and whether the research results are usable and practically used in the areas of interest. This aspect is also supported by specialists in the field, who believe that the results of applied research and technological transfer to the private sector must be properly regulated by the legislative framework. Moreover, comparing the selection of smart specialization sectors in Romania, it is found that they have generally been maintained from one programming period to another (without the emergence of new areas), including in the case of the South-West Oltenia Region. For 2021-2027, in addition to the previous period, increased attention (in the case of several development regions) is given to the health and ICT sectors – which, together with the low share of expenditure in these sectors, emphasizes the need to accelerate RDI investments in these areas.

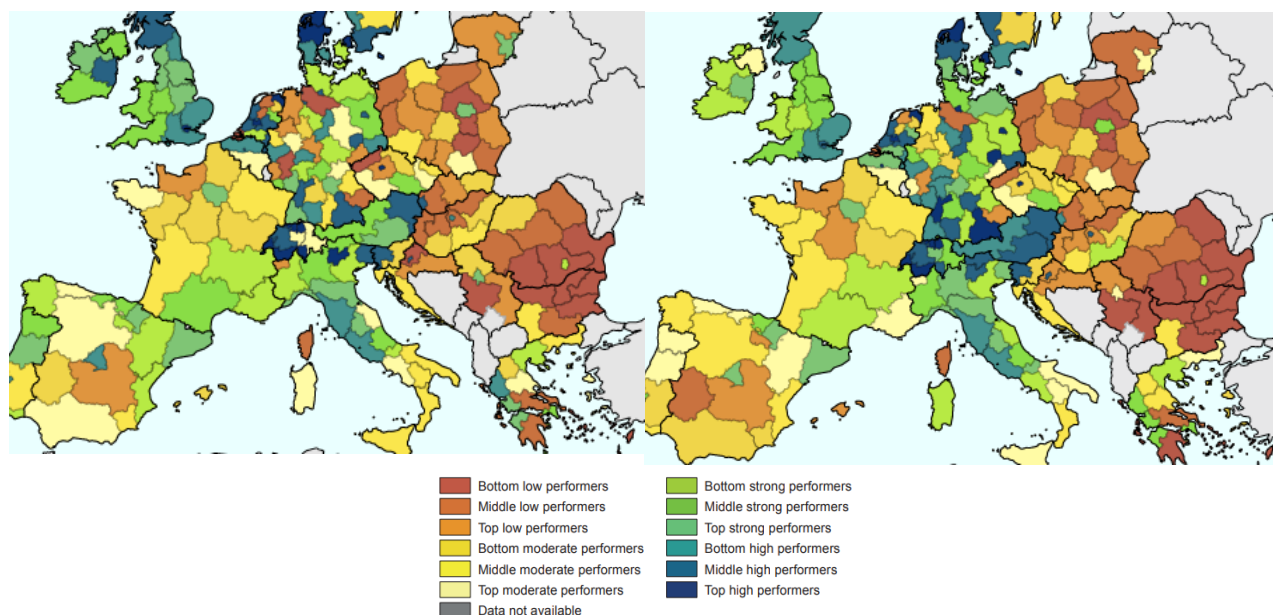
The degree of innovation of enterprises shows extremely positive trends in terms of the number of innovative enterprises, the increase in turnover, the diversification of the types of innovation and the number of their employees. Thus, the number of product and process innovators (including as a share in the total number of enterprises) in key sectors of the Romanian economy, such as manufacturing and extractive industries or distribution of utility services, has increased significantly. Moreover, the share of those collaborating with others (out of total innovative enterprises) has doubled in recent years, emphasizing the importance for the economic sector to focus on innovation concepts. However, compared to the EU average, the performance of the Romanian regions is still extremely low, in all the aforementioned aspects (according to RIS 2023).

At the level of the South-West Oltenia region, all indicators are just below the national average, exceeding only the South-East region.

Publications and public-private collaborations are another important aspect of RDI activity. According to RIS 2023 data, Romania ranks last in the EU in regional performance regarding international scientific co-publications and public-private co-publications (per million inhabitants). However, there is a growing interest in creating university-business-academic partnerships, but these are not sufficiently materialized. This aspect emphasizes, once again, the need for government regulations, both to strengthen the capacity for collaboration and to facilitate technology transfer and the degree of use of research results.

Figure 7 International scientific co-publications and public-private co-publications

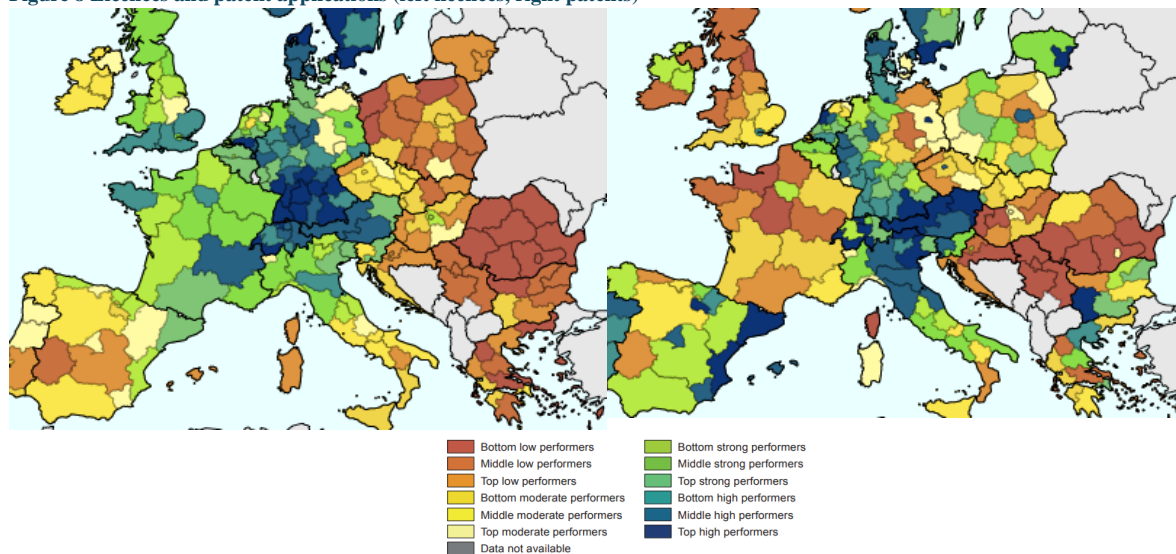




Source: RIS 2023

Last but not least, Romania ranks last at EU level regarding patent applications and licences (according to RIS 2023 information).

Figure 8 Licences and patent applications (left licences, right patents)



Source: RIS 2023



Another pressing issue in Romania is related to **technology transfer and access to research results**. Currently, Romania has 46 accredited technology transfer centers²⁴, of which only 3 in the South-West Oltenia region, and an adequate strategy for connecting the public and private sectors, but these are not used effectively. Moreover, the legislative framework is insufficiently developed, which reduces the degree of use of research results by actors in the territory and access to information by third parties.

Needs and challenges

According to the context analysis, the needs and challenges identified since the programme was developed are still relevant, and the priorities and intervention actions programmed within the South-West Oltenia RP remain relevant.

The regional competitiveness index records extremely low values for the South-West Oltenia region, in relation to investments made, added value brought by SMEs, introduction of product or process innovations. At the same time, the region ranks last in terms of contribution to national GDP.

At the same time, the RDI sector is underrepresented both at national and regional level, with low financial allocations, research activity far below its existing potential and with final results that in many cases are not transferred to the market.

In this context, the support provided by the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme remains essential for the development and strengthening of the RDI sector capacity, but also for improving the performance of the business sector and SMEs. In addition, if possible, it is recommended to supplement the financial allocations for the development of the competitiveness and RDI sector at regional level.

Priority P2. Digitalization for the benefit of citizens and businesses

For the current programming period, the European Commission has updated its priorities up to 2030 through the Communication "**Digital Compass 2030: Europe's path for the digital decade**"²⁵, which is based on four cardinal points: skills for adults; businesses using cloud computing, AI, big data; connectivity infrastructure; digitalisation of public services.

All these pillars are supported at the national level through various strategic documents, such as: the **Partnership Agreement**²⁶, the Public Policy Proposal in the field of e-Government, the Government Strategy for the development of the SME sector and the improvement of the business environment in Romania towards a digital and data economy. Moreover, at the regional level, the **Regional Development**

²⁴ Innovation and Technology Transfer Entities – Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization. [Link](#)

²⁵ European Commission, Digital Compass 2030: the European path for the digital decade, 2021, [link](#)

²⁶ *op.cit.*, [link](#)



Plan²⁷ and the **RIS3 Strategy**²⁸ provide for investments in the digitalization of the public and private environment. Last but not least, the potential of the South-West Oltenia region is also viewed through the lens of large regional industries, such as vehicle production, energy and agri-food, which still require investments in the development of specialized software. For these reasons, ICT and Digitalization is selected as one of the pillars of smart specialization for the current period, aiming at the development of Smart City, Smart Village, innovative products in the IT field and the digitalization of the economy.

Thus, the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme identifies the following main needs in terms of competitiveness:

- Increasing the rate of use and the number of users of online public services;
- Developing the interoperability of IT systems in public administration;
- Increasing the degree of use of the Internet and AI in the activity of SMEs;
- Increasing access to financing for SMEs for the development of the ICT component;
- Increasing the number of jobs.

Current developments and challenges

In 2022, Romania ranked last (position 27) in terms of the value of the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI 2022) at EU level²⁹. According to data provided by the European Commission, Romania records the worst performance in the EU, both in absolute terms, but also in relation to growth in recent years: in addition to having the lowest score, Romania actually records poor progress in the period 2016-2022, progress that only exceeds that of Bulgaria and Latvia.

According to the Country Report on the Digital Decade 2024³⁰, the digital ecosystem in Romania, compared to most indicators, is still at the bottom of the European ranking and well below the targets set for the next period, despite somewhat more accelerated growth in certain areas.

Connectivity

Romania has a solid situation in terms of broadband connectivity and a positive dynamic in recent years. In fact, the coverage of the fixed very high capacity network (VHCN) and the fiber optic network (FTTP) reached 95% in 2023, far exceeding the European Union average (79% VHCN coverage and 64% FTTP). At the same time, the coverage of fiber optic services in rural areas is sufficiently high, reaching 92.5% in

²⁷ *op.cit*, [link](#)

²⁸ *op.cit*, [link](#)

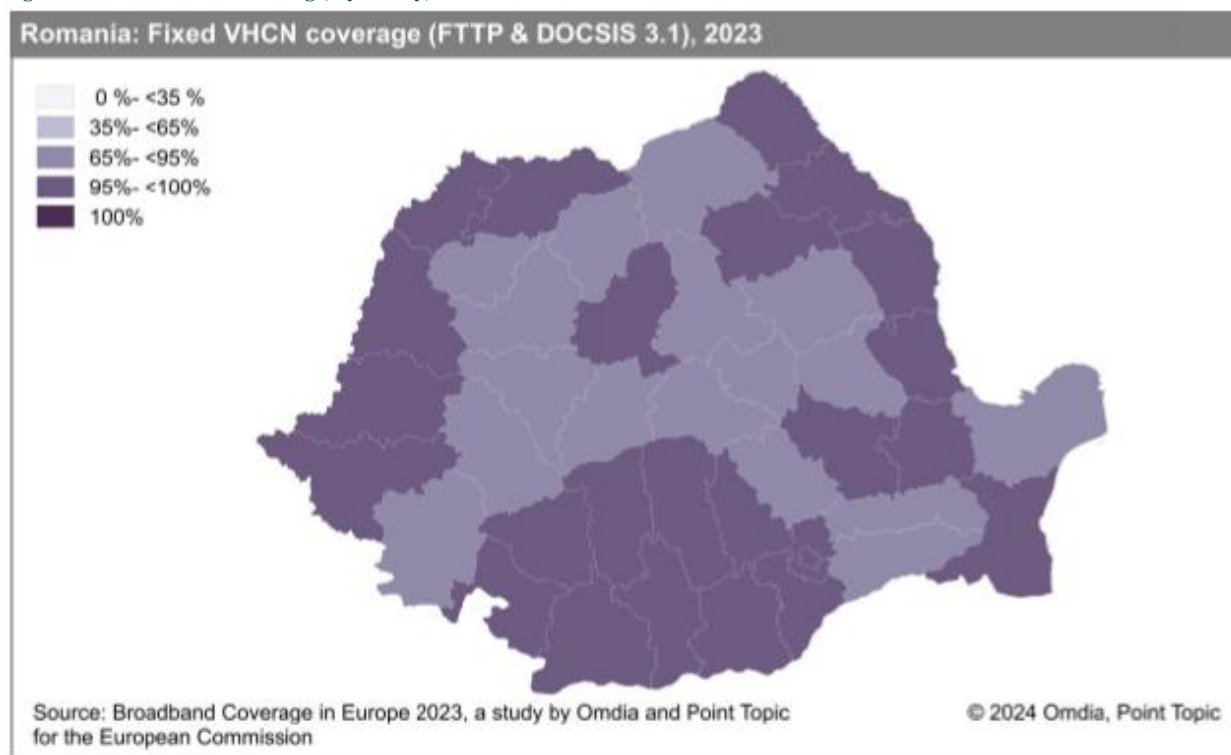
²⁹ The European Commission has been monitoring Member States' progress in the digital field and has published annual reports on the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) since 2014. DESI is an index built on more than 30 indicators representing five main policy areas on digitalisation.

³⁰ Digital Decade Country Report 2024, *Currently, the DESI index has been transposed into the Digital Decade and is monitored differently. [link](#)

2023. However, in terms of 5G services, only 33% of populated areas were covered in 2023 (up from 12% in 2020), well below the European Union average (89% coverage).

From a territorial point of view, the distribution of broadband coverage is quite uniform between counties, with few exceptions³¹ (e.g. in the mountainous areas of Romania). At the same time, in the South-West Oltenia region, connectivity is high across all counties and, more importantly, connectivity in rural areas is extremely high compared to other development regions (e.g. Olt County has a coverage of 99% of rural areas, the highest in the country).

Figure 9 NGA broadband coverage, by county, 2023



Source: EC, *Broadband Coverage in Europe*, 2023

Population and skills

The general digital literacy of the population and its use of ICT are aspects in which Romania still lags behind. The share of citizens with at least basic digital skills reached 29% of the population in 2023, remaining well below the EU average (55%). Otherwise, according to Eurostat statistics on internet use,

³¹ EC, *Broadband Coverage in Europe*, Report 2023



the share of Romanian citizens who regularly use the internet is approaching the European Union average, with over 91% of Romanian citizens regularly using the internet (year 2023).

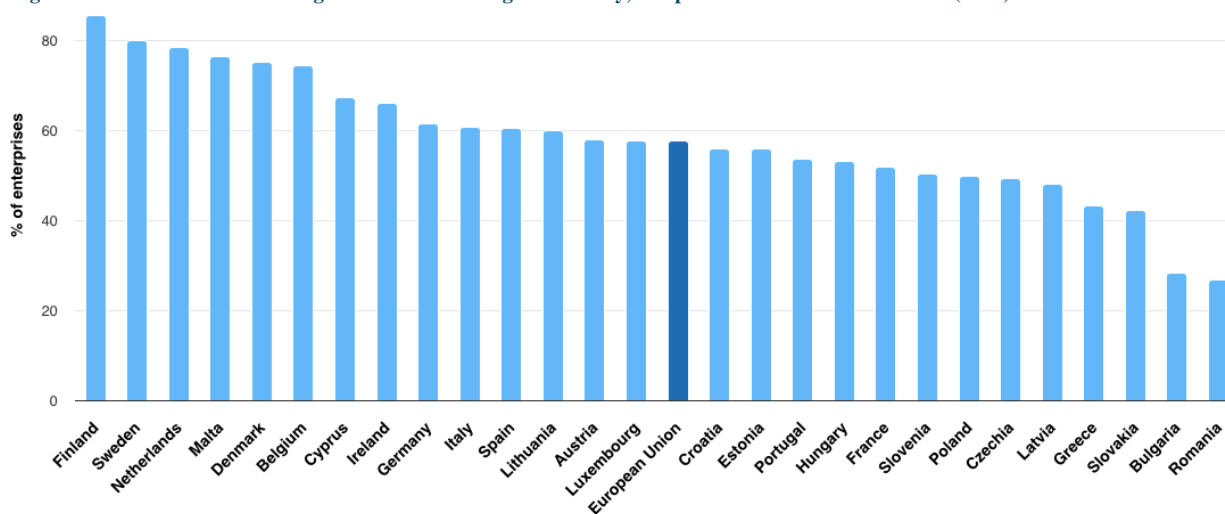
Data on the digital literacy of Romanian citizens and their approach to ICT partially contrast with statistics on ICT specialists: for example, Romania has a high number of ICT graduates. On the other hand, active specialists in the field represent only a small share of the total number of people employed in Romania. The general phenomenon of migration of young qualified labor force may explain, at least in part, these contrasting data.

Digitalization in the business sector and public institutions

Regarding the integration of ICT in business activities, Romania lags behind the EU average, in relation to most of the indicators taken into account for the calculation of the Digital Decade index.

Less than 27% of SMEs reach the minimum criteria for basic digital intensity, a limited number use cloud services and big data analysis and a very small share (1.5%) use technologies based on Artificial Intelligence. The only indicator in which Romania is relatively close to the European Union average is related to the use of e-invoicing systems.

Figure 10 Share of SMEs reaching the basic level of digital intensity, compared to other Member States (2023)



Source: Digital Decade 2024

At the same time, analyzing the degree to which more advanced forms of ICT are integrated into internal business processes, the indicators recorded at the Romanian level³², in 2023, show significant delays

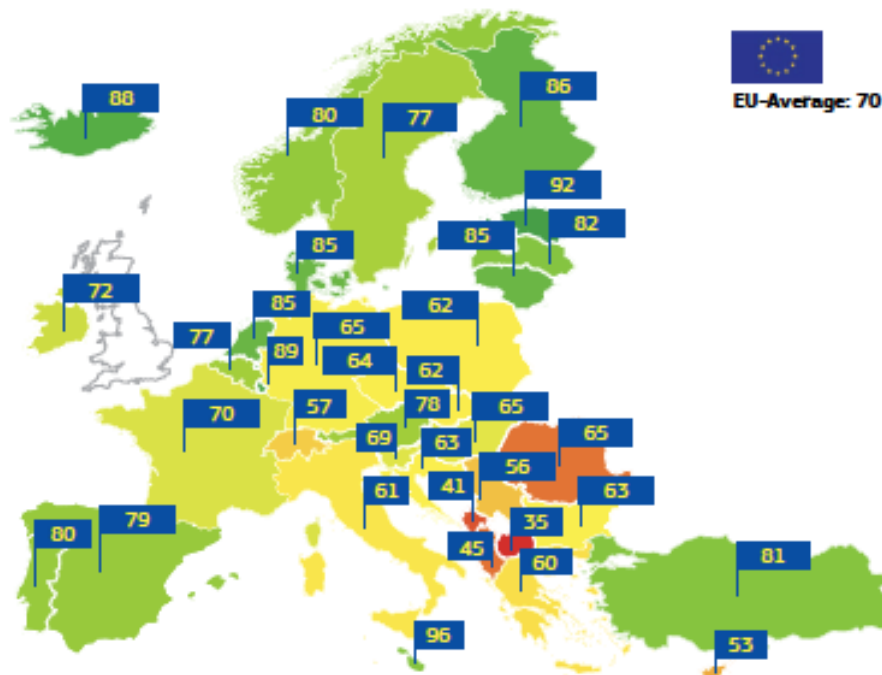
³² Source: Eurostat

compared to the EU average, for example related to the share of companies that have a high digital intensity index (0.5%, compared to 3.4% in the EU, in 2023).

At the same time, according to the *eGovernment benchmark* 2023 report³³, Romania has one of the lowest performances in Europe in the field, both in terms of demand (degree of penetration: the extent to which citizens seek digital interaction with public authorities) and in terms of supply (degree of digitalization: the quantity and quality of public services actually available online).

Moreover, the share of citizens interacting online with public authorities is well below the EU average (65%) and only 56% of services are available online (84% at EU level). At the same time, identification based on the identity card in various online platforms, as well as the use of pre-filled forms, is carried out to a small extent.

Figure 11 Positioning of e-government in EU Member States, depending on the combination of penetration and digitalization performances



Source: EC, E-government benchmark 2023

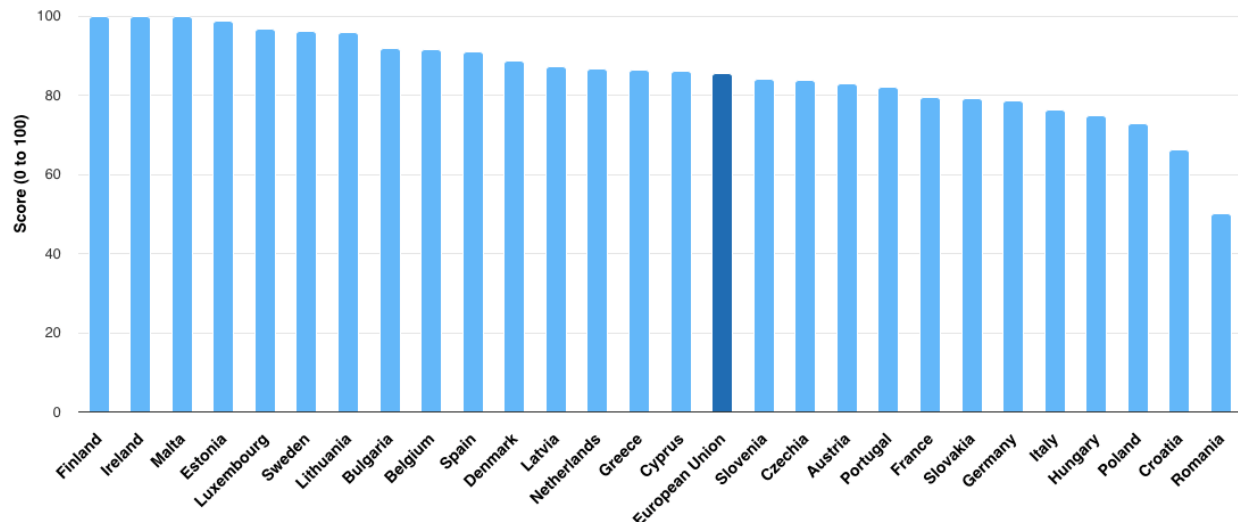
Another important indicator concerns digital public services offered to businesses, which shows the extent to which a service or information regarding a service for businesses is provided online and through

³³ European Commission, eGovernment benchmark 2021 – outlook report



a portal. In 2023, Romania's score for this indicator was 50.03, well below the European Union average of 85.42, a score that places it in last place at European level from this point of view as well. Compared to previous years, there is an improvement, but the need for the development of digital public services addressed to businesses remains extremely high.

Figure 12 Digital public services for businesses at EU Member State level (score 0-100)



Source: Digital Decade 2024

Needs and challenges

Romania has assumed ambitious targets within the Digital Compass 2030, supported also by regional development strategies and plans, regarding the increase of ICT skills, the use of cloud computing, AI or Big Data, but also the digitalization of public services.

According to European-level indices, Romania and the South-West Oltenia region rank last in terms of the digital ecosystem. An extremely positive aspect is the territorial coverage of broadband and fiber optic connectivity, both in urban and rural areas. Otherwise, digital literacy and ICT use are at low levels, with a low integration of specialists at the level of SMEs and companies (despite the high number of graduates).

Moreover, digitalization in the business sector is limited and well below the European average in terms of the use of cloud services, big data or artificial intelligence. The only indicator in which Romania is relatively close to the European Union average is the use of e-invoicing systems. In terms of digital public services, Romania has one of the lowest performances in Europe, both in terms of demand for such services and in terms of the existing supply.



Given the current situation, the interventions supported by the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme remain relevant and absolutely necessary for improving public services, but also for better integration of digital solutions in the activity of enterprises.

Priority P3. Energy efficiency and green infrastructure

Specific objective: RSO2.1. Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions (ERDF)

OS 2.1 responds to the needs identified at the time of the development of the PR SV Oltenia 2021-2027, to continue financing thermo-modernization projects, for which there was a very high interest in the previous programming period, in order to reduce energy consumption in public and residential buildings and implicitly improve energy efficiency.

The two categories of operations financed under OS 2.1 are:

- A. **Investments in public buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency and measures for the use of renewable energy sources**
- B. **Investments in residential buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency**

Current developments and challenges

At European level, energy and environmental challenges have led to the establishment of climate objectives covering all key sectors of the economy. economy and which must be pursued at the level of EU Member States. As a member state of the European Union, Romania is a signatory to the European Green Deal, having established decarbonization objectives and firm deadlines, aimed at transforming the EU into a modern, competitive and resource-efficient economy:

- i. reduction by 2030 of net GHG emissions by at least 55% compared to 1990 levels ("Prepare for 55");
- ii. (ii) achieving net zero GHG emissions by 2050 ("Carbon Neutrality").

According to data provided by Eurostat, in 2022, there was a 72.5% reduction in GHG emissions at the national level compared to 1990 emission levels, with Romania thus meeting the EU target of reducing GHG by 55% by 2030, well ahead of schedule. This represents the highest performance among EU Member States, with the reduction recorded at European level in 2022, compared to 1990, being 31%. On the other hand, Romania has set an ambitious target through the Integrated National Plan for Energy and Climate Change (PNIESC) 2025-2030, which aims to reduce net GHG emissions by 85% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, and achieve climate neutrality before 2045, thus advancing the previous deadline set for 2050.

However, energy and energy efficiency challenges remain, with a need for a greater share of renewable energy in the energy mix and greater energy efficiency. To this end, at European level, through the revised



Energy Efficiency ³⁴ **Directive and the revised Renewable Energy Directive** ³⁵, the following objectives have been agreed:

- reducing final energy consumption by at least 11.7% compared to the energy consumption forecasts estimated for 2030.
- an average annual energy efficiency obligation of 1.49%, with a gradual increase and the inclusion of additional elements of flexibility (energy savings achieved through the application of the EU ETS scheme including for buildings and transport, EPBD measures and temporary ones adopted during the energy crisis in 2022).
- in the public sector, the energy efficiency target is 1.9% (according to the general approach), with the possibility for Member States to exclude defence and public transport.
- The EU's overall target for the share of RES in the energy mix by 2030 is 42.5% (with an indicative additional contribution of 2.5%), to achieve the 45% target.

In order to reduce final energy consumption at EU level, each Member State shall set an indicative national energy efficiency contribution, based on final energy consumption, with a view to collectively meeting the Union's binding final energy consumption target. Each Member State's contribution shall be notified to the Commission, together with an indicative trajectory for it, as part of the updated versions of the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plans. Thus, in **the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (INECP)** ³⁶, The primary energy consumption target for Romania in 2030 was set at 30.2 Mtoe. The assumed primary energy consumption forecasts indicate reaching a target of 28.7 Mtoe in 2030, below the target set by the Energy Efficiency Directive (recast). The target of 28.7 Mtoe will mark a 9% decrease in primary energy consumption compared to 2022. Also, gross final energy consumption is expected to register a slight decrease, of 6%, in 2030 compared to 2022, without affecting productivity, also complementary to measures to increase the share of energy produced from renewable sources, reaching an absolute value of 22.5 Mtoe in 2030 (this means that Romania will meet its gross final energy consumption target set by the Energy Efficiency Directive (recast), which is 22.47 Mtoe in 2030).

Final energy consumption was broadly stable in the period 2019-2022, at national level, at around 24 Mtoe in 2022, according to data provided by the NIS. This value is very close to Romania's commitment to reduce its energy consumption by 2030, to the target of 22.47 Mtoe. The available data on the types of energy

³⁴DIRECTIVE (EU) 2023/1791 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 13 September 2023 on energy efficiency and amending Regulation (EU) 2023/955 (recast), [link](#)

³⁵DIRECTIVE (EU) 2023/2413 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 October 2023 amending Directive (EU) 2018/2001, Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 and Directive 98/70/EC with regard to the promotion of energy from renewable sources and repealing Council Directive (EU) 2015/652, [link](#)

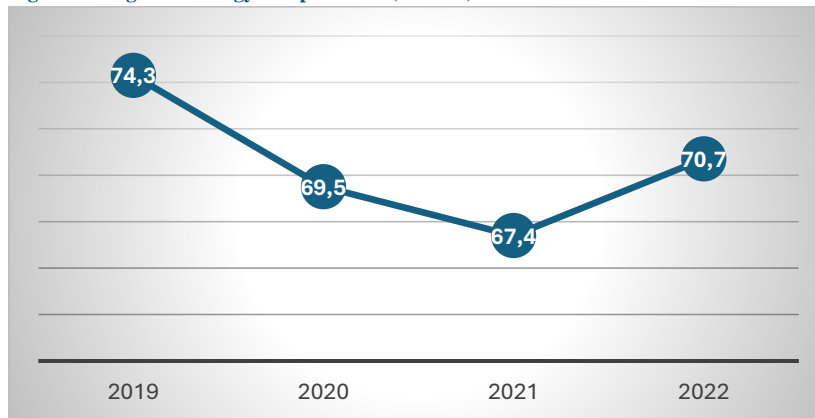
³⁶Ministry of Energy, National Integrated Plan for Energy and Climate Change, 2024, [link](#)



carriers in Romania show that the largest share in final energy consumption in 2022 was held by the consumption of crude oil and petroleum products (37.60% of final energy consumption), followed by natural gas with 22.49%, whose share experienced a downward trend in the period 2019-2022 (a decrease of around 4%).

Romania's energy sources are quite rich compared to other EU countries, including in terms of gas, lignite and hydropower capacity and supply. The degree of energy independence, representing the ratio between primary energy production and the amount of primary energy available, was quite high in 2022 (70.7%), according to data provided by the NIS.

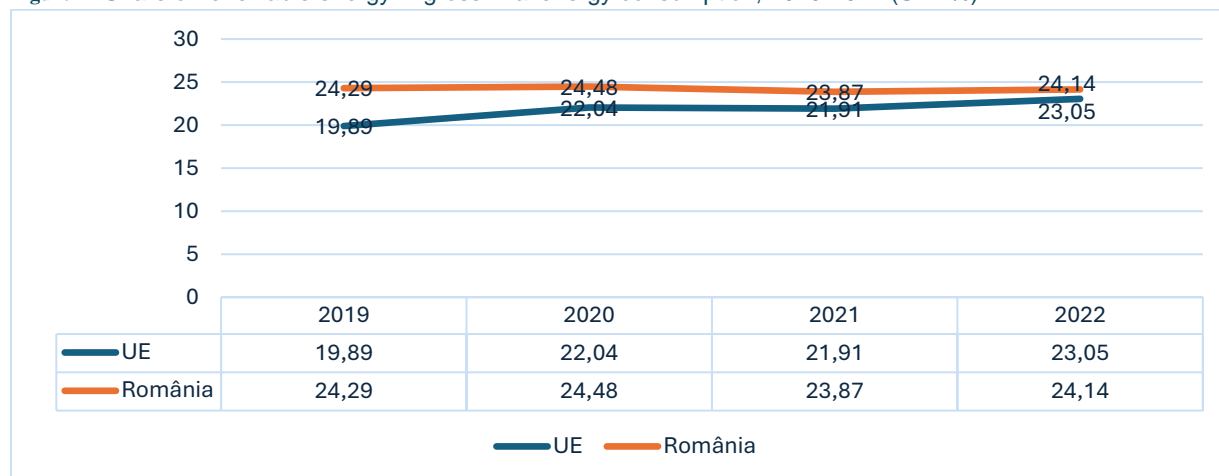
Figure 13 Degree of energy independence (MU: %)



Source: NIS

Regarding the share of RES in the energy mix, statistical data show that in Romania, in 2022 (the last year for which Eurostat data is available), the share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption was 24.14%, far from the target for 2030, of 42.5%, but this share is slightly higher compared to the share of renewable energy recorded at European level, which highlights an average performance of Romania in this sector, compared to other Member States. However, a stagnation of this indicator is observed, at national level, in the period 2019-2022, unlike the growth trend existing at EU level (where the share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption increased from 19.89% to 23.05%). It is therefore necessary to continue efforts to increase the use of renewable energy sources

Figure 14 Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption, 2019-2022 (UM: %)



Source: Eurostat

Specific objective: RSO2.7. Intensifying actions to protect and conserve nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution (ERDF)

OS 2.7 responds to the needs identified at the time of the elaboration of the PR SV Oltenia 2021-2027, to revitalize urban spaces, improve the urban ecosystem, reduce the carbon footprint and other forms of pollution, etc., providing **support for the conservation, improvement or expansion of green-blue infrastructure**, through: modernizing/expanding existing green spaces, creating green spaces through the reconversion and/or reuse of abandoned, degraded spaces and lands, other urban lands and transforming them into green areas, including the creation/expansion of green corridors in urban areas; primary actions undertaken to improve and increase green infrastructure (afforestation, grassing, etc.); developing blue infrastructure: wetlands (swamps), lakes, protection of lakes and watercourses (bank area and area above the banks) only within projects that include a green infrastructure component.

Current developments and challenges

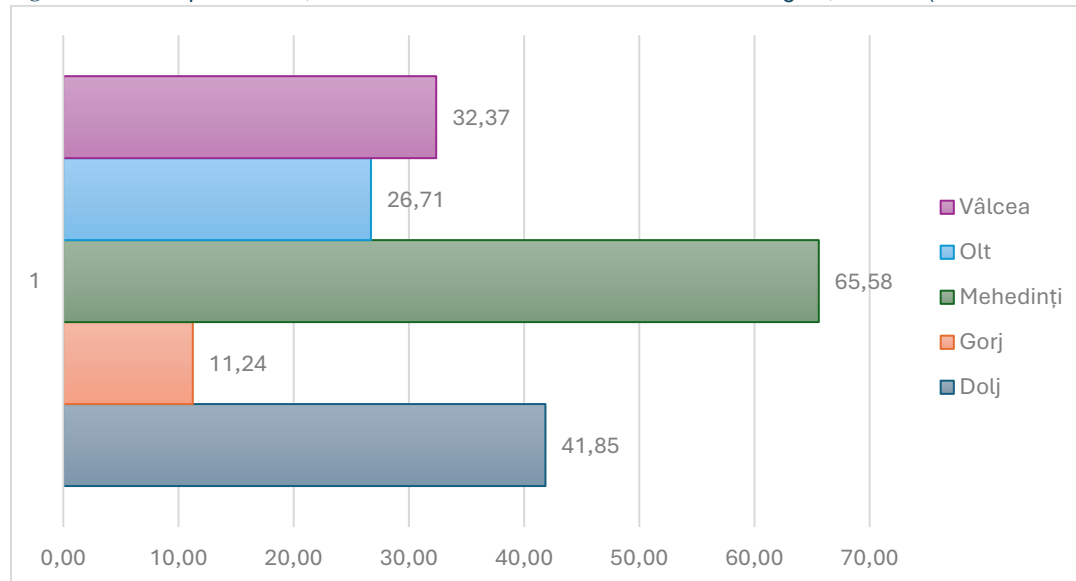
At the time of the elaboration of the PR SV Oltenia 2021-2027, the main problem identified at the regional level, in relation to OS 2.7, was represented on the one hand by the existence of a small area of urban green spaces, which represented about 10% of the area at national level, and on the other hand, by the degraded state of these areas. The analysis of the data provided by the NIS, regarding the area of green spaces at national and regional level, shows that, in 2023, the area of urban green spaces increased at national level by about 25% compared to 2019, while at the level of the South-West Oltenia region, the registered increase was much lower, of only 8.85%.



Regarding the area of green spaces relative to the number of inhabitants, according to the World Health Organization standards, it should be 50 m²/inhabitant, while the European Union standard is 26 m²/inhabitant. By comparison with these standards, the South-West Oltenia region had, in 2023, an urban green space index of 35.46 m²/inhabitant, above the national average of 33.82 m²/inhabitant. A comparison at county level shows that the lowest urban green space index was recorded in Gorj County (of only 11.24 m²/inhabitant), and the highest in Mehedinți County (of 65.58 m²/inhabitant, therefore even above the WHO standard).

It is therefore found that the European Union standard regarding the surface area of green spaces is met at the urban level in the South-West Oltenia region, the only county where it is reduced, being Gorj county. There is also a fairly large disparity between the counties of the region, which could indicate, in the future, a need to prioritize investments towards counties that face a greater need for green space growth (Gorj, Olt, Vâlcea).

Figure 15 Green space index, in the counties of the South-West Oltenia region, in 2023 (MU: m²/inhabitant)



Source: NIS data processing

The analysis carried out on the evolution of the context indicators highlights that the only county where the surface of urban green spaces is below European Union standards is Gorj county. However, although there is a more pressing need at the level of this county, potential beneficiaries did not take advantage of the calls dedicated to OS 2.7 (only one project being contracted at the level of this county). The low interest from potential beneficiaries is a global problem, at the level of the entire region, which can be justified by the limitations imposed at the level of the program, derived from the need to respect the legislative



framework in the field of green spaces in Romania (more details are provided in *Chapter III - General presentation of the program and the implementation status by December 31, 2024*).

Needs and challenges

Although at the national level Romania is making considerable progress in achieving decarbonization and energy efficiency objectives, compared to the European average, there is still a need to increase the use of renewable energy sources (given that the share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption is far from the target for 2030, of 42.5%) or to increase the area of urban green spaces.

Also, continuing investments to increase the energy efficiency of buildings will contribute to reducing energy losses, given that the final energy consumption in buildings has a large share in the total final energy consumption. Energy efficiency in end-use is one of the proposals of the Romanian Energy Strategy, for the horizon of 2035, with a perspective of 2050. This involves encouraging the use of energy-efficient household appliances, **improving building insulation** and promoting practices that reduce energy consumption. Last but not least, the importance of investments to increase the energy efficiency of public and residential buildings is also justified by the objectives pursued by the Fit for 55 legislative package in this sector, which aims to renovate the buildings with the lowest performance.

Priority 4 – Sustainable urban mobility

Specific objective: RSO2.8. Promoting sustainable multimodal urban mobility as part of the transition towards a zero-carbon economy (ERDF)

Analysis of European statistical data on the impact on the environment shows that greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector account for approximately 25% of total emissions at EU level, with the indicator showing an upward trend in recent years. To counter these effects, the European Commission has underlined the need for ambitious changes in the transport sector, setting as an objective of **the European Green Deal** ³⁷ a 90% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from transport, so that the EU becomes a climate-neutral economy by 2050. At the same time, through the " **Fit for 55** " legislative package ³⁸, the European Commission has developed a series of proposals aimed at adapting EU policies, including in the transport sector, to *reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels*.

³⁷European Commission, *Transport and the European Green Deal* , [link](#)

³⁸European Commission, *Commission welcomes finalisation of key legislative package "Fit for 55", which puts EU on track to exceed 2030 targets* , [link](#)



Romania's firm commitment to achieving the community objectives and targets regarding the green transition and the reduction of pollution levels is confirmed in the content of **the Integrated National Plan for Energy and Climate Change** ³⁹. According to this strategic document, the national long-term objectives aim to reduce GHG emissions by 85% by 2030, a 96% decrease by 2040, respectively a complete reduction of GHG emissions by 2050 (compared to the 1990 level). In the transport sector, *the sectoral target indicates an increase in GHG emissions limited to no more than 40% in 2030 compared to 1990, the limitation being possible primarily by supporting the development of road transport with hybrid and electric vehicles*. Regarding *passenger transport*, PNIESC proposes measures to increase the share of vehicles powered by alternative fuels and modernize urban public transport.

At the time of drafting the PR SV Oltenia 2021-2027, the main problems identified at the regional level, in relation to urban mobility, were represented by the low attractiveness of local public transport, due to physically worn and insufficient public transport means, mobility infrastructure not adapted to the needs and requirements of urban development, respectively the lack of connections between the center and the periphery, especially to new peri-urban areas.

In this context, Priority 4 of the program supports sustainable multimodal urban mobility, addressing the vulnerabilities, deficiencies and priority needs of local public transport systems (such as the age of transport means, low frequency of traffic and long travel times), but also issues regarding the interconnectivity of motorized and non-motorized transport means (multimodal terminals, park and ride parking lots, etc.), in order to support the transition to a zero-carbon economy. The categories of operations financed under SO 2.8 aim to increase the efficiency and attractiveness of the public transport system, by improving accessibility, travel times and transfer to public passenger transport (intermodal), while simultaneously encouraging non-motorized modes of transport, both at the level of the county capital municipalities and at the level of the other municipalities and cities in the South-West Oltenia region.

Current developments and challenges

Despite developments in recent years, the Romanian transport sector still presents numerous vulnerabilities both in terms of infrastructure development and in terms of alignment with EU environmental and climate objectives. According to **the 2024 Country Report** ⁴⁰, Romania has made *some progress* towards implementing and adopting the 2019 and 2020 country-specific recommendations in

³⁹ *Ibidem* 7, [link](#)

⁴⁰ *Ibidem* 1, [link](#)



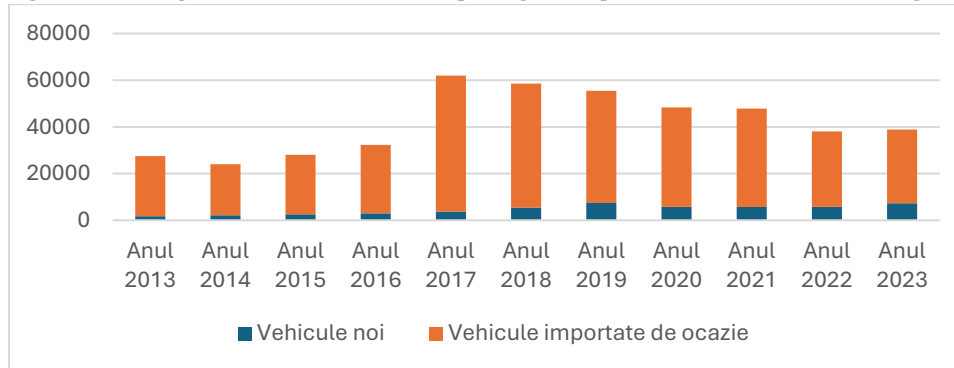
the field of transport, by launching specific investments, supported by Cohesion Policy and the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism .

The report highlights *Romania's progress towards the green transition* , but underlines the need to implement more actions to support the policies needed to achieve the 2030 effort-sharing objective ⁴¹, by reducing, *inter alia* , greenhouse gas emissions from road transport. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from road transport plays a key role in the architecture of national public policies, against the backdrop of unfavorable statistical data, which reveal significant increases in pollution levels. According to the 2024 Country Report, in 2022, greenhouse gas emissions from road transport increased by 8.3% compared to 2005 levels, and their share in emissions subject to the effort-sharing legislation increased to 23.4%, from 15.4%, as reported in 2005. The increase in greenhouse gas emissions is strongly correlated with the increase in the number of road vehicles for both freight and passenger transport. As for passenger transport, according to NIS data, the number of road vehicles at the national level has increased by approximately 65% in the last 10 years.

The statistical data corresponding to the South-West Oltenia Region highlight trends and dynamics almost similar to those recorded at national level. The number of vehicles registered for road passenger transport has increased by 41% in recent years, from 27 thousand in 2013 to over 38 thousand in 2023, the majority (81%) being old vehicles, imported from other countries, and with high carbon dioxide emissions.

⁴¹ Regulation (EU) 2023/857 (Effort Sharing Regulation) is the legislative framework setting the national greenhouse gas emission reduction target. It aims to align actions in the sectors concerned towards the EU economy-wide target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% compared to 1990 levels. This target applies to sectors outside the current EU emissions trading scheme, in particular buildings (heating and cooling), road transport, agriculture, waste and micro-agriculture and buildings (heating and cooling).

Figure 16 1New registrations of road vehicles for passenger transport in the South-West Oltenia Region (MU: no.)



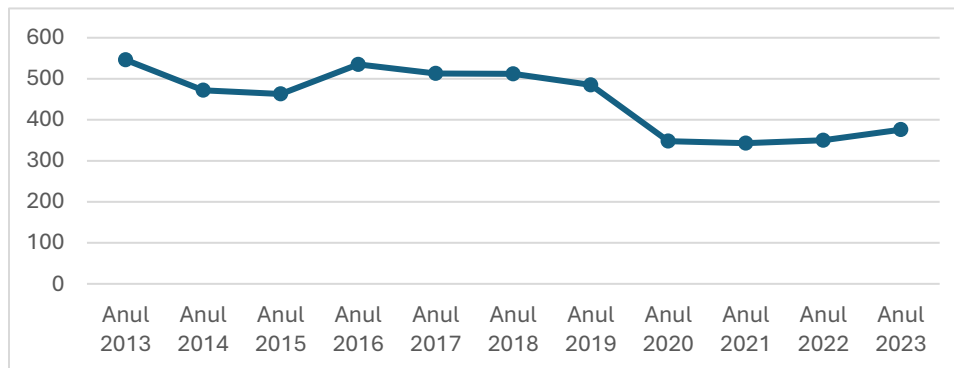
Source: NIS data processing

Regarding local public passenger transport, in 2023, in the South-West Oltenia region there were 31 trams, 369 buses and minibuses and 11 trolleybuses, a slight increase compared to the number recorded in 2013. Public transport in the region faces numerous difficulties, the most important being the physical and moral wear and tear of the means of transport and the outdated network of city streets, the length of which is insufficient to ensure fluent traffic given the increasing number of cars. The main means of public transport are buses and minibuses, the number of passengers using environmentally friendly public transport (trams and trolleybuses) representing only 9% of the total number of passengers transported.

In the South-West Oltenia region, the only county that has a tram is Dolj, while Gorj county is the only one where trolleybuses are used as a means of public transport. It follows that these two counties use ecological means of public transport, while Olt, Mehedinți and Vâlcea rely exclusively on public transport with buses and minibuses.

In the last 10 years, the attractiveness of local public transport in the region has faced a considerable decline. Statistical data highlight the fact that the number of passengers/km traveled by buses, minibuses, trams and trolleybuses has experienced a downward trend in the South-West Oltenia region, from 546 thousand passengers/km in 2013, to 376 thousand in 2023, data that confirm the population's decreasing interest in using public transport.

Figure 17 2No. of passengers/km travelled by buses, minibuses, trams and trolleybuses in the South-West Oltenia Region (MU: million passengers/km)



Source: NIS data processing

To increase the attractiveness of local public transport, further investments are needed to support the modernization and expansion of the public transport fleet. It is also necessary to continue investment efforts to improve the level of connectivity of urban and peri-urban public transport, while establishing intermodal connections to streamline the transport of people.

Needs and challenges

The updated context analysis confirms the persistence of the needs and challenges identified at the time of the development of the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 for SO 2.8. Despite the investments made in recent years to improve the quality of public transport, the need for continued interventions to support the use of environmentally friendly public transport and improve connectivity for motorized and non-motorized means of transport is noted.

The interventions in the field of sustainable urban mobility, provided for at the program level, are still consistent with the country-specific recommendations for 2024, according to which Romania must continue investing in the decarbonization and greening of road transport, in order to achieve the climate neutrality objectives for 2030.

Priority 5: Accessibility and connectivity at regional level

Specific objective: RSO3.2. Developing and improving sustainable, climate-resilient, smart and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improving access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility (ERDF)



At the national level, the **General Transport Master Plan of Romania**⁴² aims to improve population mobility and the business environment along the TEN-T network, national connectivity corridors, as well as regional connectivity corridors, by reducing traffic delays, reducing the risk of road accidents and developing economically sustainable projects with an impact on regional development. **The Investment Program for the Development of Transport Infrastructure in Romania for the period 2021-2030**⁴³ continues to support the objectives related to the recovery of the basic infrastructure deficit at the national level for all transport areas, but especially in the *road transport sector*. The program emphasizes the need to focus Romania's political, institutional and financial efforts on a clear set of priorities, in line with national and European interests, which will lead, by 2030, to the creation of the national transport network necessary to ensure the development of the national economy, while achieving the targets set under the European Green Deal and the "Ready for 55" package.

A major priority of current public policies at European level, road safety is essential for any transport system. The EU Road Safety Policy Framework 2021-2030 – Next steps towards “Vision Zero” – states that the EU’s long-term objective is to move as close as possible to zero road deaths by 2050 (“Vision Zero”). In order to create a road safety policy framework in line with European guidelines, Romania adopts the “safe system” vision⁴⁴ and aims to *reduce by 50%, by 2030, compared to 2019, the number of people killed and by 50% the number of people seriously injured in road accidents*.

At the time of the elaboration of the PR SV Oltenia 2021-2027, the main problems identified in the region, regarding accessibility and connectivity, were represented by the regional road infrastructure insufficiently connected to the TEN-T network, low accessibility and connectivity, limited mobility and reduced traffic safety. In response to the identified problems and challenges, the program supports, through the interventions provided for in Priority 5, the construction, rehabilitation or modernization of secondary road connections to the TEN-T road network and nodes and solutions to increase traffic safety (e.g. roundabouts, purchase of equipment and machinery necessary to increase and maintain the level of traffic safety)

Current developments and challenges

The development and modernization of road transport infrastructure is a current need at national level, despite the investments made in recent years, through public policies dedicated to this sector. In 2023, the length of public roads in Romania was 86,388 km, of which 17,677 km were national roads (20.46%),

⁴²Ministry of Transport, General Transport Master Plan of Romania, 2016, [link](#)

⁴³Ministry of Transport, Investment Program for the development of transport infrastructure in Romania for the period 2021-2030, 2021, [link](#)

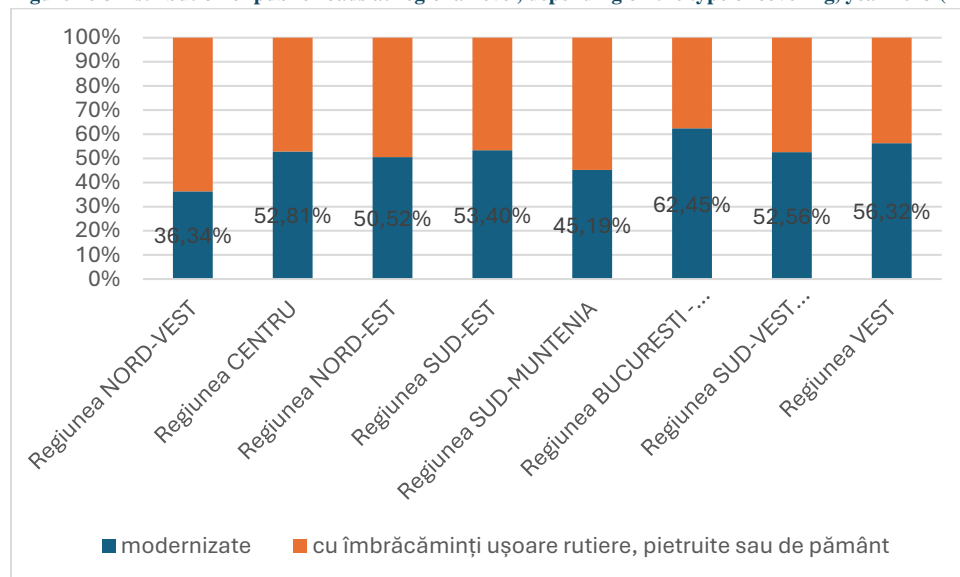
⁴⁴According to the "safe system" approach, deaths and serious injuries from road accidents are not an inevitable price of mobility. Accidents will always happen, but deaths and serious injuries are largely preventable.



35,046 km (40.56%) were county roads and 33,665 (38.96%) were municipal roads. Of the total number of public roads existing at national level, only half are modernized. However, significant progress is noted compared to the situation in 2013, when only 34% of the length of national public roads had benefited from modernization works.

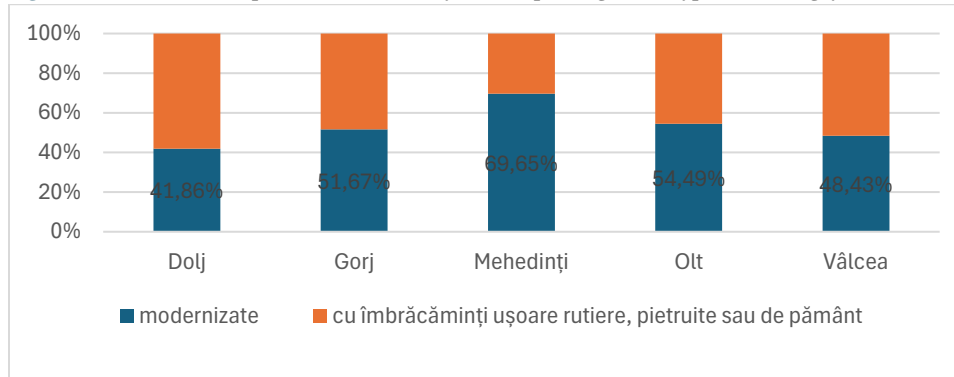
The regional profile analysis shows that accessibility and connectivity in the South-West Oltenia Region is achieved mainly through the county and communal road network, which represents 80.3% of the region's road network. Statistical data indicate the poor development of the road network at regional level, but also its poor technical condition. It is thus found that only 52.56% of the region's public roads are modernized, meaning 5,995 km, an increase of 2,093 km, compared to the situation 10 years ago. The South-West Oltenia Region ranks 5th at national level in terms of the share of modernized public roads, after the Bucharest - Ilfov (62.45%), West (56.32%), South-East (53.4%) and Center (52.81%) regions. The North-West Region presents the lowest degree of modernization, only 36.34%.

Figure 18 3Distribution of public roads at regional level, depending on the type of covering, year 2023 (MU: %)



Source: NIS data processing

Regarding county roads in the Southwest Oltenia region, the percentage of modernized roads is 48.75% (the third lowest nationally), while communal roads are modernized at a rate of 36.95% (the highest degree of modernization in the country).

Figure 19 4Distribution of public roads at county level, depending on the type of covering, year 2023 (MU: %)

Source: NIS processed data

The analysis of statistical data at the level of the counties that make up the Southwest Oltenia region shows that Dolj and Vâlcea counties still present significant gaps in terms of the level of modernization of public roads, more than half of which are roads with light road surfaces, paved or dirt.

According to **the National Road Safety Strategy for the period 2022-2030** ⁴⁵, the infrastructure deficit is reflected in reduced mobility, insufficient connectivity in certain regions, poor interconnection of the main economic and urban centers, high transit traffic in many localities that do not benefit from bypass options, long travel times and traffic jams. The increase in traffic volume against the background of a slow development dynamics of the road infrastructure negatively influences the evolution of the number of road accidents.

Romania ranks first in the EU in terms of mortality due to road accidents, both in number and per million inhabitants. Although their number has decreased compared to the pre-pandemic period, the years 2021-2023 bring a new constant increase in their number. Thus, in 2023, almost 29,000 (+8% compared to 2021) road accidents with victims were recorded, or over 1500 such accidents per million inhabitants. Compared to this indicator, the South-West Oltenia region is slightly above the national average, with a number of 1571 accidents with victims per million inhabitants, but below regions such as Bucharest-Ilfov or South-East. In contrast, compared to the number of deaths from accidents, the SV Oltenia region is in first place in 2023, with 106 deaths per million inhabitants, which intensifies the need to modernize roads, as well as preventive measures.

⁴⁵Ministry of Transport, National Road Safety Strategy for the period 2022-2030, 2022, [link](#)



Tabel no. 8. 2Mortality due to road accidents

Year 2023	Accidents with casualties (per million inhabitants)	Deaths (per million inhabitants)
TOTAL	1519	81
NORTH-WEST Region	1364	74
CENTER Region	1499	67
NORTH-EAST Region	1438	85
SOUTH-EAST REGION	1636	102
SOUTH-MUNTENA region	1452	97
BUCHAREST - ILFOV region	1848	40
WEST region	1378	76
SOUTH-WEST OLTEA region	1571	106
Dolj	1373	100
Gorj	1556	64
Mehedinti	2234	134
Olt	1237	106
Valcea	1855	138

Source: NIS data processing

Statistical data at the county level show that the highest number of road accidents with victims in the region is recorded in the counties of Mehedinți (2234 per million inhabitants) and Vâlcea (1855 per million inhabitants).

Needs and challenges

The context analysis regarding accessibility and connectivity in the South-West Oltenia region highlights the existence of the same needs identified at the time of the program development. Most county roads are still degraded and with outdated technical solutions, making access to rural areas and small towns difficult. Moreover, insufficient modernization works for these categories of public roads reduce driving speed, lead to traffic jams and contribute to the increase in the number of road accidents with victims. According to available statistical data, Romania still records the worst results in terms of road safety in the EU.

In order to adopt the "safe system", which involves halving the number of people killed and seriously injured in road accidents, it is more than necessary to continue investment efforts in road transport infrastructure. In response to these challenges, the programme must continue investing in the development and modernization of the TEN-T network and secondary road links, while adopting effective solutions to increase traffic safety.





Priority P6. Modern and inclusive education

Specific objective: RSO4.2. Improving access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning by developing accessible infrastructure, including by promoting resilience for distance and online education and training (ERDF)

Priority 6 of the Oltenia Regional Public Service Programme aims to ensure the minimum material base (rehabilitated/modernized buildings, sanitary conditions necessary for operation, provision of equipment, teaching materials, etc.) for the implementation of the educational act in order to meet the needs of discouraging absenteeism, reducing the phenomenon of early school abandonment/leaving, increasing the graduation rate and transition to higher levels of education.

The operations financed under OS 4.2 of P6 aim at:

- i. Investments in the development of educational infrastructure for preschool level: construction/ rehabilitation/ modernization/ expansion/ equipping of preschool educational infrastructure (kindergartens).
- ii. Investments in the development of educational infrastructure for primary and secondary education: construction/rehabilitation/modernization/expansion/equipment of educational infrastructure for primary and secondary education (middle schools, TVET high schools, high schools and theoretical colleges).
- iii. Investments in the development of educational infrastructure for tertiary education: construction/rehabilitation/modernization/expansion/equipment of educational infrastructure for tertiary education.

Current developments and challenges

The analysis carried out at the time of the program development highlighted the fact that in the South-West Oltenia region, the number of educational units was decreasing (in 2020 compared to 2011), which determined the relocation of students. At the same time, the transformation of the preparatory group into grade 0 and its inclusion in the primary education cycle, determined the overstrain of some categories of educational infrastructure, located especially in the urban environment.

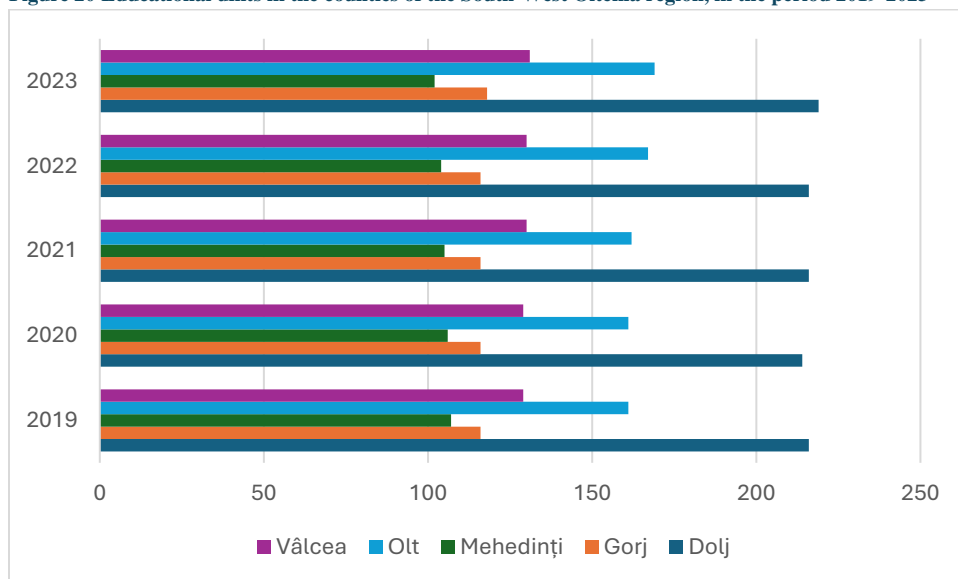
The needs identified at the program level in the field of education were represented by the need to ensure the minimum material base, in order to **discourage absenteeism and reduce the phenomenon of early school abandonment/leaving, to increase the graduation rate and the transition to higher levels of education**.

The following is an updated analysis of the main indicators in the field, highlighting their evolution since the program was developed, using the most recent data available, to identify any changes that have

occurred at regional level and/or whether certain needs have been improved or, on the contrary, accentuated.

Statistical data provided by the NIS show that starting with 2021, there has been a constant increase in **the number of educational units** in the South-West Oltenia region, reaching 739 in 2023, compared to 726 (in 2020). The only county in the region where an opposite trend of decreasing the number of educational units was recorded was Gorj county (where in 2023 there were 4 fewer educational units operating than in 2020).

Figure 20 Educational units in the counties of the South-West Oltenia region, in the period 2019-2023

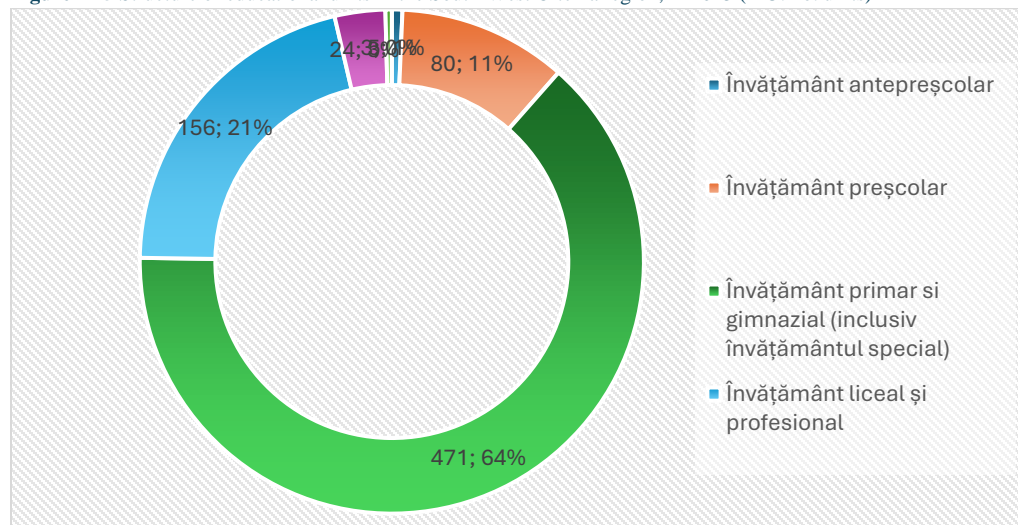


Source: NIS

Of the 739 educational units in the South-West Oltenia region, 88.09% were in pre-university education, 10.83% in preschool education, 0.82% in pre-preschool education and 0.41% in higher education.

In the 2022/2023 school year, preschool education in the Southwest Oltenia region was carried out in 80 educational units (kindergartens), representing the smallest number of kindergartens among the 8 regions in the country. In the same year, 651 educational units operated in pre-university education in the region (88.09% of the total units at the regional level). Compared to 2020, the number of units in pre-university education increased by only 3 units. Higher education is carried out in 3 units at the regional level (2 in Dolj and 1 in Gorj). The SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 addresses the need to continue investing in the educational spaces of universities, in conjunction with the need to adapt the spaces to a modern and attractive learning environment.

Figure 21 5 Structure of educational units in the South-West Oltenia region, in 2023 (MU: no. units)



Source: NIS

In the same school year, **the number of school laboratories** in the Southwest Oltenia region was 2,318, of which 47.84% in Dolj County, 16.70% in Gorj County, 14.19% in Vâlcea, 11.69% in Olt and 9.58% in Mehedinți County. Compared to 2020, at the regional level, the number of laboratories decreased by 2.19% (52). The largest decrease was recorded in Gorj County (-4.68%, 19), followed by Mehedinți Counties (-3.06%, 7), Olt (-2.17%, 6) and Dolj (-1.77%, 20). In Vâlcea County, the same number of school laboratories was recorded as in 2020 (respectively 329 laboratories). The downward trend in the number of school laboratories in the period 2020-2023 was also manifested at the national level, the only regions that recorded an increase in the number of school laboratories being the Bucharest-Ilfov and North-West regions. Interviews conducted in the context of the interim evaluation of the PR SV Oltenia, with key relevant actors in the field of education, at the regional level, show that the existence of school laboratories is extremely important and they should be expanded especially in rural areas, where the need for their appropriate endowment is also felt.

Tabel no. 9 3 School laboratories by development regions and counties, in the period 2020-2023 (MU: number)

Development regions	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Romania	26845	26767	26585	26300	26101
North-West Region	4171	4320	4335	4355	4376
Central Region	2906	2831	2782	2785	2695
North-East Region	4632	4486	4422	4290	4262
South-East Region	2949	2909	2897	2852	2772
South-Muntenia Region	2691	2658	2726	2705	2489

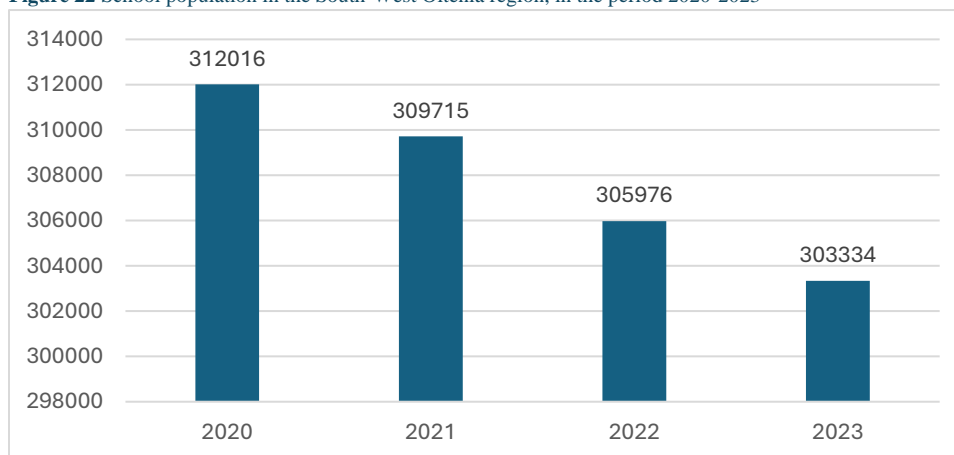


Development regions	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Bucharest-Ilfov Region	4051	4186	4145	4153	4349
South-West Oltenia Region	2387	2370	2352	2333	2318
Dolj	1132	1129	1132	1113	1109
Gorj	402	406	401	403	387
MEHEDINȚI	231	229	221	219	222
Olt	297	277	274	267	271
dale	325	329	324	331	329
West Region	3058	3007	2926	2827	2840

Source: NIS

Regarding **the school population in the SV Oltenia region**, it registered a decrease of 2.78% during the period 2020-2023, more pronounced compared to the decrease recorded at the national level (of 0.80%). The largest decrease in the school population at the regional level was recorded among the population in university education (-3.92%). On the other hand, the population in pre-school and preschool education increased during the analyzed period, at the regional level, a trend also recorded at the national level.

Figure 22 School population in the South-West Oltenia region, in the period 2020-2023



Source: NIS

The total number of graduates also registered a decrease in the period 2019-2022, of 1.93% at the national level, the most pronounced decrease at the level of the 8 regions, being recorded in the South-West Oltenia Region (-5.41%). At the level of the South-West Oltenia region, the largest decrease in the number of graduates was recorded in Vâlcea County (-10.75%), and the smallest, in Mehedinți County (-3.11%).



Tabel no. 104 Graduates by development regions and counties, in the period 2019-2022

Development regions	2019	2020	2021	2022
Romania	514930	476557	503495	504991
North-West Region	72051	66040	69225	70240
Central Region	57370	53014	55699	56520
North-East Region	86091	79534	84729	84168
South-East Region	58364	53900	56962	57377
South-Muntenia Region	59770	54115	57976	57679
Bucharest-Ilfov Region	84990	81900	84855	86598
South-West Oltenia Region	49928	45201	48131	47227
Dolj	18789	17687	18230	18078
Gorj	8452	7810	8577	8033
MEHEDINȚI	6112	5334	5713	5922
Olt	8926	7717	8514	8367
dale	7649	6653	7097	6827
West Region	46366	42853	45918	45182

Source: NIS

The teaching staff in the Southwest Oltenia region increased slightly in 2023, compared to 2020 (0.44% increase), especially due to the increase in the number of teaching staff in pre-school and preschool education (during the same period, there was a decrease in staff in pre-university and university education).

Tabel no. 115 Teaching staff, by development region, in the period 2020-2023

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Romania	235,563	237,854	240,691	245,039
North-West Region	34,824	35,351	35,839	36,720
Central Region	30,375	30,994	31,532	31,928
North-East Region	40,229	40,287	40,707	41,238
South-East Region	26,852	27,019	27,116	27,546
South-Muntenia Region	29,041	29,162	29,249	29,204
Bucharest-Ilfov Region	29,918	30,628	31,557	32,793
South-West Oltenia Region	22,581	22,544	22,525	22,681
West Region	21,743	21,869	22,166	22,929

Source: NIS

One of the most recent non-legislative initiatives at European level in the field of education is **the Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (2021-2030)** ⁴⁶,

⁴⁶Council of the European Union, Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training with a view to achieving and further developing the European Education Area (2021-2030), 2021, [link](#)



which aims to cooperate at EU level to build resilient and future-oriented education systems. In this document, a series of targets were set to be achieved at European level by 2030:

- The proportion of 15-year-olds with low skills in reading, mathematics and science should be below 15%;
- The proportion of eighth grade students with low computer skills should be below 15%;
- At least 96% of children aged 3 and above the age for compulsory primary school enrolment should participate in early childhood education and care;
- The proportion of people leaving education and training early should be below 9%;
- The proportion of people aged 25 to 34 who have completed tertiary education should be at least 45%.

The participation rate in early childhood education of children aged between 3 and the official age of compulsory education was, at the national level, 78.2% in 2020 (without major differences by gender), decreasing compared to the period 2014-2019, and falling short of the target for 2030 of 96%.

6 Tabel no. 12 Early childhood education participation rate of children aged 3 to the official compulsory school age (MU: %)

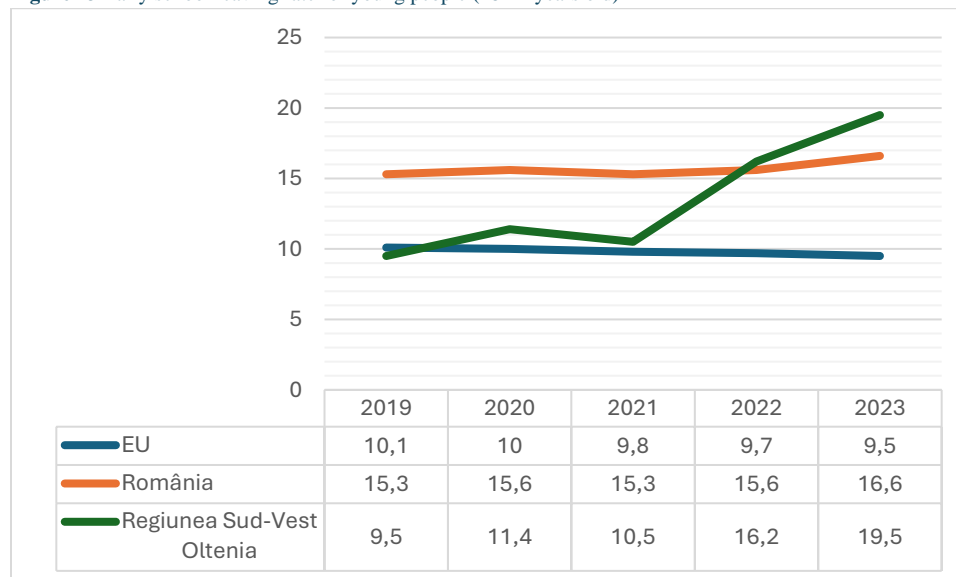
Gender	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total	84.2	84.6	84.5	84	81.9	78.6	78.2
Male	83.7	84.3	84.2	83.6	81.6	78.4	78.1
Female	84.8	84.9	84.8	84.3	82.2	78.8	78.3

Source: NIS

Regarding the proportion of young people (18-24 years old) leaving education and training systems early, this was, in the South-West Oltenia region, 19.5% in 2023, above the average recorded at national level (16.6%) and increasing by 3.3 pp compared to 2022 and 10 pp compared to 2019. These values are worrying, taking into account the target pursued at European level for 2030, of below 9% and the fact that this represented the highest rate recorded at the level of the Member States (the EU average being 9.5%).



Figure 23 Early school leaving rate for young people (18-24 years old)

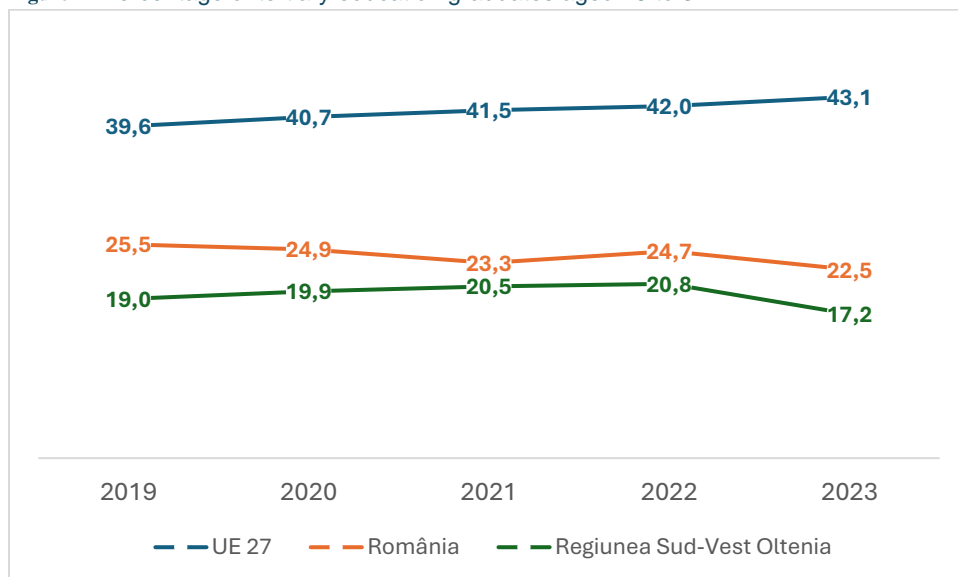


Source: Eurostat

The Romania 2024 Country Report shows that tertiary education completion rates remain low at national level. The percentage of tertiary education graduates aged 25-34 was 22.5% in 2023 and is one of the lowest in the EU (43.1%), due to high early school leaving, socio-economic factors, low bacalaureate exam pass rates and high tertiary education dropout rates.

The analysis of data provided by Eurostat shows that the rate of tertiary education graduates aged between 25 and 34 years, in the South-West Oltenia region is even lower compared to the national level, being 17.3% in 2023, confirming the needs identified at the program level. Moreover , analyzing the evolution of this indicator, it is found that it experienced a decrease in 2023, compared to the period 2019-2022. The downward trend is aligned with the trend at the national level, but not with that at the European level, where a constant increase in the percentage of tertiary education graduates aged between 25 and 34 years is observed during the analyzed period.

Figure 24 Percentage of tertiary education graduates aged 25 to 34



Surah: Eurostat

Needs and challenges

According to the updated context analysis, based on the analysis of the evolution of the main indicators in the field, the needs identified at the time of the program's development are still relevant, despite the steps taken in recent years, including the implementation of interventions in the field of education, supported by European funds. These needs are all the more important as the targets pursued at European level for 2030, in the field of education, are very ambitious, and the South-West Oltenia region is not making progress in achieving these targets.

The existing educational needs in the South-West Oltenia region are also identified in the Regional Development Plan, which highlights the educational discrepancies between rural and urban areas and the deficiencies faced by schools in rural areas in particular: the poor condition of buildings, inadequate educational infrastructure and equipment, the lack of teachers in many rural areas, difficulties in participating in secondary education, predominantly located in urban areas. Such needs were also confirmed by the key actors interviewed in the context of this assessment, who confirmed that especially in rural areas, there are many needs related to the equipment of schools and laboratories.

Regarding tertiary education infrastructure, the focus group organized in the context of the interim evaluation shows that potential beneficiaries face the challenge of the reduced budget allocation for



tertiary education, which was also diminished due to the takeover of phased projects that were not completed in the previous financial year.

Considering the evolution of indicators in the field and the aspects pursued at European level, it is found that the interventions financed under Priority 6 of the Regional Program South-West Oltenia remain relevant to cover regional needs. The adequate learning environment and the existence of quality educational infrastructures and a minimum material base are essential for the safety of students and their comfort and for ensuring conditions that favor the learning process and co-interest the student, in order to discourage absenteeism and reduce the phenomenon of early school leaving/abandonment and increase the graduation rate and the transition to higher levels of education. Through Priority 6, the program resources are directed towards addressing educational needs, with the capacity and interest of potential beneficiaries to absorb the available funds.

Priority P7. Sustainable territorial development

The two specific objectives under Priority 7 support integrated development in urban and rural areas in the South-West Oltenia region, through investments in the development of culture, natural heritage and sustainable tourism. The actions provided for under the two specific objectives, which will target the construction/expansion or renovation of cultural or tourist infrastructure, respond to the needs identified at the time of the elaboration of the PR SV Oltenia 2021-2027.

Tourism and culture are seen as an engine of economic development, having the potential to create jobs and stimulate economic growth at the local level, including for vulnerable groups, aiming at the sustainable development of territories with high tourism potential, ensuring the protection of natural and cultural resources, protecting and valorizing cultural heritage, and establishing investments in tourism and cultural infrastructure.

Current developments and challenges

At the time of the elaboration of the PR SV Oltenia 2021-2027, the main problems identified at the regional level, in relation to SO 5.1 and SO 5.2, were represented by complex challenges related to connectivity, urban mobility, traffic congestion, air and environmental quality, degraded public spaces, insufficient valorization of cultural heritage. According to the socio-economic analysis presented below, these needs still seem relevant, although some steps have been taken in recent years, including by implementing interventions in the field of tourism and culture supported by European funds.

The situation of tourism and culture in the region is further presented by analyzing some statistical indicators that show the evolution or progress made since the preparation of the Regional Program South-West Oltenia. For this reason, where data were available, the analysis interval takes into account the





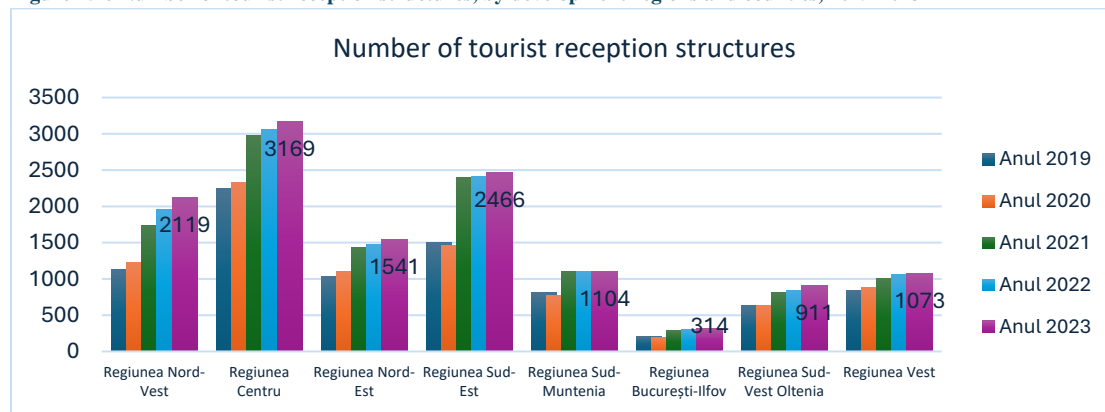
period 2019 (year referred to in the section identifying the needs within the program) - 2023/2024 (the last year for which data is available). The results of the analysis are intended to confirm whether the needs initially identified in the field of integrated development and valorization of cultural and tourist heritage are still relevant or if, on the contrary, recent years have brought with them other needs that have proven more urgent as a result of external factors and crises in recent years (the crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, the energy crisis, etc.).

The South-West Oltenia Development Region has valuable natural and tourist potential, both in the urban and rural areas, especially in the counties of Vâlcea, Gorj and Mehedinți.

At the end of 2023, the region had a **tourist reception structure** consisting of 991 units, 44% more than in 2019 and in continuous growth throughout the 2019-2023 analysis period. The counties with the highest number of tourist reception structures are Vâlcea (40% increase compared to 2019), Gorj (45% increase compared to 2019) and Mehedinți (104% increase compared to 2019).

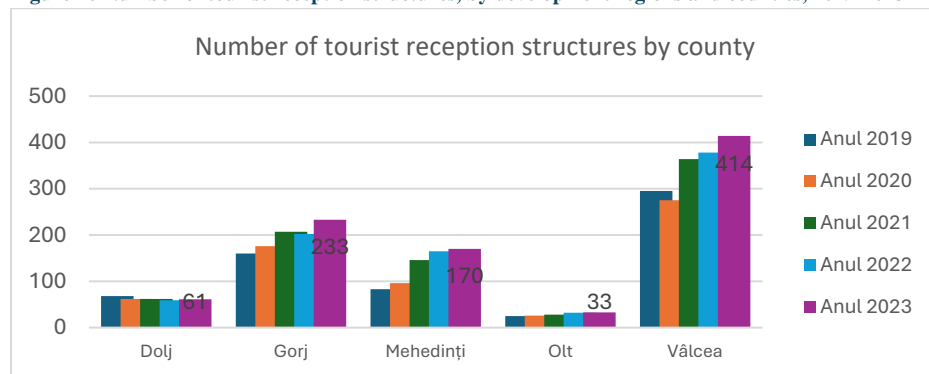
Tourist reception structures with accommodation functions, at the end of 2023 in the South-West Oltenia region, consisted of 129 hotels, 287 agro-tourism guesthouses, 56 tourist villas, 17 tourist chalets and 2 holiday villages, their number being higher than in 2019. The tourist reception structures in the category of motels (18), tourist guesthouses (142), hostels (25), campsites (4) and tourist stops (5) were decreasing compared to the situation in 2019, while the number of bungalows remained constant throughout the analyzed period (4 bungalows in the period 2019-2023).

Figure 25 6 Number of tourist reception structures, by development regions and counties, 2019-2023



Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

Figure 26 Number of tourist reception structures, by development regions and counties, 2019-2023



Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

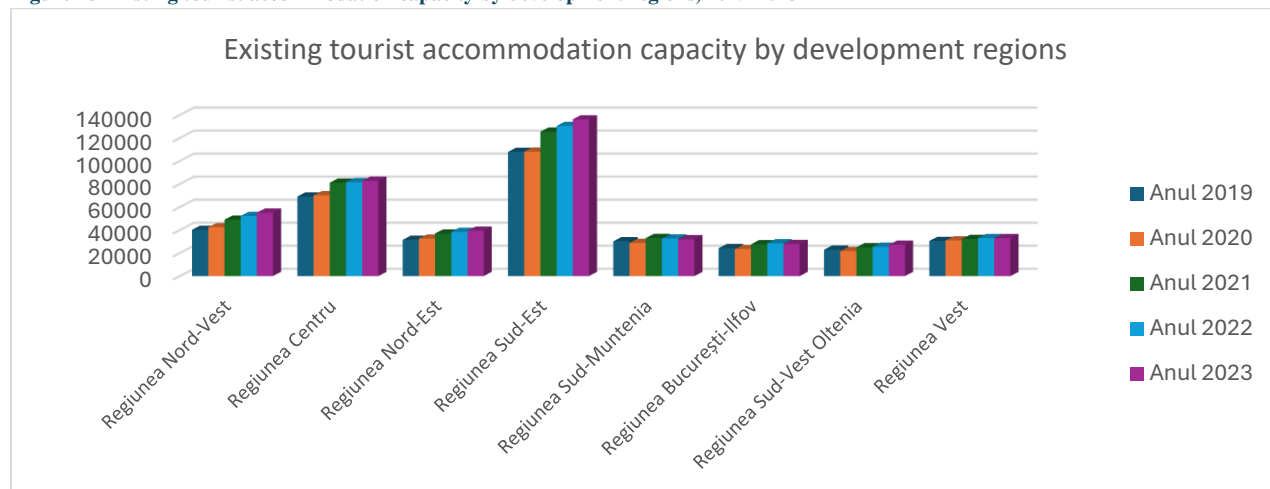
Figure 27 7 Tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation functions, by type of structure, in the South-West Oltenia region, 2019-2023



Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

tourist accommodation capacity in 2023 in the South-West Oltenia region reached 27,193 accommodation places, an increase of 18% compared to 2019. The evolution of accommodation places in the region has been on an upward trend in the last 5 years (2019-2023), with a slight decrease of 5% in their number in 2020, explained by the pandemic crisis and its socio-economic implications.

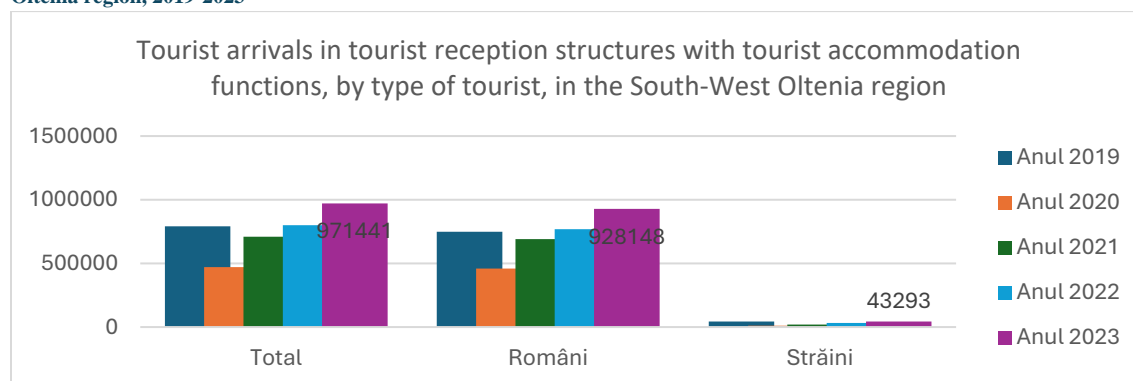
Figure 28 Existing tourist accommodation capacity by development regions, 2019-2023



Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

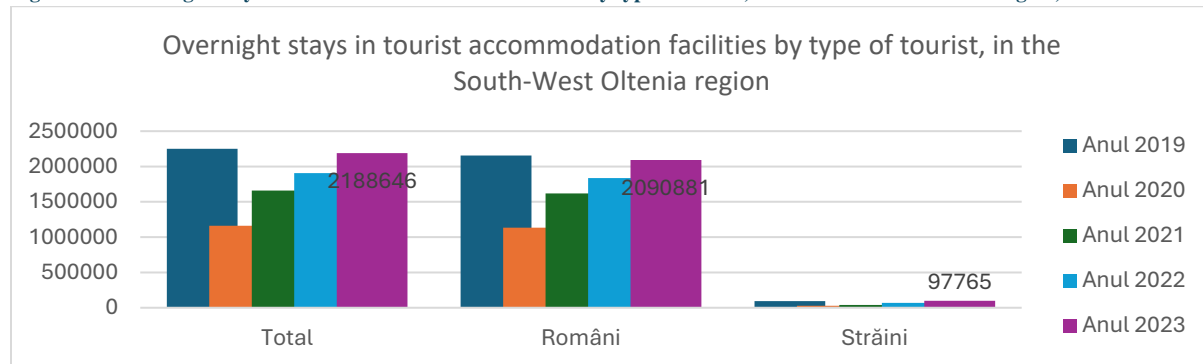
The analysis of the evolution of **tourist circulation** shows an almost perfect correspondence between the number of arrivals and the number of overnight stays, which makes the indicator - the average duration of stay - remain at an almost static value for the entire reference period, with values between 2 and 3 days. However, the average duration of stay decreased in 2023 by approximately 20% compared to 2019, a fact explained by an increase in the number of tourist arrivals in tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation functions by 22% in the analyzed interval and a decrease in the number of overnight stays in tourist reception structures by 2%.

Figure 298 Tourist arrivals in tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation functions, by type of tourist, in the South-West Oltenia region, 2019-2023



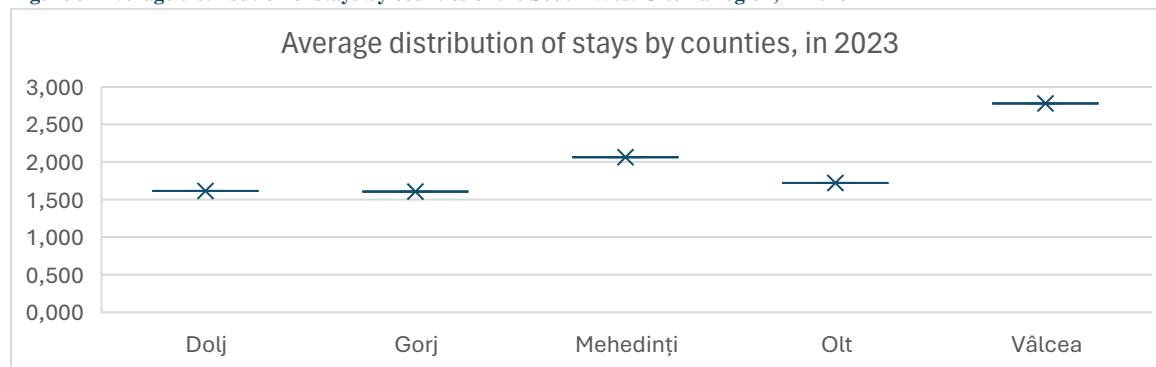
Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

Figure 30 9 Overnight stays in tourist accommodation facilities by type of tourist, in the South-West Oltenia region, 2019-2023



Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

Figure 31 Average distribution of stays by counties of the South-West Oltenia region, in 2023

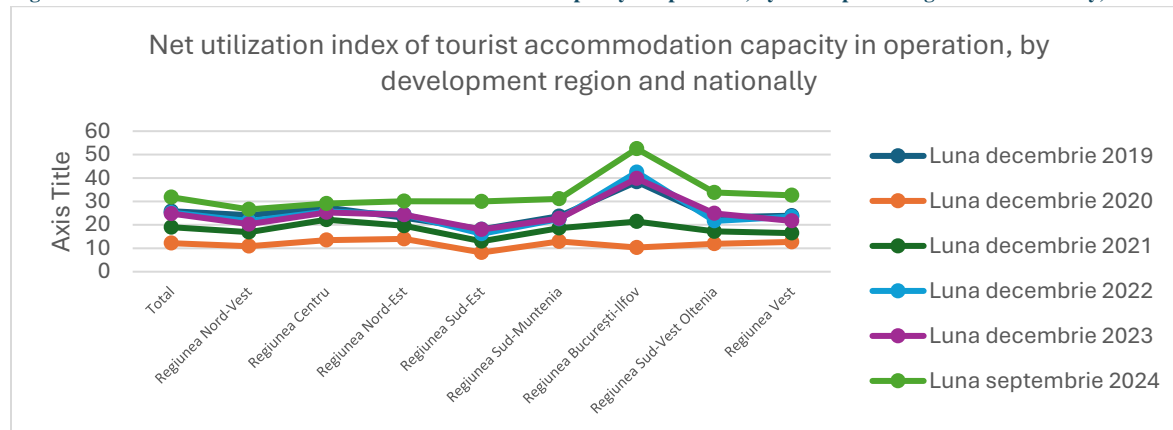


Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

At the national level, in the analyzed time interval, 2019-2024, the net utilization indices of the operating capacity registered increases by 6 percentage points, all development regions following the same upward trend, with the Bucharest-Ilfov region registering the most significant increase (14.1%) and the Center region with the lowest increase (1.7%). Regarding the values of the net utilization index of the operating capacity in the Southwest Oltenia region, it registered an increase by 10.6 percentage points in the period 2019-2024. In September 2024, the value of the net utilization index of the operating tourist accommodation capacity reached the highest value in the analyzed interval (33.8%), being continuously increasing after the decrease in 2020.

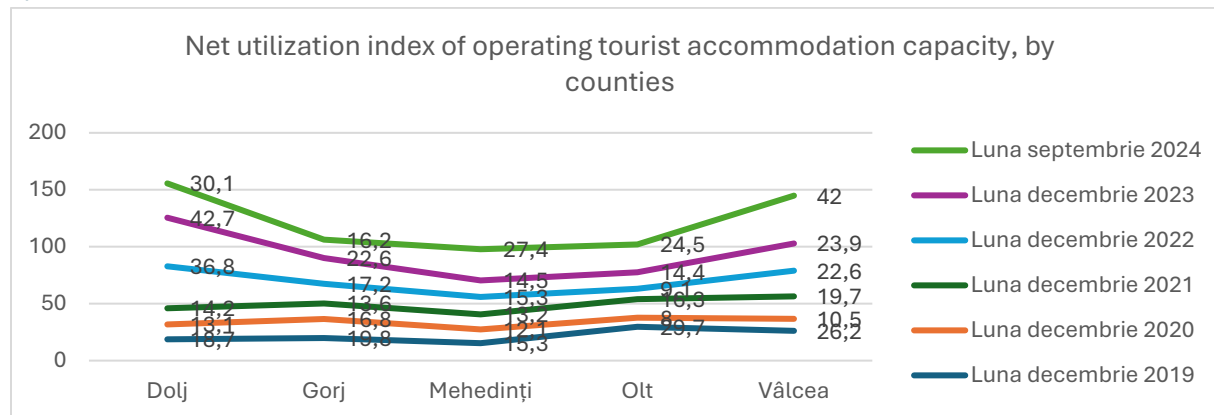
A breakdown of the net capacity utilization index at the level of the counties of the Southwest Oltenia region, in September 2024, places the counties of Vâlcea (42%) and Dolj (30.1%) in the first positions. With the exception of the counties of Gorj and Olt, for which decreases in the value of the net capacity utilization index were recorded by 3.6% and 5.2% respectively, all other counties recorded increases in the values for this index during the period 2019-2024.

Figure 3210 Net utilization index of tourist accommodation capacity in operation, by development region and nationally, 2019-2024



Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

Figure 3311 Net utilization index of tourist accommodation capacity in operation, by counties of the South-West Oltenia region, 2019-2024

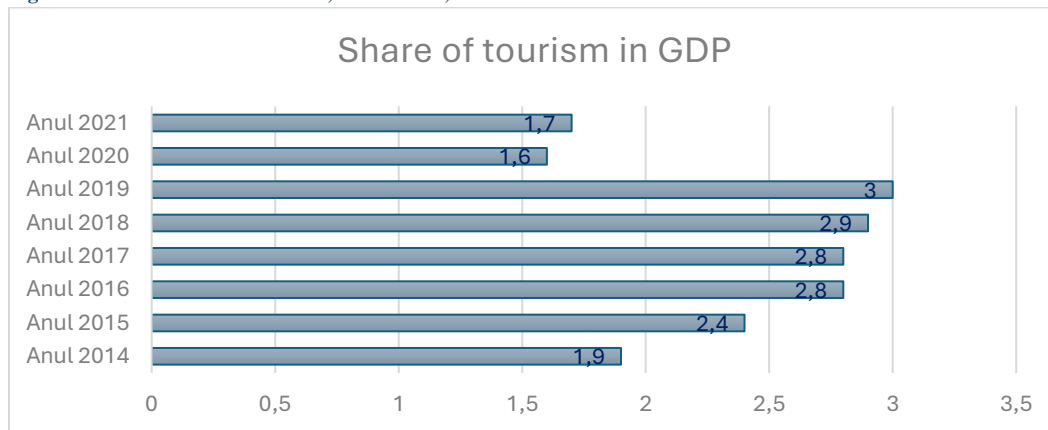


Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

Another relevant indicator at the national level that shows the stage of development of the tourism sector is represented by **the share of tourism in GDP**, and the analysis of the situation in recent years (2019-2021⁴⁷) shows a decrease of almost half of this percentage in 2020 compared to previous years, a fact also explained by the effects that the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic have had on tourism in general. Starting from 2021, the share of tourism in GDP is experiencing a gradual increase, which will be visible in the following years.

⁴⁷Latest available data.

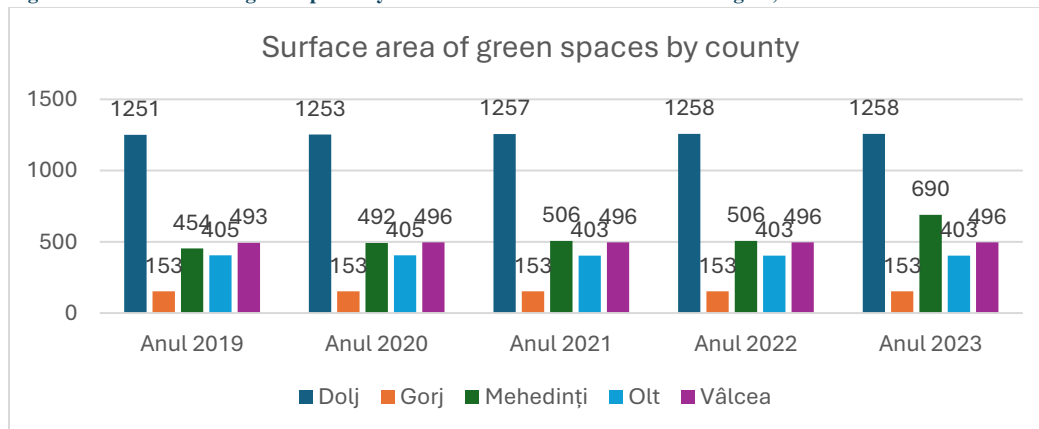
Figure 34 Share of tourism in GDP, in Romania, 2014-2021



Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

Regarding **the area of green spaces by counties** of the Southwest Oltenia region, a differentiated evolution of this indicator is observed in the analysis interval 2019-2023. While Mehedinți county records a considerable increase in this area (by 52%), Gorj county experiences a stagnation of the indicator value throughout the analyzed interval, and Olt county records an 8% reduction in the area of green spaces. Dolj county is the county with the largest area of green spaces, which represents 45% of the entire area of green spaces in the entire Southwest Oltenia development region.

Figure 35 Surface area of green spaces by counties of the South-West Oltenia region, 2019-2023



Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

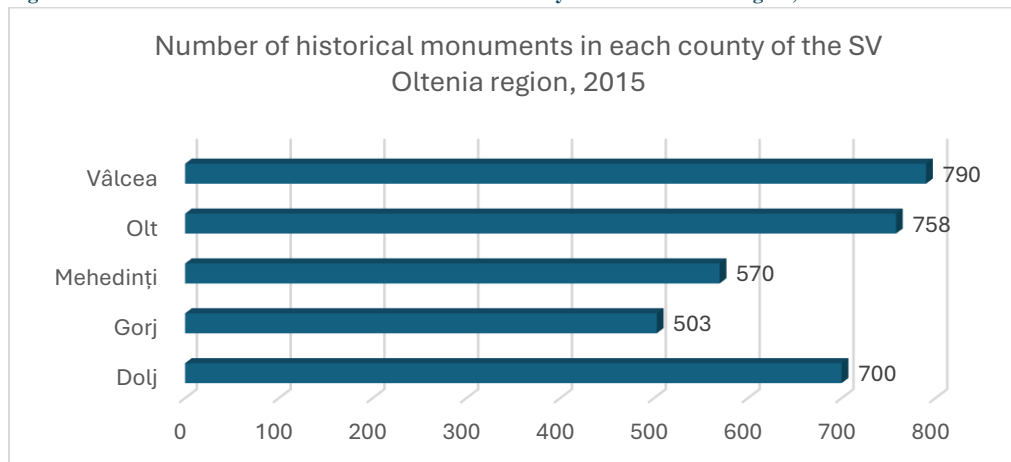
The South-West Oltenia region has a valuable cultural heritage, with 3,322 historical monuments (INP). Out of a total of 391 monuments classified as category A, approximately 239 are located in rural areas. The condition of most monuments continues to be unsatisfactory, and the quality of cultural heritage sites, cultural offer and related activities is poor.



From the perspective of analyzing the socio-economic situation in the heritage and culture sector, indicators related to the number of historical monuments, the number of libraries, the number of museums, as well as expenditures from the state budget for culture, recreation and religion are relevant.

From the information available on the website of the National Heritage Institute, **the number of historical monuments** in each county of the South-West Oltenia region has remained unchanged since 2015. According to this data, most historical monuments are found in Vâlcea, Olt and Dolj counties, and the lowest number in the region is found in Gorj county.

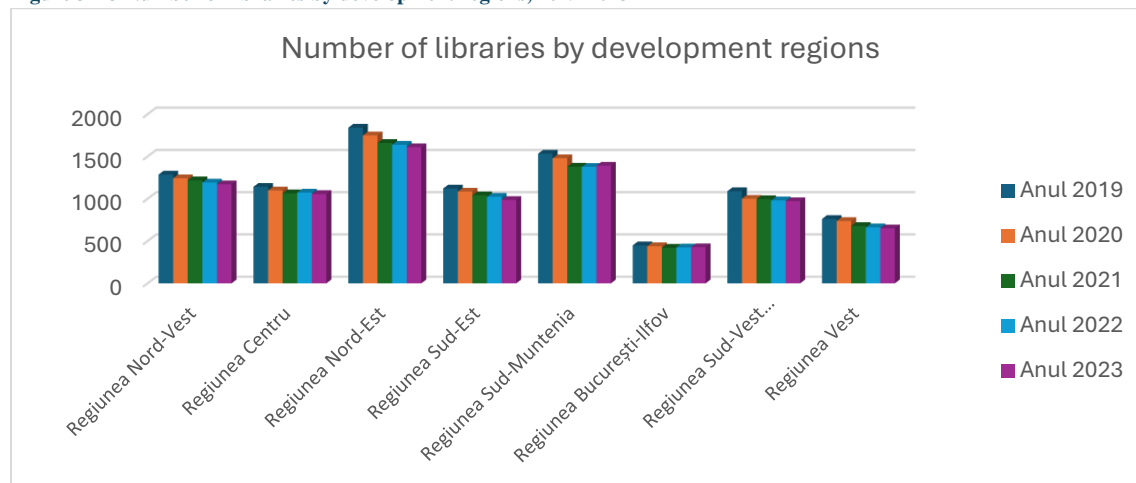
Figure 36. 12Number of historical monuments in each county of the SV Oltenia region, 2015



Source: processed data from the National Heritage Institute, 2024

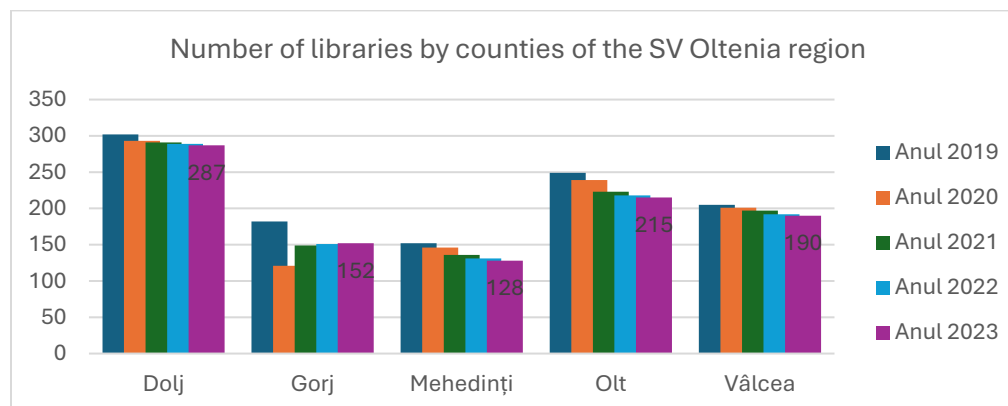
During the analyzed period, 2019-2023, **the number of libraries** decreased in all development regions, with the Southwest Oltenia region recording an 11% decrease in the number of libraries and the highest decrease in absolute values. The same downward trend was maintained in the five counties of the Southwest Oltenia region, with Gorj and Mehedinți counties recording the most significant reductions in the number of libraries (16% reduction in the indicator value in both counties).

Figure 3713 Number of libraries by development regions, 2019-2023



Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

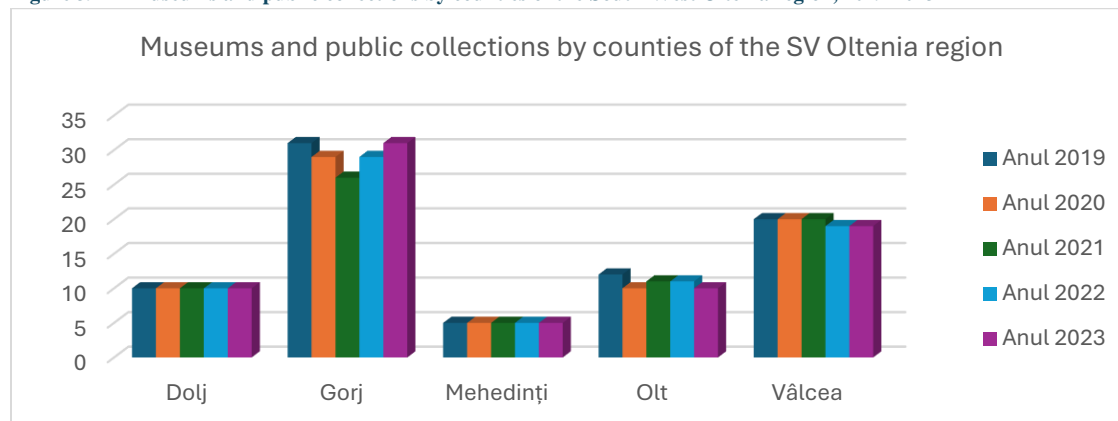
Figure 38 Number of libraries by counties of the South-West Oltenia development region, 2019-2023



Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

Regarding the number of museums and collections, at the national level, the Centru and Sud-Muntenia regions are the regions with the highest number of museums in 2023. However, in the analyzed period, 2019-2023, the Bucharest-Ilfov and Nord-Vest regions are the only ones in which the value of this indicator increased, by 12% and 8% respectively. Within the Southwest Oltenia development region, the number of museums and collections remained unchanged throughout the analysis interval for Dolj and Mehedinți counties and experienced a slight reduction in Vâlcea county, although this county records the second highest value for this indicator. Gorj county records 41% of the total number of museums and collections in the Southwest Oltenia region and although the value of this indicator for 2023 is the same as in 2019, there were some fluctuations in the period 2020-2022.

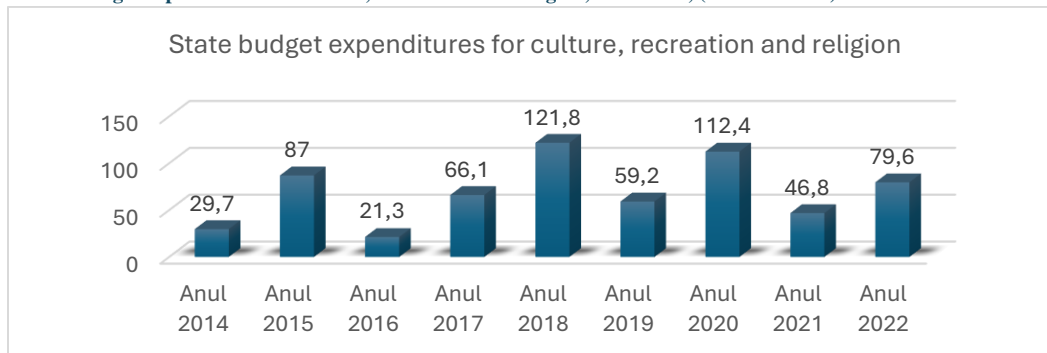
Figure 39 14 Museums and public collections by counties of the South-West Oltenia region, 2019-2023



Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

From the perspective of state budget expenditures for culture, recreation and religion, it is noteworthy that the highest budgets for these categories of expenditures are for the years 2018 and 2020. There is a very large fluctuation in these expenditures from one year to another, and the allocations from the last 4 years for which there is available data (2019-2022), the value of state budget expenditures for culture, recreation and religion is close to 300 million lei. This situation also denotes an underfinancing of the field of culture, which further highlights the need to allocate additional funds available at the national level for the development of cultural heritage, both in urban and rural areas.

Figure 4015 State budget expenditures for culture, recreation and religion, 2014-2022, (Millions of lei)



Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

Needs and challenges

Considering the socio-economic analysis carried out above for the tourism and culture sector, it emerges that, although faced with various external factors and crises in recent years (the crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, the energy crisis, etc.), the South-West Oltenia region has identified the necessary resources for recovery or even made progress in these areas. However, the results



of the socio-economic analysis and the interviews carried out so far (beneficiaries of projects supported under Priority 7) have revealed that the needs identified at the time of the programme development regarding tourism and cultural heritage remain relevant for the region.

The beneficiaries of projects supported under Priority 7 who participated in the evaluation activities (interviews, case studies) emphasized that the South-West Oltenia Region still needs interventions to support the balanced and sustainable development of communities, especially in terms of urban regeneration (revitalization of public spaces to increase the quality of life), development of sustainable tourism, valorization of natural and cultural heritage, development of ecological infrastructure (quality green spaces to mitigate the effects of climate change).

The results of interviews and case studies conducted with beneficiaries of projects supported under Priority 7 also revealed that the region's needs in this area were influenced by: accelerated urbanization, which increased the pressure on green spaces in urban areas; the impact of climate change, which accentuated pollution problems and the insufficiency of adaptation measures; increased public awareness, determined by the fact that the population increasingly demands investments in green, safe and modern spaces; the availability of funds through the Regional Program, which allowed the implementation of projects, but also a better understanding of their impact.

The cities and towns with a tourist profile in the South-West Oltenia region still need support for the diversification and development of tourism/cultural infrastructure. The development of these sectors depends to a certain extent on the existing facilities, with a higher level of development being recorded in the tourist resorts, as well as in some of the main urban centers in the region. Also, the cultural heritage in the urban environment faces important challenges in terms of physical conditions that are gradually deteriorating, and a good part of them still requires conservation or investment for their development and valorization through inclusion in tourist circuits.

Considering the above, at the time of drafting this report, the main needs in these areas are represented by the existence of degraded urban areas and public spaces, the poor state of cultural heritage and the still insufficient exploitation of tourism potential.

The analysis also reconfirmed a set of needs that were also included in the Regional Development Plan of the South-West Oltenia Region 2014-2020, such as: the still limited capacity of higher-class accommodation, the low level of the accommodation capacity utilization index and the average length of stay in the region, in relation to the existing tourism potential, as well as the existence of a low number of foreign tourists visiting the region.

The Regional Program South-West Oltenia remains relevant to cover these needs and challenges, given the actions provided for under Priority 7, which aim, among others: improving the urban environment through the physical regeneration of urban public spaces; preserving, protecting and sustainably valorizing





cultural heritage and developing cultural services in the urban environment; developing tourism infrastructure and public tourism assets. The restoration of urban spaces, the revitalization and valorization of cultural heritage and supporting tourism will continue to contribute to improving the quality of life of residents and increasing the attractiveness of cities, while interventions in heritage and tourism in rural areas will generate economic opportunities and jobs, improving the quality of life of residents in the region.

The interventions financed under Priority 7 largely respond to the needs of the South-West Oltenia region, but there are several aspects that could improve their efficiency and effectiveness, which refer to better integration of projects at regional level to create a coherent network of interventions. Although individual projects contribute to local development, it is considered that there is still a need for:

- Closer regional coordination between projects to create greater cumulative impact.
- Integrated strategic planning, which prioritizes projects with the potential to stimulate synergies between multiple localities.
- Promoting collaboration between beneficiaries: cities, municipalities and other entities in the region should share good practices and lessons learned to increase the efficiency of resource use.

Priority P8. Technical Assistance

Technical assistance plays an essential role in the efficient implementation of cohesion policies and the management of European funds, contributing to strengthening the administrative and institutional capacity of beneficiaries and authorities involved in the management of programs.

At European and national level, there are strategic documents that emphasize that good governance and strong institutions are essential for the efficient absorption of European funds. Among these documents is **the Roadmap for Administrative Capacity – Practical Toolkit** ⁴⁸, published by the European Commission in 2020, which provides guidelines and examples of good practices for strengthening administrative capacity within the framework of cohesion policy. Based on the recommendations made by the European Commission in the aforementioned document, the South-West Oltenia Regional Development Agency has developed **the Roadmap for strengthening the administrative capacity of RP and RDA beneficiaries as RPMA 2021-2027** ⁴⁹.

⁴⁸European Commission – DG Regio, Administrative Capacity Roadmap – Practical Toolkit, 2020, [link](#)

⁴⁹South West Oltenia Regional Development Agency, Roadmap for strengthening the administrative capacity of PR and RDA beneficiaries as AMPR 2021-2027, 2024, [link](#)

Thus, this roadmap is a very important strategic document that has mapped in detail the needs and challenges in the field of technical assistance and administrative capacity among the key actors involved in the implementation of the South-West Oltenia Regional Program.

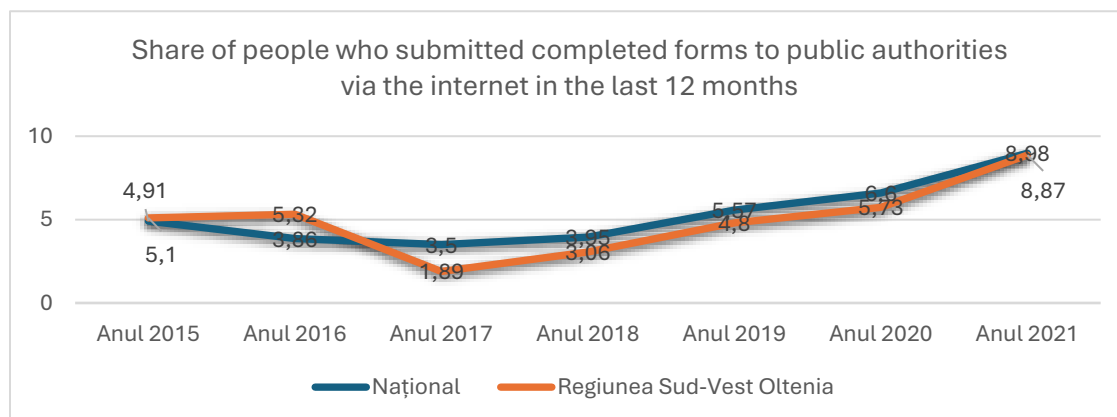
According to the analysis of statistical indicators related to the interaction of the population with the public administration, presented below, these needs still seem to be relevant. It is worth noting, however, that steps have been taken in recent years, including through the implementation of technical assistance projects.

Current developments and challenges

From the point of view of *statistical indicators* that can capture the level of development of public administration and its capacity to ensure good governance of services offered to citizens, indicators referring to people who have interacted with public authorities through the use of the internet are relevant.

Regarding the share of people who have submitted completed forms to public authorities via the internet, in the last 12 months, starting from 2017, the value of this indicator has experienced a constant and considerable evolution both at the national level (156% increase), and especially at the level of the South-West Oltenia development region (370% increase). It is important to mention that in 2021, the last year for which data is available, the value of the indicator at the level of the South-West Oltenia region has almost completely aligned with the value of the indicator at the national level (difference of 0.11 percentage points).

Figure 4116 Share of people who submitted completed forms to public authorities via the internet, in the last 12 months, 2015-2021

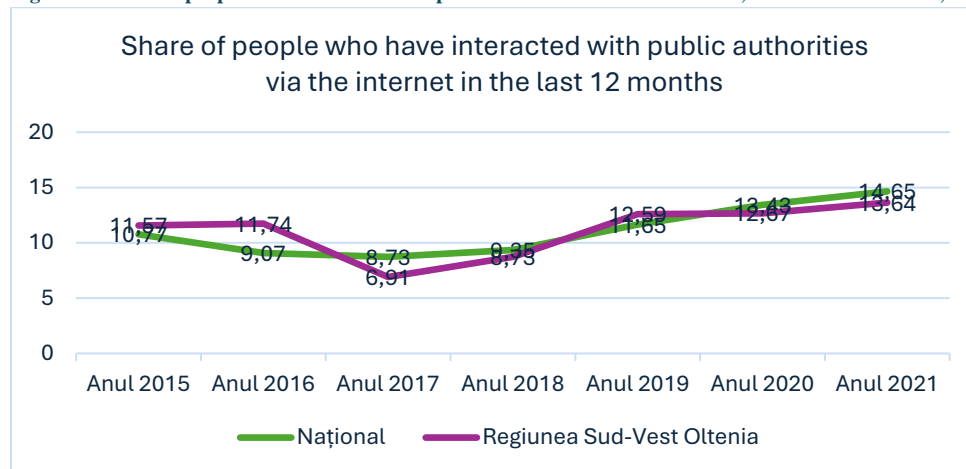


Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

The situation is similar for the indicator regarding the share of people who interacted with public authorities via the internet in the last 12 months, 2015-2021. Similar to the evolution of the previous

indicator, the values for the share of people who interacted with public authorities via the internet have increased steadily since 2017 both in the South-West Oltenia region (97% increase) and at the national level (68% increase). The values of this indicator at the South-West Oltenia region have approached the value of the indicator at the national level since 2018 and have followed a similar trend throughout the analyzed period. For 2019, the value of the indicator for the South-West Oltenia region exceeded the value of the indicator at the national level.

Figure 42 Share of people who interacted with public authorities via the internet, in the last 12 months, 2015-2021



Source: processed data from the National Institute of Statistics, 2024

From the perspective of the needs identified by the Managing Authority of the South-West Oltenia Regional Program in the field of Technical Assistance in recent years and integrated within projects supported by Priority 8, the most relevant were:

- The need to ensure the functioning of the management and control system for the effective implementation and monitoring of the SW Oltenia RP;
- The need to ensure program evaluation and the development of relevant studies for good program implementation;
- The need to strengthen the administrative capacity of the MA SW Oltenia RP, beneficiaries and regional partners in preparing and implementing projects and ensuring their proper information;
- The need to ensure transparency and promote SW Oltenia RP.

According to the 2024 ⁵⁰Country Report , there are still some challenges at national level related to administrative capacity, which concern issues such as over-regulation, complexity of governance

⁵⁰European Commission (June 2024), *Commission Staff Working Document, Country Report 2024 – Romania, accompanying the document on the economic, social, employment, structural and budgetary policies of Romania* , [link](#) , p.18



structures and insufficient coordination between national, regional and local authorities, all of which generate administrative barriers and hinder the efficient implementation of Cohesion Policy programmes.

Also, given that for the 2021-2027 programming period, the RDAs have become MAs, thus receiving new responsibilities, the RDAs must ensure their own training, quickly identify the necessary tools for learning and putting the theories learned into practice to ensure that they fulfill their new responsibilities.

At the level of the RDA SW Oltenia, according to *the roadmap for the development of administrative capacity developed in 2024*, the following needs were identified from the perspective of strategic planning for regional development: the need to strengthen the RDA's skills and expertise in the areas of strategic planning and procurement to support the implementation of the RDA's planning documents at regional and local level; the need to strengthen the administrative capacity of its teams responsible for the selection and financing of projects; the need to improve the efficiency of stakeholder involvement and communication.

The MA needs the ability to understand the sectoral environment or policy sphere in which the investments take place and to raise awareness among all actors involved in this sphere, in order to ensure effective investment results. The MA also needs the ability to link strategic objectives to specific activities and tangible results and to identify the agencies or bodies responsible for implementing projects that contribute to the achievement of these objectives.

Strengthening the administrative capacity at the level of the structures involved in the management of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme represents an essential stage in achieving the objectives set at the operational programme level. For these reasons, the roadmap developed at the PR level is a short and medium-term plan of measures that the SVO RDA wishes to implement in order to effectively implement the 2021-2027 programming period, the implementation of the plan of measures clearly ensuring the implementation of the actions necessary to resolve the problems/deficiencies identified in the region.

It is important to note that Priority 8 of the SW Oltenia RP reflects very well the need to strengthen the administrative and institutional capacity of the parties involved in the implementation of operations financed from the ERDF, both at the level of beneficiaries and at the level of the MA SW Oltenia RP. The activities supported through Priority 8 - Technical Assistance continue to have the role of contributing to the efficient implementation of the PR, by training specialized staff and ensuring their stability, as well as by supporting beneficiaries in understanding and complying with the requirements of the program, preparing mature projects and implementing them efficiently, as well as by increasing the administrative capacity of beneficiaries. Technical Assistance was designed from the beginning to be flexible throughout the programming period, i.e. easily adaptable to changes and needs arising during the implementation of



the program, a particularly important aspect in the context of changes most often generated by external factors.

4.5. Progress made in achieving milestones

At the level of the South-West Oltenia Regional Program, a number of 34 output indicators and 22 unique result indicators have been established – as certain indicators can be found within several priorities/specific objectives. In fact, the total number of indicators established at priority level is as follows:

Priority	Number of Output indicators	Number of Result indicators
P1	20	11
P2	2	2
P3	3	1
P4	8	2
P5	1	1
P6	1	3
P7	9	3
P8	4	
Total	48	23

Of these, milestones were set only for Priority 1, SO 1.4, Priority 2, SO 1.2, Priority 7, SO 5.1 and Priority 8. The justification for this decision lies, on the one hand, in the fact that the program was approved late and thus there was not enough time to obtain results by the end of 2024 and, on the other hand, in the specificity and degree of complexity of the interventions, which in some cases provide for infrastructure works (e.g. roads), which require a long period of time for their implementation, and the quantification of the result can only be achieved at the time of project completion, based on the final documents of work acceptance ⁵¹. For these reasons, in most cases, it was considered that the establishment of milestones for the end of 2024 is not feasible or possible. In other words, careful monitoring and reporting of the evolution of the interventions is carried out periodically, once every six months.

The last official monitoring of the degree of achievement of indicators and milestones was carried out at the end of 2024.

⁵¹According to the information obtained through the interview with the Managing Authority of PR SV Oltenia



Tabel no. 13 Milestones 2024

Priority	SO	Indicator	Milestone 2024	Selected operations 31.12.2024*	Operations implemented 31.12.2024*
P1	RSO1.4	RCO01 - Enterprises benefiting from support (of which: micro, small, medium, large)	53	51	0
		RCO02 - Enterprises benefiting from grant support	53	51	0
		RCO16 - Participation of institutional stakeholders in entrepreneurial discovery processes	23	18	0
		RCO101 - SMEs investing in skills for smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship	53	51	0
P2	RSO1.2	RCO01 - Enterprises benefiting from support (of which: micro, small, medium, large)	56	0	0
		RCO02 - Enterprises benefiting from grant support	56	0	0
		RCO13 - The value of digital services, products and processes developed for enterprises	1,394,416.00 (euro)	0	0
P7	RSO5.1	RCO75 - Integrated territorial development strategies that benefit from support	11	25	0
P8		SV180 - Full-time equivalent jobs	100	100	0
		SV181 - Studies, analyses, reports, developed strategies	2	2	0
		SV182 - Events organized for ROP CM, CDR, potential beneficiaries, beneficiaries and other relevant partners	30	44	0
		SV183 - Persons trained regarding ROP 2021 -2027 (MA staff, support and beneficiaries)	297	263	0



*Selected operations 31.12.2024 – represents the forecast of achieving the indicators in the contracts already signed

*Operations implemented on 31.12.2024 – represents the degree of achievement of indicators on 31.12.2024 (does not represent the number of contracted projects).

Progress recorded in implementing interventions and achieving milestones

Overall, progress in implementation is adequate for the end of 2024, with most calls for proposals launched, with many projects in the approval and contracting phases. At the same time, there is an increased interest from potential beneficiaries in accessing funding and an oversubscription in several calls for proposals (the non-reimbursable value of the projects exceeds the program allocations). Moreover, in the first months of 2025, new calls for proposals are to be launched for all objectives and interventions not covered so far.

Regarding the milestones for 2024, in relation to the operations implemented on 31.12.2024, their value is zero, given that there were no completed projects on that date. However, it is noted, based on the operations selected on 31.12.2024, that a satisfactory level of targets has been achieved in most cases (P1, P7, P8), except for those selected under priority 2.

Priority 1

According to the Regulation (UE) 2021/1060 and the Performance Framework, investments for skills development in the areas of smart specialization, industrial transition and entrepreneurship were proposed to be carried out in complementarity with the interventions of SO 1.3. For this reason, two of the calls of SO 1.3 (dedicated to SMEs and micro-enterprises) also include the interventions of SO 1.4, with specific selection criteria for the development of employees' skills.

Thus, at the level of priority 1, a number of 52 projects have already been signed, with an accelerated pace of signing observed in the last months of 2024. 51 of these projects cover the interventions targeted at the level of OS 1.4. Therefore, based on the selected projects, the milestones for indicators RCO01, RCO02, RCO101 are estimated to be achieved by over 95% and there are premises for achieving the final targets, taking into account the projects already approved and those contracted.

Regarding the RCO16 indicator, in November 2024, a meeting of the CRI Sud-Vest Oltenia was organized, which brought together several key actors from the RDI sector. The main objective was the analysis and evaluation of the Project Fiches submitted within the Call for Project Ideas for strengthening the portfolio in the field of smart specialization "Research, innovation and technology transfer infrastructures in collaboration with SMEs", with a view to launching a call for projects dedicated to strengthening the CRI and the EDP process. It is estimated that new participations of key parties in entrepreneurial discovery processes will take place during 2025, with the implementation of new projects.

Priority 2





At the level of OS 1.2, 2 calls for projects were launched (one dedicated to the digitalization of SMEs and another dedicated to Digitalization for the benefit of citizens), within which 100 projects were submitted, of which 48 are already approved and 4 are already contracted. Regarding the public sector, the call for projects registered an increased interest, with projects submitted with a value exceeding the initial allocation by +35%.

On the other hand, compared to the private sector, interest is low, with 66 funding applications submitted, with a total eligible value of less than 5.5 million euros (26% of the initial allocation) and well below contracting expectations. Although companies' interest in improving economic performance and increasing competitiveness is high (visible in the case of accesses to Priority 1, SO 1.3), they do not consider financing strictly for digitalization processes to be as big an opportunity as financing that covers a wider area of activities. Another possible explanation is that there are already numerous other funding sources (at national level) that support the digitalization of SMEs.

To date, no contracts have been signed by private beneficiaries, which is why there is no progress in achieving the milestones. Moreover, through the 59 projects (approved or in the contracting stage), there are not enough elements to achieve the final targets.

Thus, a possible reallocation of the remaining unused financial resources to other Specific Objectives with a high degree of access is recommended (e.g. Priority 1, SO 1.3).

At the same time, it is recommended to adjust the final targets.

Priority 7

In the case of priority 7, SO 5.1, there are 37 projects already contracted, of which 25 have an estimated contribution within the Integrated Territorial Development Strategies, which means that the milestone target is achieved by reporting to the selected projects.

Priority 8

In the case of Priority 8, progress is already significant, according to monitoring data, with all milestones estimated to be achieved or even exceeded, except for SV183 - Persons trained regarding RP 2021-2027 (MA staff, support and beneficiaries), which had a value of 263, based on operations selected on 31.12.2024.

Flexibility amount

Regarding the flexibility amount, the programme allocated the amount of 176 million euros (approximately 14.50% of the total allocation of the program), distributed in a weight of approximately 15% of the amount allocated to each priority. The exception to the rule is found in the case of P6 (amount of flexibility of 11% of the total amount allocated to the priority) and P8 (13%).

Priority	Total allocation	Amount of flexibility	%
P1	243,320,000	36,483,401	15%



Priority	Total allocation	Amount of flexibility	%
P2	34,487,136	5,171,001	15%
P3	279,471,765	41,903,996	15%
P4	119,430,211	17,907,366	15%
P5	135,371,986	19,807,213	15%
P6	100,278,105	10,613,435	11%
P7	252,370,956	37,840,500	15%
P8	48,823,529	6,292,894	13%
Total	1,213,553,688	176,019,806	14.50%

According to art. 18 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, together with the interim evaluation of the programme, the definitive allocation of the flexibility amount is proposed, an amount that will be released for financing operations once the Commission's final decision confirming this allocation.

Thus, the present evaluation analyzes how the amount of flexibility can be reallocated at the level of specific priorities and objectives, taking into account the following elements: the evolution of the socio-economic context since the moment of the program approval; the contribution to the country-specific recommendations; the contribution to the PNIESC and PEDS; the degree of achievement of the indicators (currently, based on the selected operations and estimated for 2029); the interest shown by beneficiaries for certain types of interventions; the availability of the amounts to be transferred, also taking into account the allocation provisions, according to EU regulations.

Thus, three main changes are proposed to reallocate financial resources and the amount of flexibility:

Modification 1: Addition of allocation at P1 level, OS 1.3

Justification: Financing related to the competitiveness of enterprises must be supplemented, in the context of the need to reduce gaps with other regions and comply with the Country Specific Recommendations. At the same time, SO 1.3 has seen a high level of interest from potential beneficiaries, with a high number of funding applications submitted and a total value of projects already approved of over 160% of the initially allocated value. Last but not least, at this moment, in the absence of additional allocation, there is a risk of not achieving the achievement and result indicators.

Conclusion: Supplementing the financial allocation and the amount of flexibility at the P1, OS 1.3 level, from the remaining resources available at the P2, OS 1.2 level.

Modification 2: Introduction of a new priority at the programme level



Justification: Given the opportunities offered by the STEP platform initiative, it is recommended to introduce a new priority, namely Priority 9. Strategic Technologies, which would include SO 1.6 - Supporting investments contributing to the objectives of the Strategic Technologies Platform for Europe (STEP platform), referred to in Article 2 of Regulation (EU) 2024/795.

Conclusion: Supplementing the financial allocation and the amount of flexibility at the P9 level, by introducing OS 1.6, from the remaining resources available at the P2 level, OS 1.2.

Modification 3: Decrease allocation at P2 level, OS 1.2

Justification: Although the needs for digitalization persist at regional level, interventions targeting Enterprise Digitalization have seen low interest from beneficiaries (the value of submitted projects represents 26% of the initial allocation), an aspect that continues to be maintained. In this context, the related indicators cannot be achieved. Companies prioritize funding that covers a wider range of activities, and the existing alternatives at national level reduce the attractiveness of this call.

Conclusion:

- 1) Transfer of the financial allocation and the amount of flexibility remaining available under P2, OS 1.2, to P1, OS.1.3.
- 2) Transfer of the financial allocation and the amount of flexibility remaining available under P2, OS 1.2, to P8, OS 1.6.

Modification 4: Reallocation within P3

Justification: In the case of SO 2.7, the low interest of beneficiaries, combined with the limitations imposed by the national legislation on green spaces, led to a contracting below expectations, which calls into question the full absorption of the financial allocation. In the case of SO 2.1, the increased interest from potential beneficiaries and the pressing needs to improve the energy performance of public buildings are confirmed.

Conclusion: Transfer of the available amounts and the amount of flexibility under P3, OS 2.7, to P3 OS 2.1.

Modification 5: Introduction of a new funding line at P6 level

Justification: Based on the country-specific recommendations on poverty reduction and promoting social inclusion, including through the provision of social housing for vulnerable households, it is recommended to support actions dedicated to social housing - by introducing a new SO 4.3 - Promoting the socio-economic inclusion of marginalized communities, low-income households and disadvantaged groups, including people with special needs, through integrated actions targeting housing and social services, intervention code 126 Housing infrastructure (other than for migrants, refugees and persons seeking or under international protection).

Conclusion: Supplementing the financial allocation and the amount of flexibility at the P6 level, by introducing OS 4.3, from the remaining resources available at the P7 level, OS 5.1 and 5.2 phased projects.



Modification 6: Decrease in allocation at P7 level

Justification: Within RSO 5.1 and RSO 5.2, two of the calls launched were dedicated to phased projects, noting that the total allocated value will not be covered by the submitted projects. Taking into account the fact that the number (including their value) of phased projects submitted will not change, the calls for projects dedicated to these types of intervention recorded a saving of just under 7 million euros at the end of 2024.

Conclusion: Transfer of the remaining financial allocation and flexibility amount available under P7, OS 5.1 and 5.2 phased projects, to P6 OS 4.3.

Separately, in the case of P5, SO 3.2, an over-submission is observed, in terms of the value of the projects submitted and contracted, compared to the initial allocation (183%). In this case, no remaining sources of funding can be identified to supplement the allocation under this priority, and the additional necessary funding will be provided from the state budget. In the case of P6, SO 4.2, the socio-economic analysis reveals that the rate of early school leaving by young people has increased in the period 2019-2023, which could require a response from the program. On the other hand, the evolution of this indicator is related to numerous other elements that are not within the scope of influence of the program – a change regarding the reallocation of financial resources is not recommended.

In all other cases, based on the analysis of the current socio-economic situation and the progress of the program to date, the current structure of budget allocations by priorities and specific objectives remains adequate for achieving the program's objectives. Thus, it is proposed to maintain the flexibility amount and it is not considered necessary to use the flexibility amount to reallocate funds between priorities - the funds will remain distributed according to the initial planning, reflecting the structure established at the programming stage.



A summary of the analysis criteria that underpinned the recommendations for reallocating the flexibility amount is presented.

		Analysis criteria justifying the reallocation of the flexibility amount				
Priority	Specific Objective	Socio-economic evolution	Contribution to CSR	Contribution to PNIESC and PEDS	Implementation progress	Conclusion quantum of flexibility
P1	OS 1.1	Not	Not	-	Not	No change
	OS 1.3	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Supplement
	OS 1.4	Not	-	-	Not	No change
	OS 1.6 (new)	-	Yes	-	-	Supplement
P2	OS 1.2	Not	-	-	Yes	Reduction
P3	OS 2.1	Not	Yes	Yes	Yes	Supplement
	OS 2.7	Not	Yes	Not	Yes	Reduction
P4	OS 2.8	Not	Not	Not	Not	No change
P5	OS 3.2	Not	-	-	Yes	No change
P6	OS 4.2	Yes	-	Not	Not	No change
	OS 4.3 (new)	-	Yes	-	-	Supplement
P7	OS 5.1	Not	Not	-	Yes	Reduction
	OS 5.2	Not	-	-	Yes	Reduction
P8	AT	Not	Not	-	Not	No change



Below, a financial summary of the programme changes is presented, along with the final allocation of the flexibility amount.

Tabel no. 14 Total financial credits per fund and per national co-financing

Number of the policy objective/specific objective JTF or technical assistance	Priority	Basis for calculation of Union support	Fund	Category of region*	Union contribution (a)=(g)+(h)	Breakdown of the Union contribution		National contribution (b)=(c)+(d)	Indicative breakdown of the national contribution		Total (e)=(a)+(b)	Co-financing rate (f)=(a)/(e)
						Less flexibility amount (g)	Flexibility amount (h)		Public (c)	Private (d)		
1	P1	Public	ERDF	Less developed	212.122.233,00	180.467.831,00	31.654.402,00	37.433.336,00	37.433.336,00		249.555.569,00	84,9999997395%
1	P2	Public	ERDF	Less developed	14.013.832,00	14.013.832,00	0,00	2.473.030,00	2.473.030,00		16.486.862,00	84,9999957542%
1	P9	Public	ERDF	Less developed	10.000.000,00	0,00	10.000.000,00	1.764.707,00	1.764.707,00		11.764.707,00	84,9999919250%
2	P3	Public	ERDF	Less developed	237.551.000,00	195.647.004,00	41.903.996,00	41.920.765,00	41.920.765,00		279.471.765,00	84,999999105%
2	P4	Public	ERDF	Less developed	101.515.679,00	83.608.313,00	17.907.366,00	17.914.532,00	17.914.532,00		119.430.211,00	84,999997069%
3	P5	Public	ERDF	Less developed	112.285.786,00	92.478.573,00	19.807.213,00	23.086.200,00	23.086.200,00		135.371.986,00	82,9461023051%
4	P6	Public	ERDF	Less developed	65.166.863,00	49.553.428,00	15.613.435,00	43.444.576,00	43.444.576,00		108.611.439,00	59,999996317%
5	P7	Public	ERDF	Less developed	209.515.312,00	176.674.812,00	32.840.500,00	36.973.291,00	36.973.291,00		246.488.603,00	84,999997769%
TA36(4)	P8	Public	ERDF	Less developed	35.674.000,00	29.381.106,00	6.292.894,00	13.149.529,00	13.149.529,00		48.823.529,00	73,0672295319%
Total			ERDF	Less developed	997.844.705,00	821.824.899,00	176.019.806,00	218.159.966,00	218.159.966,00		1.216.004.671,00	82,0592822377%
Total general					997.844.705,00	821.824.899,00	176.019.806,00	218.159.966,00	218.159.966,00		1.216.004.671,00	82,0592822377%



V. Results of the mid-term evaluation

5.1 The analysis conducted to answer the evaluation questions

Key evaluation question 1. To what extent are the actions planned and implemented within the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 coherent and relevant to achieving the Programme's objectives and the current needs of the region?

Secondary evaluation question 6. Are the actions of the Programme still relevant considering the current needs existing in the region?

Additional evaluation question 9. How has the initial socio-economic context in the region evolved? What impact does it have on the initial assumptions made during the development of the Regional Programme?

The planned and implemented actions within the SW Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 exhibit a high degree of coherence and relevance in achieving the programme's objectives, taking into account the region's socio-economic context and its alignment with national and European strategies.

Regarding **internal coherence**, it is noted that the actions planned within the programme directly contribute to the established strategic objectives, with connections between them visible through concrete measures targeting economic development, infrastructure improvement, promoting a sustainable environment, and supporting innovation—all key areas for enhancing the region's competitiveness. The action categories outlined in the programme are developed within an integrated framework, with each intervention being in synergy or complementarity with others to directly support the achievement of strategic objectives. For example, measures for the development of transport infrastructure, such as the modernization of regional roads and improving road infrastructure accessibility, are correlated with actions supporting sustainable urban mobility and the development of non-polluting transport networks, thereby contributing to improving connectivity and economic accessibility in the region. Another example is the measures aimed at increasing competitiveness and digitizing the business environment. Investments supporting SMEs, by offering funding for innovation, research, and development, are aligned with measures for digitalization, including the implementation of advanced IT solutions and adaptation to cutting-edge technologies. These measures enable SMEs in the region to become more competitive in both domestic and international markets, while digital transformation contributes to increased efficiency and the development of innovative and sustainable business models, in line with digital economy trends.

The evaluation of qualitative information obtained through participatory research tools showed that beneficiaries implementing multiple projects funded by the SW Oltenia RP and other national programmes





(NRRP, OPCDTIF, etc.) in complementary fields or investment objectives are able to create significant synergies between different interventions, increasing the sustainability chances of the results achieved.

In terms of **external coherence**, the analysis highlights that the planned actions within the programme are closely linked to current European objectives and policies, contributing to the achievement of targets set by the EU in areas such as economic, social, and territorial cohesion, digitalization of the economy, and green transition. For example, investments in energy efficiency for public and private buildings support the climate objectives set through the European Green Deal, while measures related to digitalizing public administration align with the Digital Agenda for Europe: 2020-2030, contributing to the modernization of public services and increasing citizens' access to advanced digital solutions. Nationally, the programme is aligned with the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania 2030, focusing on common priorities such as the development of sustainable infrastructure, supporting innovation, and reducing regional disparities.

The SW Oltenia RP complements interventions supported by other national operational programmes, with mechanisms in place to ensure effective coordination of resources and prevent overlaps between measures. For example, complementarity with the NRRP in the field of educational infrastructure will be achieved through careful coordination of interventions to avoid double funding and maximize the impact of resources. For early childhood education infrastructure (nurseries), a national mechanism has been established to prevent funding overlap between the NRRP and the SW Oltenia RP, ensuring optimal resource allocation. For compulsory education and vocational and technical education, the NRRP will finance only equipment projects, while the SW Oltenia RP will support both infrastructure projects and necessary equipment, ensuring careful coordination to avoid double funding. For university infrastructure, the NRRP will support projects aimed at related infrastructures such as dormitories, cafeterias, and recreation areas, while the SW Oltenia RP will exclusively fund educational infrastructures, such as classrooms, laboratories, etc.

Regarding **programme's relevance**, the actions planned remain aligned with the needs and challenges of the South-West Oltenia region, as highlighted by the updated socio-economic analysis in Chapter 4.4. Programme interventions continue to address the region's key issues, such as improving economic competitiveness, increasing social cohesion and enhancing accessibility. These actions are tailored to the region's specific characteristics, including its economic diversity and the development disparities across the counties.

In the areas of *innovation and competitiveness*, South-West Oltenia region still requires support to develop its research and development sector and stimulate the private sector. Proposed interventions to strengthen R&D and support SMEs in their digital transformation are crucial for improving the region's competitiveness and enabling its adaptation to new economic challenges. Furthermore, *energy-related*





challenges are evident, and energy efficiency remains a key priority. The region still requires investments to improve the energy efficiency of public and residential buildings and enhance eco-friendly public transport infrastructure. These measures will help reduce carbon emissions and support the transition to a green economic model, in line with the European decarbonization goals.

In *education*, the region continues to face a significant urban-rural gap, with insufficient school infrastructure in rural areas. Therefore, measures to improve access to education and modernize educational infrastructure are essential to ensure equal opportunities for all citizens and support the long-term development of human resources. Additionally, *sustainable territorial development* is vital for integrating the region into the vision of a balanced, green economy. Urban regeneration and the promotion of tourism based on cultural heritage remain necessary steps to increase the region's attractiveness and create new economic and social opportunities. These interventions will not only support the revitalization of urban areas but also contribute to developing a sustainable local economic model that meets the current and future needs of the region's residents.

The persistence of regional needs in the aforementioned areas has been confirmed through surveys and interviews with beneficiaries and other key stakeholders of the programme. The majority of respondents agreed that the regional challenges identified during the initial programme development phase remain valid.

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the actions planned and implemented under the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 are well-founded and aligned with both the region's needs and national and European objectives. They directly address the region's challenges and contribute to creating a framework for sustainable, inclusive, and resilient economic development through smart investments in green and digital infrastructure, fostering innovation, and adapting to climate change.

Key evaluation question 2: What are the factors that hinder or facilitate the implementation of the Programme?

Secondary question 1: How effective have the planned and implemented actions been under the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 so far?

Secondary question 2: To what extent are the methods, tools, and mechanisms developed for the implementation of the Programme suitable and likely to achieve the objectives?

Additional question 1: How have the priorities addressed in the Programme evolved since its approval?

Additional question 8: How adequate are the processes compared to the basic quality standards? What needs to be changed?



The implementation of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme is influenced by several factors that can act either as obstacles or as enablers in achieving its objectives, according to the results of the programme's performance analysis, surveys, interviews and case studies conducted with programme beneficiaries.

The key factors supporting the programme's implementation include:

- *Proper planning of the calls for proposals schedule*, which has led to significant progress in initiating the calls. Despite delays caused by legislative changes, the process of project submission, evaluation and contracting is progressing at a favorable pace.
- *Beneficiaries' prior experience in implementing similar projects*. Evaluation activities have shown that beneficiaries with experience in implementing projects funded by other European programmes in previous programming periods possess the necessary knowledge and resources to ensure the efficient implementation of current projects.
- *Effective collaboration among stakeholders involved in the programme's implementation*. Close communication and cooperation between beneficiaries and the Managing Authority for the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme play a crucial role in facilitating project implementation.
- *Exchange of experience, support and expertise from the World Bank/MIPE, and even the European Commission* are highly important in guiding programme activities, especially during this programming period when Regional Development Agencies have taken on the role of Managing Authorities.
- *The Managing Authority's openness to consulting key stakeholders in the targeted intervention areas*. In terms of communication with potential beneficiaries, the Helpdesk office is available and operates efficiently.
- *The Managing Authority's proactive approach to identifying quick solutions to changes in the socio-economic context*, including adjusting the programme when necessary.
- *The use of simplified cost models within the programme*.

The evaluation results have shown that the factors causing difficulties or delays in the implementation of the Programme are:

- *Legislative changes and their impact on the schedule of calls for proposals*. The schedule of calls for proposals under the Regional Programme was delayed following the adoption of Government Emergency Ordinance No. 23 of 12th of April 2023, regarding the introduction of simplification and digitalization measures for managing EU funds under the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy. Although intended to streamline administrative processes, this ordinance imposed additional obligations on both managing authorities and beneficiaries. Consequently, it was necessary to adapt the



applicant guidelines and evaluation and contracting procedures, which led to delays in launching calls for proposals.

- *Challenges related to the time required to obtain permits and technical approvals*, which represent a significant obstacle, prolonging the preliminary phases of project implementation. The preparation of technical documentation (DAIW, technical expertise, energy audit) was frequently mentioned as a difficulty encountered by beneficiaries. Additionally, the long processing time for approvals, particularly the environmental permit, has caused significant delays.
- *The complexity of public procurement procedures*, which creates difficulties for beneficiaries, especially in cases where appeals are filed, leading to delays in contractor selection and, consequently, in project execution.
- *Difficulties in monitoring and reporting certain indicators by beneficiaries*.
- *Challenges in using the MySMIS 2021 platform*, given that the new format required an adaptation process.

Factors that could prevent the achievement of final indicator targets: low administrative capacity of beneficiaries (especially in the case of new beneficiaries with no previous experience in implementing projects under the ROP); the parallel implementation of multiple projects funded from different sources, which could lead to the prioritization of certain projects at the expense of others; changes in the assumptions used for indicator quantification, particularly in relation to financial instruments.

Regarding the effectiveness of the actions under the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027, the results achieved by the end of 2024 create favorable conditions for reaching the established final targets.

By the end of 2024, significant progress can be observed in contracting projects and in completing the submission, evaluation and contracting stages. A high level of project submissions has also been recorded for most calls, demonstrating increased interest from beneficiaries in accessing available funding.

Although most projects are in the early stages of implementation, beneficiaries estimate that the proposed objectives and indicators will be met. Payments made to beneficiaries are still at a low level, a situation explained by the recent start of project implementation.

For certain programme priorities, no milestones have been set for 2024 due to the complexity of interventions and the long duration required for investments. However, for some specific objectives, such as SO 1.4, SO 1.2, SO 5.1 and P8, milestones have been defined. The justification for this decision lies, on the one hand, in the fact that the programme was approved late, leaving insufficient time to achieve results by the end of 2024, and on the other hand, in the specificity and complexity of interventions, which



in some cases involve infrastructure works (e.g., roads) that require a long time to complete, with quantifiable results only upon project completion, based on final acceptance documents.

For most indicators, no milestones have been set due to the delayed approval of the programme. The MA RP acknowledged that programme indicators could not be structured in stages, a point highlighted in all working groups.

There are, however, a set of potential risks identified by beneficiaries, which are associated with delays in public procurement procedures. These delays could affect the pace of project implementation and cause setbacks to the implementation schedule. Additionally, payments to beneficiaries remain at a low level, a situation explained by the recent start of project implementation.

Key evaluation question 3. What progress has been made in the implementation of the NPIEPSR and in applying the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights at the regional level, and how do the interventions of the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 contribute to this progress?

The analyses conducted to provide an answer to this evaluation question are presented in Chapters 4.2 Contribution to the National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan (NIECP) and 4.3 Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR).

Key evaluation question 4: To what extent is there coherence and complementarity between the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 and other sectoral and regional programmes?

The SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 has aimed for coherence and complementarity with other programmes since the programming stage, when sectoral and national programmes with which the SW RO is complementary or that support similar interventions were identified and indicated.

A key objective has been to avoid intervention overlap and ensure the efficient use of funds, which during the implementation phase, has primarily been monitored by checking for double funding through the platform www.dublafinantare.ro. Developed by the Ministry of Investments and European Projects, this mechanism allows managing authorities to verify and prevent the funding of the same project from multiple sources, including from Cohesion Policy programmes and the NRRP, being crucial in maintaining coherence among financial interventions and preventing the duplication of funds for identical activities.

However, according to interviews with representatives of the MA, there have been cases of overlaps with investments from the LIOP, with projects that had investments planned through both programmes at the same location. Therefore, there is a need for a more integrated approach in the future to provide greater assurance regarding the avoidance of double financing, for example, through closer coordination between managing authorities or the creation of integrated national databases.



Regarding complementarity, some calls encourage projects that are complementary to other projects implemented through different funds, as stated in the evaluation grid.

Key evaluation question 5: What are the conditions for the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 to achieve its targets within the performance framework, and what measures can be considered?

Additional question 2: Have the milestones been achieved?

Overall, implementation progress is appropriate for the end of 2024, with most calls for proposals launched and numerous projects in the approval and contracting phases. At the same time, there is a growing interest from potential beneficiaries in accessing funding, leading to an oversubscription for several calls for proposals (the total eligible value of projects exceeds programme allocations). Furthermore, new calls for proposals are set to be launched in the first months of 2025.

Regarding the milestones for 2024, based on operations implemented as of 31.12.2024, their value is zero, given that no projects had been completed by that date. However, based on operations selected by 31.12.2024, a satisfactory level of target achievement is observed in most cases (P1, P7, P8), except for those selected under Priority 2.

Priority 1

Calls for proposals have been launched for SO 1.3 and SO 1.4, which have generated a high level of interest among applicants, leading to oversubscription within the priority.

Thus, the targets set for output and result indicators related to funding for the business environment are likely to be met by the end of the programming period for SO 1.3 and 1.4.

However, certain indicators, such as those under SO 1.1 and those related to the public sector, financial instruments, incubators and business accelerators (under SO 1.3), cannot yet be estimated, as no calls for proposals targeting them have been launched. Instead, calls for proposals are already scheduled for early 2025.

Regarding milestones, these have been proposed only for SO 1.4, and targets are estimated to be met at an appropriate level based on operations selected by 31.12.2024 (3 out of 4 indicators have an achievement rate of over 95%).

Priority 2

Progress is strong for interventions targeting digitalization for citizens (dedicated to the public sector), with no risks foreseen in achieving the final targets.

However, for interventions aimed at SMEs digitalization, the absorption rate is low, with a relatively limited number of submitted projects (compared to SO 1.3, also targeting enterprises). There are significant risks that not all private sector indicators will be met, so adjusting these indicators and reallocating existing funds to other priorities and SOs is recommended.

The milestones were solely related to private sector indicators, which have not been met.





Priority 3

For RSO 2.1, the projects already signed by the end of December 2024 (76) will significantly contribute to reaching the target values set for 2029 across all indicators. For RSO 2.7, contracted projects have a low potential contribution to achieving the RCO36 target and a medium to high contribution to meeting the RCO74 and RCO65 targets. However, it is important to note that at the time of reporting, eight additional projects were still under evaluation, approved or contracting, which suggests that the proposed 2029 targets should be attainable.

No milestones were set for Priority 3.

Priority 4

The contracted projects by the end of 2024 indicate a strong contribution toward achieving final targets, particularly in terms of developing infrastructure for public transport (100%), increasing the capacity of eco-friendly rolling stock for public transport (97.13%), and the number of cities and localities with new or modernized urban transport systems (76.92%). However, the anticipated outputs of the contracted projects for the number of kilometers of supported cycling infrastructure and alternative fuel infrastructure indicate slower progress toward 2029 targets. Nonetheless, all result indicators are expected to be met.

No milestones were set for Priority 4.

Priority 5

Regarding the output indicator measuring the length of reconstructed/modernized roads outside the TEN-T network, it is estimated that the 2029 targets will be exceeded through contracted projects. For the result indicator related to road users, estimates show a 70% achievement rate, though this indicator is subject to changes due to various external factors.

No milestones were set for Priority 5.

Priority 6

So far, implementation progress on indicators is limited due to the average project duration, delayed launch of calls, and phased projects scheduled for completion in 2025. However, the 44 contracted projects as of 31.12.2024 have strong potential to contribute to achieving output indicator values. Based on contracted projects, it is estimated that approximately 60% of the target for indicator RCO66 and around 73% of the target for RCO67 (capacity of classrooms in new or modernized educational structures) will be met.

Additionally, two open calls remain dedicated to developing preschool education infrastructure and university infrastructure investments, expected to close in March/April 2025, leading to additional contracted projects. No issues are anticipated in this regard.

No milestones were set for Priority 6.



Priority 7

The 37 projects already signed by the end of December 2024 (36 under RSO 5.1 and one under RSO 5.2) have a high potential for achieving the 2029 output indicator values. Relevant examples include RCO75 (Territorial development strategies benefiting from support), RCO77 (Number of cultural and tourist sites benefiting from support), and RCO114 (Open spaces created or rehabilitated in urban areas), which are expected to meet or even exceed (RCO75 and RCO114) the 2029 targets based solely on these 37 projects.

However, indicators RCO74 (Population targeted by projects under territorial development strategies) and RCO76 (Integrated territorial development projects) are unlikely to reach the 2029 target solely through the 37 contracted projects. It is important to note that, in addition to contracted projects, 29 more funding applications are at various selection stages (under evaluation, approved or in contracting) under RSO 5.1.

Regarding the milestones, out of the 37 projects, 25 are estimated to contribute to integrated territorial development strategies, meaning the target is met based on the selected operations.

Priority 8

The performance recorded under Priority 8 by the end of 2024 is remarkable, as the two supported and completed projects have exceeded the target values for output indicators set for the entire programming period (e.g., SV180, SV182). At the same time, there is a high probability of meeting the 2029 targets for the remaining indicators.

All the proposed milestones for Technical Assistance in 2024 are expected to be met or even exceeded, except for indicator SV183 (Persons trained regarding the ROP), which had a value of 263 based on selected operations as of 31.12.2024, out of the total target of 293.

Key evaluation question 6: To what extent is the involvement of the European Union visible, and how is it perceived in the South-West Oltenia region in the context of projects implemented through the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027?

The involvement of the European Union in the implementation of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 is a key factor in the region's development, with its visibility and impact evident across all intervention areas. The programme's budget allocates over 82% of its funding, approximately 1 billion euros, from the ERDF, with the remaining 18% covered by the state budget.

Projects implemented through the programme are positively perceived in the region, being regarded as an important support instrument for enhancing economic competitiveness, modernizing infrastructure and improving citizens' quality of life. According to the survey conducted among beneficiaries, 97% confirmed that they had accessed other non-reimbursable funding sources in the past five years, demonstrating not only a strong interest from organizations/institutions in securing such funds, but also the high visibility of the EU's contributions to regional development.



Furthermore, the EU is perceived as a reliable partner whose financial support facilitates essential interventions in sectors such as education, healthcare, mobility, digitalization and urban regeneration. European funds have contributed in the past and continue to contribute today to the revitalization of many communities. Project beneficiaries have highlighted the positive impact of these funds on the economic and social development of the region. Moreover, most beneficiaries who participated in field research activities (interviews) stated that the investments would not have been possible without non-reimbursable funding.

Additionally, the European Union is strongly associated with transparency and the efficient management of financial resources. Its robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms ensure the proper and effective implementation of projects, reinforcing trust among the public and local authorities in the management of EU funds. In this context, not only are the financial benefits evident, but commitments to sustainable development and innovation are also widely recognized.

Through the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027, the EU solidifies its position as a driving force behind regional progress, fostering long-term development opportunities. Its involvement extends beyond funding, providing continuous support to the managing authority.

Secondary question 3: To what extent are the enabling conditions ensured for the proper implementation of interventions?

The enabling conditions established to facilitate the achievement of the objectives of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 were proposed at the Partnership Agreement level, with most of them fulfilled before the programme's approval.

Below is a summary of the key enabling conditions and their fulfillment status:

Enabling condition	Details	Fulfilled
1. Effective mechanisms for monitoring the public procurement market	Monitoring mechanisms are in place to cover all public procurement contracts and procedures under EU-funded programmes, ensuring compliance with EU procurement legislation. Additionally, information on applicants and final prices is available, along with data monitoring and dissemination mechanisms that adhere to current regulations.	Yes
2. Tools and capacities for the effective enforcement of state aid rules	Managing authorities have the necessary tools and expertise to verify compliance with state aid rules and access specialized consultancy.	Yes



Enabling condition	Details	Fulfilled
3. Effective application and implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights	There are effective mechanisms in place to ensure compliance with the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights ("the Charter") and reporting mechanisms in case of non-compliance or complaints.	Yes
4. Implementation and enforcement of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), in line with Council Decision 2010/48/EC	There is a national framework that ensures the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and mechanisms to ensure compliance with accessibility policies and legislation at programme level.	Yes
1.1. Good governance of the national or regional smart specialization strategy	The main measures envisaged to respond to the challenges identified at national and regional levels are: increasing evidence-based policymaking, integrating monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, increasing RDI funding and its efficiency, spreading digitalization in all areas of activity and increasing the interoperability of the national IT system.	Yes
2.1. A strategic policy framework for supporting renovations aimed at improving energy efficiency in residential and non-residential buildings	A long-term national strategy has been adopted to support the renovation of the national stock of residential and non-residential buildings, and there are measures in place to improve energy efficiency.	Yes
2.2. Governance of the energy sector	The National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan is in place.	Yes



Enabling condition	Details	Fulfilled
2.7 Priority Action Framework for conservation measures eligible for EU co-financing	A framework is established for nature conservation measures related to Natura 2000 areas.	Yes
3.1. Comprehensive transport planning at the appropriate level	All criteria regarding transport planning are met.	Yes
4.3 A strategic policy framework for the education and training system at all levels	A system based on skills anticipation is in place as a result of the ReCONNECT project. The platform provides a picture of the follow-up of graduates to employment, so newly created public policies to ensure the correlation of demand with educational supply. It has already provided forecasts of labor demand until 2028 at national level, and will follow at county level once integrated into an IT platform.	Yes

Secondary question 4. How have horizontal principles (gender equality, non-discrimination, accessibility, sustainable development, inclusivity, including the principle of "do no significant harm") been integrated into the selected projects and their implementation?

The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme ensures the integration of horizontal principles (such as equal opportunities, non-discrimination, accessibility, sustainable development, inclusivity and the principle of "do no significant harm") through specific measures included in all calls for proposals. Additionally, the programme incorporates horizontal measures that support the implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which are embedded in all calls for proposals.

Thus, the Programme aims to apply horizontal principles related to equal opportunities, inclusion, and non-discrimination by complying with national and European provisions (EU Charter of Fundamental Rights) in force, which is a condition for eligibility to access funds.

The compliance with national provisions regarding equal opportunities, inclusion, and non-discrimination constitutes an eligibility requirement in the applicant guidelines. Therefore, the programme ensures the achievement of these objectives at the level of the financed interventions by including clear conditions in the applicant guides regarding equal opportunities between men and women, the prohibition of any actions that have the potential for discrimination, the prohibition of any actions that contribute, in any form, to segregation or exclusion, and facilitating access for people with reduced mobility.



Investments support the adaptation of infrastructure (appropriate furniture, elevators, ramps, assistive devices). These measures aim to ensure an inclusive environment, free of barriers for vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, etc. Furthermore, according to the construction reception regulations and Law 206, public authorities are required to involve representatives of the National Authority for Persons with Disabilities in the reception committees at the completion of works, which often happens at the recommendation of the MA RP.

In conclusion, the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 integrates these horizontal principles both strategically and operationally, ensuring equitable access to resources and services for all beneficiaries.

Secondary question 5. What is the level of cooperation and coordination between the different actors involved in the implementation of SW RP 2021-2027?

The level of cooperation and coordination among the various stakeholders involved in the implementation of the SW RP 2021-2027 is a key factor for its success, significantly influencing the efficiency of resource allocation and use, as well as the impact of the actions implemented in the region. Effective inter-institutional cooperation and coordination between public and private actors are essential for ensuring smooth, transparent implementation in line with the programme's objectives.

To uphold transparency and partnership principles, RDA SW Oltenia, as the Managing Authority for the Regional Programme, carried out activities to inform stakeholders about the programme's development, involving key regional actors in the analysis and identification of needs — including municipalities, cities, county councils, and representatives from the business, academic and civil sectors.

One central component of the regional partnership framework is the Regional Committee for the Development of the Regional Development Plan 2021-2027 (RCD), composed of local public authorities, prefectural institutions, deconcentrated services, research institutes, higher education institutions, and social and economic partners from the region's 5 counties. To ensure wide consultation with partners, the RDC operates through County Working Groups (CWG) and Thematic Working Groups (TWG).

Between November 2019 and March 2020, 5 CWG meetings and 3 TWG meetings were organized, covering topics such as competitiveness and R&D, infrastructure and mobility, education, labor market, and health. During June-July 2020, territorial consultations were held with regional partners, including representatives of local authorities, county councils and the Intercommunity Development Association of the Craiova Metropolitan Area. Between October 2021 and March 2022, consultations were organized with potential beneficiaries, focusing on presenting the programme's priorities, analyzing the 2021-2027 project portfolio, aligning them with the interventions outlined in the SW RP 2021-2027, and discussing urban approaches and governance mechanisms.

Throughout the regional consultation process, the programme was adapted based on identified needs and challenges.





During the implementation phase, the MA for SW RP 2021-2027 has become a genuine partner for funding applicants and project beneficiaries, as highlighted by the research tools (surveys, interviews, focus groups, etc.). Most beneficiaries participated in numerous meetings, consultations and training sessions with the MA representatives, where they had the opportunity to ask key questions regarding submission procedures, eligibility criteria, and implementation conditions. Furthermore, from the concept phase of the projects, applicants were able to address written or phone queries to the helpdesk service, with prompt responses provided. Most beneficiaries expressed a high level of satisfaction with the support offered by the MA staff during the project development and submission stages, emphasizing the professionalism and proactive approach of the MA in addressing their requests/questions. Similar appreciation was expressed for the support provided throughout the implementation, monitoring, and reporting phases.

In conclusion, the cooperation and coordination among the various stakeholders involved in the implementation of SW RP 2021-2027 are characterized by a well-structured framework, with clear mechanisms for collaboration and accountability, ensuring the smooth execution of activities and achievement of the programme's objectives. However, to continuously improve the process, it is essential that inter-institutional dialogue and the exchange of best practices remain a priority to maximize the impact of the implemented measures.

Additional question 3: To what extent have potential beneficiaries considered funding opportunities necessary and managed to access them?

The potential beneficiaries of the Programme view funding opportunities as essential for supporting regional project ideas. In fact, most interviewees believe that investments would not have been possible without access to non-reimbursable funding.

The success rate in securing funding is reflected in the rejection rate of submitted projects, which stands at approximately 12% across the entire programme. For Priority 1, the rejection rate of 13.85% is considered reasonable, given that the interventions targeted the private sector, where potential beneficiaries may have limited experience in accessing funding. However, relatively high and unexpected rejection rates were also observed for P4 and P7, largely due to the lack of experience among smaller local authorities.

Priority	No. of submitted projects	No. of rejected projects	Rejection rate
P1	563	78	13.85%
P2	100	11	11.00%
P3	104	11	10.58%
P4	32	4	12.50%



Priority	No. of submitted projects	No. of rejected projects	Rejection rate
P5	9	0	0.00%
P6	46	2	4.35%
P7	75	9	12.00%
P8	3	0	0.00%
Total	932	115	12.34%

According to the survey conducted among programme beneficiaries, the vast majority (97%) have accessed other non-reimbursable funding sources in the past five years, demonstrating their experience in this area. Furthermore, over 50% of these beneficiaries sought the assistance of a consultant when preparing their funding application. Additionally, most beneficiaries (63.6%) consider the application process accessible, though not without challenges, while a significant percentage (22.17%) perceive the submission stage as relatively straightforward, with no major difficulties. Moreover, the information provided by the programme authorities during the application phase was deemed very clear.

All these factors contribute directly to the successful access to funding and, ultimately, to the effective implementation of projects.

However, administrative challenges were also encountered, such as the large volume of required documents within a short timeframe, the complexity of the investment justification requirements, and the need to update documentation due to legislative changes.

Additional question 4: To what extent is there sufficient capacity to implement the interventions, including the adoption of new technologies among applicants?

In general, research activities confirm that the beneficiaries of interventions funded through the SW Oltenia RP have the capacity to implement the ongoing projects. Interviewed beneficiaries are confident that their projects will be successfully completed and that the proposed objectives will be achieved by the end of the implementation period. The main risks that could affect the achievement of project objectives include:

- Delays in public procurement procedures due to appeals against tender documents, as well as the inability of selected suppliers to deliver products, services, or works according to requirements and within the agreed timeframe;
- Price fluctuations/increases in the market;
- External risks, such as those experienced during the pandemic and the war in Ukraine;
- Legislative changes that may cause delays or implementation bottlenecks;



- Execution delays and late delivery of project components.

Regarding the adoption of new technologies, this is primarily targeted under Specific Objective 1.1 *Development and enhancement of research and innovation capacities and the adoption of advanced technologies*. All actions supported under this objective will focus on the RIS3 priority areas: transport systems, industrial engineering and materials, agri-food, ICT and digitalization, health and wellness, and creative industries, along with two cross-cutting areas: green economy and circular economy. However, assessing the beneficiaries' capacity to adopt new technologies is not feasible at this stage, as no project calls under SO 1.1 had been launched as of 31st of December 2024. Due to the complexity of these interventions, prior consultation with key stakeholders is essential.

On the other hand, while not a primary objective, the adoption of new technologies is also integrated into other types of interventions. Among the technologies mentioned in funding applications, beneficiaries have identified several key advancements, including: the use of high-energy efficiency equipment to reduce energy consumption and CO2 emissions; smart energy control technologies, such as LED lighting systems; promotion of clean technologies and resource efficiency; adoption of new technologies and significant transformations for the digitalization of the transport system.

Additional question 5: Are there indications that the targeted groups of individuals, businesses and institutions are actively involved in the supported activities?

There is strong evidence confirming the active involvement of the target groups in the interventions supported by the programme, as demonstrated by both document analysis and the results of interviews and surveys conducted with beneficiaries. The main categories of beneficiaries include SMEs, local public authorities and institutions, state higher education institutions, as well as various other public and private entities contributing to the implementation of funded projects.

Their active engagement is reflected in the high number of submitted funding applications and the significant project contracting rate, particularly in key areas such as regional accessibility and connectivity (SO 3.2), energy efficiency (SO 2.1) and sustainable urban development (SO 2.8).

This broad participation has been facilitated by the support mechanisms established by the Managing Authority, including information sessions, thematic training, and technical assistance services provided through a helpdesk. These measures have enhanced transparency and streamlined the funding access process, confirming that the target groups are actively engaged in implementing the programme's interventions.

Additional question 6: How is the programme being implemented (strengths, weaknesses, risks, opportunities)?





The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 is a key instrument for the region's development. Structured around eight strategic priorities, the programme aims to align with the EU's policy objectives while addressing the specific challenges of its five constituent counties. Its implementation involves managing a mix of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks that influence the success of its interventions and funded projects.

Strengths:

- **Strategic alignment and coherence:** the programme is well integrated with the European objectives for the 2021-2027 period and ensures external coherence with other funding programmes, as well as with regional strategies and national objectives (including NIECP and EPSR).
- **Diverse coverage areas:** it provides funding for essential sectors such as economic competitiveness, digitalization, mobility, education, and urban regeneration across all five counties of the South-West Oltenia region (Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt and Vâlcea). The programme also adheres to thematic funding concentrations.
- **Adequate implementation progress:** by the end of 2024, implementation progress is on track, with most calls for proposals launched and numerous projects in the approval and contracting stages. Additional calls are planned to cover all Specific Objectives and intervention types within the programme.
- **Experience from previous programming periods:** a major advantage in implementing the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 is the experience gained during past programming periods (2007-2013, 2014-2020). Local authorities, beneficiaries and the MA are already well-acquainted with EU funding mechanisms, facilitating better project planning and execution.
- **Support provided by the MA:** the assistance provided by the South-West Oltenia Regional Development Agency has been a key factor in improving the implementation process. Active communication, organized consultations and technical support for beneficiaries have enhanced understanding of requirements and increased the success rate of submitted projects. Field research confirms that beneficiaries value the close collaboration with the MA, which enables swift problem-solving and administrative process optimization.
- **Effective reporting and monitoring mechanisms:** a crucial aspect of programme implementation is the presence of clear reporting and monitoring mechanisms that allow for tracking project progress and swift intervention when issues arise. These reporting systems are structured to ensure transparency and compliance with European requirements, making it easier to assess the impact of funding on regional development.

Weaknesses:





- **Bureaucracy and high administrative burden:** Although bureaucracy has been significantly reduced compared to the previous programming period, beneficiaries still emphasize the need to simplify and optimize the MySMIS platform, as well as the required project documentation.
- **Variable administrative capacity:** There are significant differences among beneficiaries (both public institutions and private entities) regarding their ability to implement projects effectively.
- **Low beneficiary interest in certain interventions:** For example, there has been limited interest in digitalization interventions in the private sector, as SMEs do not prioritize digitalization, often favoring more flexible funding options. Similarly, low interest has been observed in Priority 3, SO 2.7.
- **Insufficient funding:** Monitoring data from the end of 2024 indicates that certain interventions have a high level of demand, with submitted project values far exceeding initial allocations. This has led to funding shortages, particularly in Priorities 1, 4, 5, and 7. Additionally, it has been noted that county capital cities require larger allocations compared to smaller localities.

Opportunities:

- **Regional economic development:** A favorable macroeconomic environment supports access to various forms of available funding. Encouraging innovation and digitalization can drive long-term economic growth.
- **New trends and technologies:** The integration of emerging technologies, such as AI, to improve public services and business operations presents an increasing opportunity, which could also facilitate access to SW RP funding.
- **Public-private partnerships:** Strengthening public-private collaborations can create new project opportunities while maximizing the impact of investments supported by the programme.
- **Complementarity with additional funding sources:** Combining programme funds with other national or EU funding sources enhances regional impact.

Risks:

- **Delays in project approval/contracting processes:** The programme was launched with some delays, with the first calls of proposals initiated in 2023, leading to contract signings extending into late 2024 (and even ongoing). Moreover, the programme plans to launch additional calls, requiring a streamlined contracting process to shorten approval times. Delays in contracting could further impact project completion deadlines and pose risks to achieving the programme's final targets.
- **Economic or political crises:** Factors such as inflation, rising material costs or economic instability could hinder project implementation. Additionally, political instability—whether at the national or local level—could lead to funding disruptions from external sources or a decline in trust in EU financial mechanisms.





Additional question 7: Is the implementation efficient and carried out on time? If not, why?

The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme was approved in October 2022, creating a gap between the start of the programming period (2021) and the actual launch of the first project calls. The first calls were launched in June 2023, which impacted the initial planning and execution of projects under the programme.

The calendar for the calls of proposals faced delays following the adoption by the Romanian Government of Emergency Ordinance No. 23 of April 12, 2023, which introduced simplification and digitalization measures for managing EU funds under the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy. Although the new provisions were intended to streamline fund management, they imposed additional obligations on both managing authorities, which had to implement the ordinance's measures and beneficiaries, who had to adapt to revised applicant guidelines and evaluation and contracting procedures.

To date, the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme has made significant progress in launching calls for proposals and contracting projects. By the end of 2024, a total of 36 calls had been opened, attracting projects worth over 1 billion euro (more than 80% of the programme's financial allocation). Of these, 249 projects were contracted, with a total value of 750 million euro (65% of the financial allocation). However, in some cases, the time between project approval and contracting was extended due to the high workload of the MA, as multiple interventions were launched simultaneously.

Despite these advances, progress in payments (5% of the contracted project value) and in meeting European and national policy objectives has been slower. Nevertheless, given the current stage of contracted projects, most priorities have significant potential to meet their targets for 2029 in terms of both output and result indicators. The only exceptions are the risks associated with failing to meet the targets for SO 1.2 and 2.7.

Regarding the milestones, most are expected to be met, except for those related to SO 1.2.

5.2 Answer to the evaluation questions

Key evaluation question 1. To what extent are the actions planned and implemented within the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 coherent and relevant for achieving the Programme's objectives and addressing the current needs of the region?

Secondary question 6. Do the Programme's actions remain relevant considering the current needs of the region?





Additional question 9. How has the initial socio-economic context of the region evolved? What impact does this have on the initial premises of the Regional Programme's development?

The planned and implemented interventions within the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 are coherent and relevant for achieving the programme's objectives, considering the socio-economic context of the region and alignment with national and European strategies. Moreover, the interventions are tailored to regional needs, significantly contributing to sustainable economic development, infrastructure improvement, and the promotion of a greener and more digital economy.

Regarding *internal coherence*, the interventions are developed within an integrated framework that enables synergies between actions and directly supports the achievement of strategic objectives. In terms of *external coherence*, the analysis shows that the interventions proposed under the SW Oltenia RP are complementary to other national programmes and supported by mechanisms ensuring coordination and efficient resource allocation.

Concerning the *programme's relevance*, the interventions continue to adequately address current regional challenges, such as enhancing economic competitiveness, ensuring social cohesion and improving accessibility. They are also adapted to the specific characteristics of the region, including economic diversity and territorial development disparities.

In conclusion, the planned actions within the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 are well-founded and remain highly relevant and coherent with the region's needs.

Key evaluation question 2: What factors hinder or facilitate the implementation of the Programme?

Secondary question 1: How is the effectiveness of the actions planned and implemented within the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 assessed so far?

Secondary question 2: To what extent are the methods, tools and mechanisms developed for the Programme's implementation suitable/will lead to achieving its objectives?

Additional question 1: How has the situation of the targeted priorities evolved since the Programme's approval?

Additional question 8: How adequate are the processes compared to basic quality standards? What needs to be changed?

The implementation of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme has been influenced by both challenges and facilitating factors that support the achievement of its objectives.

Factors that contribute to optimizing the implementation process and increasing the absorption of available funds include: efficient planning of project calls, beneficiaries' previous experience, effective collaboration between stakeholders, consultation with key actors, and the use of simplified cost options.



Challenges hindering implementation include legislative changes, delays in obtaining permits and authorizations, the complexity of public procurement procedures, issues in monitoring and reporting certain indicators, and beneficiaries managing multiple projects simultaneously, among others.

As of the end of 2024, implementation progress is satisfactory, with most project calls launched and numerous projects in the approval and contracting phases. There is also a noticeable increase in interest from potential beneficiaries in accessing funding, with over-subscription in most project calls (the total eligible value of submitted projects exceeds programme's allocations).

The methods, tools and mechanisms developed by the Managing Authority for implementing the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 have proven essential in ensuring efficient implementation and achieving the proposed objectives. However, further administrative process optimization, improving the functionality of the MySMIS platform, and strengthening beneficiaries' capacity are necessary measures to be pursued in the coming period.

Key evaluation question 3: What progress has been made in the implementation of the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (INECP) and the application of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights at the regional level, and how do the interventions of the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 contribute to this progress?

The SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 makes a significant contribution to the implementation of the INECP, particularly through interventions funded under Priorities 3 and 4. The most substantial impact is observed under SO 2.1, which supports energy efficiency in public and residential buildings, directly reducing energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. By 31st of December 2024, contracted projects aim to improve the energy performance of 213 residential units and 159,061 square meters of public buildings. Additionally, SO 2.7 supports the restoration of degraded ecosystems and green infrastructure, while SO 2.8 focuses on sustainable urban mobility, showing significant progress in developing infrastructure and eco-friendly rolling stock for public transport. Indirect contributions to INECP objectives have also been identified in other specific objectives of the programme, including SO 1.1, SO 1.3, SO 1.4, SO 3.2, SO 4.2, SO 5.1 and SO 5.2.

Regarding the European Pillar of Social Rights, the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme supports the EU's 2030 targets for employment, skills development and poverty reduction. Although projects under SO 4.2 are still in their early implementation stages, they will directly contribute to the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Furthermore, horizontal measures integrated into all project calls ensure compliance with equality, inclusion and non-discrimination principles. Project eligibility is conditioned by clear requirements on gender equality, ensuring equal opportunities for women and men; the prohibition of discriminatory



actions; the avoidance of segregation or exclusion in any form; and the facilitation of access for people with reduced mobility.

Key evaluation question 4. To what extent is there coherence and complementarity between the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 and other sectoral and regional programmes?

The SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 has pursued coherence and complementarity with other programmes from the programming stage, with the programme being designed in consideration of its complementarity with other national and European programmes, including the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), as well as other initiatives within Cohesion Policy.

Complementarity is also encouraged through the evaluation grids of certain calls, where projects that correlate with other investments funded from different sources are awarded additional points.

During implementation, the avoidance of funding overlap was ensured through verification of double funding on the platform www.dublafinantare.ro. However, cases of overlap with the LIOP have been identified, indicating the need for closer coordination between Managing Authorities and/or the development of integrated national databases to ensure a more integrated territorial approach.

Key evaluation question 5: What are the premises for the SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 to achieve its performance framework targets and what measures can be considered?

Additional question 2: Have the expected milestones been achieved?

SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 has strong premises for achieving its performance framework targets, supported by overall good progress, increased interest from beneficiaries, and the launch of project calls across most types of interventions. However, there are risks related to achieving certain indicators under SO 1.3 and SO 2.7.

Based on the operations selected as of 31.12.2024, milestones show a high degree of achievement in most cases, except for those related to SME digitalization (P2), where absorption remains low.

Key evaluation question 6: To what extent is the involvement of the European Union visible, and how is it perceived in the South-West Oltenia region in the context of projects implemented through SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027?

The European Union's involvement in the implementation of SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 is essential for the region's development, being visible across all intervention areas. With a financial allocation of over 1 billion euro from the ERDF (82% of the programme's budget), the EU plays a key role in modernizing infrastructure, boosting economic competitiveness, and improving living conditions for citizens. The projects implemented are highly valued by beneficiaries for their positive impact on the region, and 97%



of them confirm having accessed non-reimbursable funding in the last five years, demonstrating both high interest in these funds and the visibility of the EU's contribution.

The European Union is perceived as a reliable partner, and the monitoring mechanisms in place ensure transparency and efficient resource management, reinforcing public and beneficiary confidence in the implementation process.

Secondary evaluation question 3: To what extent are favorable conditions ensured for the proper implementation of interventions?

The favorable conditions for the proper implementation of interventions under the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 are ensured. Market monitoring mechanisms for public procurement, tools for the effective application of state aid rules, respect for fundamental rights, and governance in specific sectors such as energy and transportation are all appropriately implemented.

Secondary evaluation question 4: How have horizontal principles (gender equality, non-discrimination, accessibility, sustainable development, inclusivity, including the principle of do no significant harm) been integrated into the selected projects and their implementation?

In the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027, horizontal principles such as gender equality, non-discrimination, accessibility, sustainable development, and inclusivity, including the do no significant harm (DNSH) principle, have been integrated both in the selection of projects and their implementation.

The programme promotes equal opportunities and equal treatment, ensuring that all funded actions and projects do not discriminate based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, or other characteristics. This is reflected in the project selection criteria and in the monitoring of their implementation.

Funded projects must comply with accessibility standards, ensuring that the infrastructure and services developed are accessible to all people, including those with disabilities. This is crucial for infrastructure projects and public services.

The programme integrates sustainable development principles, ensuring that projects do not cause significant harm to the environment. According to the Environmental Report for the South-West Oltenia Regional Operational Programme 2021-2027, the compliance with the DNSH principle was verified during the programme's development phase by assessing the six environmental objectives for each indicative action included in the programme.

Secondary evaluation question 5: What is the level of cooperation and coordination among the different actors involved in the implementation of the RP 2021-2027?

Cooperation and coordination among the actors involved in the implementation of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 are essential for the efficient use of resources and the achievement of strategic objectives. RDA SW Oltenia, as the Managing Authority, promoted transparency and partnership





from the programming stage, facilitating the active involvement of relevant regional stakeholders – local authorities, the business environment, academia and civil society. A central element of this process was the Regional Planning Committee, which facilitated extensive consultation through County and Thematic Working Groups, organizing meetings and consultations in various phases of the programme's concept to align regional needs with funding priorities.

A key factor that facilitated the implementation of the programme's interventions was the close cooperation between the Managing Authority representatives and the beneficiaries or potential beneficiaries. The continuous support provided by the Managing Authority staff, the information provided through the helpdesk service, training sessions and organized meetings was particularly appreciated, contributing significantly to increasing the transparency and clarity of the funding access process.

In conclusion, constant dialogue and active collaboration between the MA SW RP and other key actors (beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries and other regional stakeholders) have contributed to a more effective and efficient implementation of the programme. Maintaining and strengthening this collaboration remains essential for maximizing the impact of the funded interventions.

Additional question 3: To what extent have potential beneficiaries considered the funding opportunities necessary and succeeded in accessing them?

Potential beneficiaries consider funding opportunities essential for the development of regional projects, with the majority stating that investments would not have been possible without the financial support provided through the SW Oltenia RP. The overall rejection rate for projects is 12%, with higher values for P1 (13.85%)—where the majority of beneficiaries are from the private sector—as well as for P4 (12.5%) and P7 (12%) due to a lack of prior experience in accessing funding.

However, according to the responses provided in the survey, 97% of beneficiaries have previously accessed similar funding, and more than half have used specialized consultancy services. Although the application process is considered accessible, beneficiaries have encountered certain administrative difficulties, such as the large volume of documents required.

Additional question 4: To what extent is there sufficient capacity to implement interventions, including adopting new technologies among the applicants?

The capacity of beneficiaries to implement interventions funded through the SW Oltenia RP is generally adequate and most are confident in completing projects and achieving their proposed objectives. However, there are risks that could influence implementation, such as delays in public procurement, price fluctuations, external factors (such as pandemics), legislative changes and issues related to the execution of works.



Regarding the adoption of new technologies, this is particularly targeted through SO 1.1. However, by 31st of December 2024, no calls for projects have been launched in this area due to the complexity of interventions and the need for consultations with relevant stakeholders. Nevertheless, elements of technological innovation are integrated into other types of investments, with beneficiaries including energy-efficient equipment, smart energy control solutions, clean technologies and digitalization of the transport system in their projects.

Additional question 5: Are there indications that the target groups of people, businesses, and institutions, aimed by the interventions, are engaged in the supported activities?

The target groups of the programme's interventions, including actors from the private sector (SMEs), the academic environment (public higher education institutions), and the public sector (institutions and local public authorities), are actively involved in the supported activities. Their participation is supported by cooperation, communication and support mechanisms implemented by the MA, such as information sessions, thematic training and the technical assistance service through the helpdesk, which have facilitated access to funding.

Additional question 6: How is the programme implemented (strengths, weaknesses, risks, opportunities)?

The implementation of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 is based on a well-defined strategic framework, aligned with European and regional objectives, and benefits from the experience gained in previous programming periods. The programme covers a wide range of sectors essential for the region's development, including economic competitiveness, digitalization, mobility and education. Progress in implementation by the end of 2024 is on track, with 36 calls for projects launched, 249 projects contracted, and numerous other projects in various stages of approval and contracting. The active support of the Regional Development Agency and clear reporting and monitoring mechanisms have contributed to efficient and transparent implementation. However, there are also challenges, such as ongoing high bureaucracy and the limited administrative capacity of certain beneficiaries to implement projects, and some interventions have not received sufficient interest from beneficiaries. Additionally, certain sectors face risks of underfunding, and initial delays in the programme's start could affect the achievement of all objectives by the end of the implementation period.

Additional question 7: Is the implementation efficient and timely? If not, why?

The implementation of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 experienced a significant time delay between the start of the programming period (2021) and the launch of the first project calls (June 2023). The reasons for this delay were the late approval of the Programme and, subsequently, the application of Government Ordinance No. 23 in April 2023, which introduced additional regulations, causing delays that affected both the managing authorities and beneficiaries. Despite these challenges, the Programme has made significant progress, with 36 calls launched and over 1 billion euros in projects



Cofinanțat de
Uniunea Europeană



submitted. However, the contracting process has been slower in some cases, and payments for projects are still at a low level (5% of the contracted project value). Despite this, most priorities have the potential to meet targets by 2029, with some exceptions.



AUTORITATE DE MANAGEMENT
PROGRAMUL REGIONAL SV OLTENIA
www.adroltenia.ro
www.pr2021-2027.adroltenia.ro
facebook.com/adrsvoltenia

DEZVOLTĂM OLTENIA!

Conținutul acestui material nu reprezintă în mod obligatoriu poziția oficială a Uniunii Europene, a Guvernului României sau a Autorității de Management pentru Programul Regional Sud-Vest Oltenia 2021-2027.



VI. Conclusions

The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 aims to improve economic competitiveness, social cohesion and the accessibility of the region, in order to increase the quality of life for its citizens. The programme's strategy focuses on addressing key bottlenecks in specific sectors such as transport, education, mobility, energy efficiency and urban regeneration, through the eight priorities funded, namely: Priority 1 – Competitiveness through innovation and dynamic enterprises; Priority 2 – Digitalization for the benefit of citizens and businesses; Priority 3 – Energy efficiency and green infrastructure; Priority 4 – Sustainable urban mobility; Priority 5 – Accessibility and connectivity at the regional level; Priority 6 – Modern and inclusive education; Priority 7 – Sustainable territorial development; Priority 8 – Technical assistance.

The SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 was approved in October 2022, and the first calls for proposals were launched in June 2023, with a slight delay due to the adoption of Government Emergency Ordinance No. 23/2023, which imposed additional obligations on the MA for the transposition of the measures set forth in the ordinance and adaptation to the new provisions.

By the end of 2024, the programme has made notable progress, with calls launched totaling over 1 billion euros, representing 80% of the programme's total financial allocation. Signed contracts amount to 751 million euro (over 60% of the programme's total budget), but payments made so far have been only 5% of the non-reimbursable value of contracted projects.

Beneficiaries showed higher interest in Priorities 1, 4, 5, and 7, where significant overlaps were recorded in relation to the total non-reimbursable values of projects submitted under different calls. However, for Priorities 2, 3, 6 and 8, the initial allocations have not yet been fully reached, although calls are still ongoing as of 31st of December 2024, or are planned to be launched throughout 2025.

Given the stage of programme implementation and the relatively late signing of financing contracts, as of 31st of December 2024, no progress has been recorded in achieving the performance indicators. However, an analysis based on the projects contracted by that time shows favorable premises for a high contribution to achieving the targets of the performance indicators, a view confirmed by the beneficiaries consulted during the field research conducted for the preparation of this report. These beneficiaries estimate that the objectives and indicators planned at the project level will be met by the end of the project implementation period.

Among the various challenges and risks that may cause delays in project implementation, difficulties arising from public procurement procedures, affected by complaints and delayed contractor selection, or rising market prices, are significant. On the other hand, the partnership and good collaboration with the



representatives of the MA of SW Oltenia RP, who provided constant support in all preparation and implementation stages of the projects, and the beneficiaries' previous experience with the implementation of similar projects funded under the ROP 2014-2020, represent key facilitating factors that can contribute to the optimal realization of interventions and achieving the anticipated results.

The only specific objectives at the level of which risks have been identified in achieving performance indicators are SO 1.2 and SO 2.7. Thus, for SO 1.2, the interest of SMEs in funding for digitalization is low, with only 26% of the initial allocation accessed. Companies prioritize funding that covers a broader range of activities, and existing national alternatives reduce the attractiveness of this call. Therefore, it is recommended to reallocate the unused funds from this call - "Digitalization for SMEs" - to other priorities and specific objectives within the programme, which have higher interest and a greater absorption capacity for funds (e.g., P1, SO 1.3).

Regarding SO 2.7, calls dedicated to municipalities and towns have received low interest from potential beneficiaries, leading to lower-than-expected contracting, raising doubts about the full absorption of the financial allocation. Therefore, evaluators have proposed reallocating the unused funds from SO 2.7 to SO 2.1, to finance projects on the reserve list of the "Investments in public buildings to increase energy efficiency" call and launching a new call in this area, considering the high demand and positive impact of such investments, which support the need to improve the energy performance of buildings, amid the significant rise in energy consumption costs.

The main conclusions of the interim evaluation of the SW Oltenia RP are highlighted below, covering the key criteria set out in Article 18 of Regulation 2021/1060 on the interim evaluation of programmes, namely:

- Country specific recommendations;
- Progress in implementing the National Integrated Plan for Energy and Climate Change and the European Pillar of Social Rights;
- The socio-economic situation of the region;
- Progress made in achieving the milestones.

Country – Specific Recommendations

The SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 addresses the needs and challenges outlined in the Country Report for 2024 through strategic and operational investments aimed at strengthening administrative capacity, enhancing business competitiveness, developing RDI activities, improving energy efficiency, promoting sustainable transport, and reducing territorial disparities. The contributions and potential impact of the programme on the challenges identified in the CSR are summarized as follows:





1. **Administrative capacity and governance:** The SW Oltenia RP allocates significant resources to strengthen administrative capacity at both the level of institutions involved in the management and control system of the programme, as well as for beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries/regional partners. By 31st of December 2024, two projects were contracted under Priority 8 – Technical Assistance, with a total value of over €14 million (30.4% of the priority allocation). These projects will have a significant impact, supporting 100 full-time equivalent jobs and contributing to the training of 263 individuals from the AM staff, support personnel, and beneficiaries. The impact of interventions funded under the Technical Assistance Priority of the programme is expected to manifest at several levels. The interventions will contribute to improving the institutional capacity for managing, monitoring, and controlling the programme, as well as increasing the administrative efficiency of the MA SW Oltenia RP. At the beneficiary level, it is expected to improve the ability to access funds and reduce errors in project implementation.
2. **Business competitiveness and RDI activities:** Under Priority 1 (SO 1.3), the programme aims to improve the competitiveness and innovation of microenterprises and SMEs by developing production capacities, modernizing technological capacities, and encouraging industrial transition, among others. The programme also supports the establishment of business structures such as incubators and industrial parks to increase the resilience of businesses. By 31st of December 2024, over 181 million euro was allocated to improve the sustainability and competitiveness of SMEs, as well as to create jobs. Regarding the contribution of interventions to meeting the CSR in the field of competitiveness, it is estimated that, by the end of 2024, 51 enterprises will benefit from financial support (RCO01 and RCO02 indicators) with increased turnover (RCR19 result indicator). On the other hand, to respond to the CSR regarding increased investments in the RDI sector, the SW Oltenia RP supports, through the interventions planned under Priority 1 (OS 1.1), the stimulation of investments in research-development activities and innovation among businesses, aiming at increasing their performance and transforming them in a smart and sustainable way. The total financial allocation dedicated to investments related to SO 1.1 exceeds 60 million euro. Regarding the implementation status, it is noted that by the end of December 2024, no calls for projects had been launched under SO 1.1, with the delay being justified by the high complexity of the interventions and the need for consultation with key stakeholders.
3. **Energy efficiency:** The SW Oltenia RP supports significant investments to improve the energy efficiency of residential and public buildings (with a focus on hospitals, educational and social infrastructure). By 31st of December 2024, 76 projects were contracted, with a total non-reimbursable value of over 146 million euro, representing 76.4% of the SO 2.1



allocation. These projects will significantly contribute to improving the energy efficiency of public buildings and residential homes and will result in reduced annual primary energy consumption (RCR26) and greenhouse gas emissions (RCR29).

4. **Sustainable urban transport:** In line with the EU's strategic objectives to reduce emissions from transport, the SW Oltenia RP supports, through Priority 4 (SO 2.8), the promotion of sustainable mobility and the improvement of the local public transport system. By the end of 2024, 16 projects were contracted, totaling over 58 million euro, representing 48.84% of the total financial allocation for this priority. These projects will contribute to the creation of six new public transport infrastructures and increase the capacity of ecological rolling stock by 1,834 passengers. It is also expected that the number of cities with digitalized urban transport systems will rise. As for the results, it is forecasted that the annual number of users of new or modernized public transport systems will exceed 10.4 million. These interventions will contribute to reducing carbon emissions, improving urban life quality, and promoting a sustainable mobility model aligned with European environmental objectives and the green transition. The projects will also support local economic development and improve connectivity between urban and suburban areas.
5. **Reducing territorial disparities and developing small urban areas:** The SW Oltenia RP promotes integrated development of urban and functional urban areas by addressing economic, social, and environmental challenges, including utilizing natural heritage and promoting tourism. Interventions under Priority 7 (SO 5.1) are implemented through TDS/IUDS governance mechanisms, ensuring complementarity with other projects and facilitating the addressing of multiple functions within the same project (economic, social, environmental). The programme also supports improving the administrative capacity of local public authorities through experience exchanges and training sessions on urban regeneration and sustainable utilization of cultural and tourism heritage. By December 2024, 36 projects for integrated territorial development of urban areas were contracted, with a total value of 117.4 million euro, representing 54.15% of the total allocation for SO 5.1. The implemented projects will contribute to reducing territorial disparities and achieving balanced urban development, having a positive impact on the quality of life in local communities.

Additionally, to respond to the Country-Specific Recommendations, the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme proposes the introduction of SO 4.3 – promoting the socio-economic inclusion of marginalized communities, low-income households and disadvantaged groups, including people with special needs, through integrated actions targeting housing and social services. This will fund integrated actions aimed at constructing/rehabilitating/modernizing/extending social housing.





Furthermore, to strengthen the regional innovation and competitiveness ecosystem, the SW Oltenia RP proposes the integration of a funding action dedicated to strategic technologies (STEP). This measure will support large enterprises active in emerging fields such as clean and efficient technologies, biotechnology, and digital technologies, under the new Priority 9 and Specific Objective 1.6. Supporting investments that contribute to the objectives of the Strategic Technology Platform for Europe (STEP platform).

Progress in the implementation of NIECCP and EPSR

The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme contributes, through the interventions supported within Priorities 3 and 4, to the objectives of the National Integrated Energy and Climate Change Plan (NIECCP). In addition to interventions related to these objectives with a direct contribution to the NIECCP, a number of specific objectives have been identified that indirectly support energy and climate objectives, through the nature of the funded actions and/or the criteria included in the applicant guides, namely SO 1.1, SO 1.3, SO 1.4 (P1), SO 3.2 (P5), SO 4.2 (P6), SO 5.1, and SO 5.2 (P7). The largest contribution to the NIECCP objectives was identified in the case of SO 2.1, which supports investments in the deep renovation of existing public buildings in urban and rural areas and investments in residential buildings to ensure/increase energy efficiency, as well as the completion of phased projects (public buildings, residential buildings, street lighting) from the previous funding period (these meet the support conditions set previously but will also contribute to SO 2.1). The projects contracted by 31st of December 2024, under this SO will contribute to the NIECCP objectives by improving energy performance in 213 homes and 159,061 square meters of public buildings. In the long term, the expected results aim to reduce annual primary energy consumption in the targeted homes and public buildings and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The interventions supported under SO 2.7 aim to ensure the optimal conservation status of habitats, the ecological restoration of degraded ecosystems, and the recovery of native populations, in line with the Priority Action Framework for Natura 2000 in Romania for the period 2021-2027. Considering the lack of a direct connection between the indicators of SO 2.7 and the NIECCP objectives, an exact contribution of this SO cannot be highlighted. However, the qualitative analysis of the projects contracted by 31st of December 2024, shows that the projects financed under this SO are relevant to the objectives related to decarbonization, with investments primarily targeting the modernization of green spaces in parks and the rehabilitation and revitalization of degraded green infrastructures.

SO 2.8 contributes to the NIECCP through the specific nature of the funded activities, which address environmental and climate challenges through investments in public transport that contribute to the reduction of carbon emissions. Data from the monitoring system indicate favorable conditions for the projects contracted by 31st of December 2024, under this SO to achieve the final targets, especially





regarding the development of infrastructure for public collective transport (100%), the capacity of ecological rolling stock for public transport (97.13%), and the number of cities and municipalities with new or modernized digitalized urban transport systems (76.92%). All of these indicators directly contribute to the NIECCP objective in the field of urban mobility, limiting the growth of emissions from transport.

Additionally, through the supported actions and measures, the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme contributes to the EU's main objectives for 2030 regarding employment, skills and poverty reduction. Although the programme is still in its early implementation stage, the projects supported and implemented under RSO 4.2 will directly contribute to the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Furthermore, the programme includes horizontal measures that contribute to the implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which have been introduced in all project calls. Compliance with national provisions regarding equal opportunities, inclusion, and non-discrimination is an eligibility condition within the applicant guides. The programme ensures the fulfillment of these objectives at the level of the funded interventions by including clear conditions in the guides regarding gender equality, prohibition of any actions that may lead to discrimination, prohibition of any actions that contribute to segregation or exclusion in any form, and facilitating access for persons with reduced mobility.

It is recommended to introduce RSO 4.3. within Priority 6, which will have a direct contribution to the objectives of the EPSR.

Socio-economic situation of the region with a focus on territorial needs

The socio-economic analysis carried out at the level of each programme priority shows that the main development challenges identified during the initial phase of the SW Oltenia RP's development remain valid and relevant today.

Progress made in achieving the milestone objectives

For the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme, 34 output indicators and 22 unique result indicators were established. Among these, milestone objectives were set only for Priority 1, SO 1.4, Priority 2, SO 1.2, Priority 7, SO 5.1, and Priority 8. This decision was justified, on the one hand, by the late approval of the programme, which reduced the time available to achieve concrete results by the end of 2024, and, on the other hand, by the complexity of certain interventions, particularly those involving infrastructure, where results can only be quantified upon the completion of works based on reception documents. In many cases, setting intermediate objectives was not considered feasible.

Monitoring data as of 31st of December 2024, indicates a lack of progress in achieving the milestones when compared to the operations implemented. However, it is noted that, based on the operations selected by





Cofinanțat de
Uniunea Europeană



31st December 2024, a satisfactory level of target achievement has been reached in most cases (P1, P7, P8), except for those selected under Priority 2. At the same time, significant progress has been observed in launching project calls, approving and contracting projects. Additionally, there has been high interest from potential beneficiaries, as for several calls, the eligible value of submitted projects exceeded the available allocations.



AUTORITATE DE MANAGEMENT
PROGRAMUL REGIONAL SV OLTENIA
www.adroltenia.ro
www.pr2021-2027.adroltenia.ro
facebook.com/adrsvoltenia

DEZVOLTĂM OLTENIA!

Conținutul acestui material nu reprezintă în mod obligatoriu poziția oficială a Uniunii Europene, a Guvernului României sau a Autorității de Management pentru Programul Regional Sud-Vest Oltenia 2021-2027.



VII. Proposals

The following is a series of recommendations based on the results and findings from the analysis conducted in this evaluation report. The recommendations are structured according to the chapters of the report.

Programme progress analysis:

From the analysis of the programme's implementation status as of 31st of December 2024, it is clear that the following modifications are necessary at programme level:

- **Proposal 1:** Transferring amounts between specific objectives or intervention codes, as follows:
 - Transfer a sum from code 040 - Energy efficiency and demonstration projects in SMEs to code 021 - Business development and internationalization of SMEs, including productive investments, within P1.
 - Reallocate part of the remaining funds in Priority 2, RSO 1.2 (intervention code 013. Digitalization of SMEs) to RSO 1.3 (intervention code 021. Business development and internationalization of SMEs, including productive investments) under Priority 1. Following the reallocation of funds, it is recommended to update the final targets as well.
 - Reallocate part of the available funds under P2, RSO 1.2, to the newly created Priority 9, RSO 1.6 - Supporting investments contributing to the objectives of the Strategic Technologies Platform for Europe (STEP platform), associated with intervention areas 188 (Productive investments in large enterprises primarily in the field of clean and resource-efficient technologies), 190 (Productive investments in large enterprises primarily in the field of biotechnology), and 192 (Productive investments in large enterprises primarily in the field of digital technologies and innovations in deep technologies).
 - Reallocate part of the available funds in Priority 3, RSO 2.7 (intervention code 079) to RSO 2.1. Thus, it is recommended to transfer all unspent amounts for SO 2.7 (including amounts reserved within the Flexibility Quantum) for financing projects on the reserve list related to the call "*Investments in public buildings for increasing energy efficiency*," SO 2.1, which are currently funded from the State Budget, code 045.
 - Reallocate part of the available funds under Priority 7 (RSO 5.1 and RSO 5.2) to Priority 6, RSO 4.3 – Promoting the socio-economic inclusion of marginalized communities, low-



income households, and disadvantaged groups, including people with special needs, through integrated actions targeting housing and social services.

These proposed changes, including the reallocation of flexibility amounts, will not affect the thematic concentrations, as they involve reallocations within the same policy objectives.

- **Proposal 2:** Intensifying efforts to launch calls for proposals:
 - Launch calls for proposals within the specific objectives where progress analysis has highlighted delays, for example, within RSO 1.1 and 1.4.
 - Launch a new call “*Investments in public buildings for increasing energy efficiency – Call 2*” (under SO 2.1), considering the high interest at the regional level for improving energy efficiency in public buildings.
 - Launch calls for proposals for newly adopted initiatives, under RSO 1.6 and RSO 4.3.
 - Given the importance of investments in educational infrastructure, as supported by the context analysis, it is recommended to promote open calls and offer technical assistance to potential beneficiaries to facilitate the project submission process within this priority.

Country-Specific Recommendations:

Although the actions and interventions of SW Oltenia RP align well with the country-specific recommendations, improvements and adjustments are needed, such as:

- **Proposal 3:** Given the significant role in stimulating economic competitiveness of enterprises, increasing turnover, and generating new jobs at the regional level, as well as insufficient financial resources to cover their needs, it is recommended to reallocate any available funds from other SO to supplement the financial allocation of Priority 1, SO 1.3.
- **Proposal 4:** To increase the programme’s contribution to meeting the country-specific recommendations on the development of the research, development, and innovation sector, efforts should be intensified to launch project calls focused on investments in expanding RDI capacities and adopting advanced technologies (SO 1.1, Priority 1).
- **Proposal 5:** To strengthen the regional innovation and competitiveness ecosystem, SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 proposes integrating a funding action for STEP technologies. This measure will be supported by introducing a new priority within the programme, namely Priority 9: Strategic Technologies, with RSO 1.6 – Supporting investments that contribute to the objectives of the Strategic Technologies Platform for Europe (STEP platform).



- **Proposal 6:** Regarding energy performance improvement, given the high interest of beneficiaries in these types of interventions, it is recommended to supplement the funds dedicated to SO 2.1 by redistributing unspent amounts from SO 2.7, where the contracting level is below expectations.
- **Proposal 7:** To respond to the Country-Specific Recommendations, SW Oltenia RP 2021-2027 proposes including an action dedicated to social housing for vulnerable groups. The proposal will be integrated within Priority 6 (which will be renamed Modern Education and Inclusion) and RSO 4.3 – Promoting the socio-economic inclusion of marginalized communities, low-income households, and disadvantaged groups, including people with special needs, through integrated actions targeting housing and social services.

NIECCP:

To maximize the impact of SW Oltenia RP on NIECCP objectives, the following recommendations may be considered:

- **Proposal 8:** To intensify SW Oltenia RP's contribution to NIECCP, it is recommended to allocate additional funds to SO 2.1, as this specific objective makes the most concrete and relevant contribution to the NIECCP objectives.
- **Proposal 9:** Given the absence of intermediate objectives for the indicators related to SO 2.1, SO 2.7 and SO 2.8, due to the specifics of the interventions, it is recommended to closely monitor the progress of the indicators to identify any risks in meeting the established targets and take corrective measures (monitoring can be done annually, starting with the second year of the investment implementation).
- **Proposal 10:** It is recommended that future impact evaluation activities for SW Oltenia RP focus also on differentiating the programme's contribution to climate change mitigation (through interventions targeting energy efficiency, for example) and adaptation to climate change.

EPSR:

To further enhance the coherence of the programme and its contribution to the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the following proposals are made:

- **Proposal 11:** The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme proposes integrating funding for social housing within Priority 6, Specific Objective 4.3, by allocating funds for the construction/reconstruction/modernization/expansion of social housing. These measures directly contribute to increasing access to social housing and play a fundamental role in implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights, especially by improving equality of opportunities and access to



the labor market, as well as reducing social exclusion and improving the quality of life in disadvantaged communities. The availability, accessibility, and sustainability of decent housing are increasingly important concerns for EU citizens, especially for the most vulnerable groups.

- **Proposal 12:** The South-West Oltenia Regional Programme proposes funding large enterprises in STEP sectors, thus contributing to increasing employment in high value-added industries. Investments in strategic STEP industries such as clean technologies, biotechnology, and digital technologies support the development of a skilled workforce and the creation of quality jobs, aligning with the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights.
- **Proposal 13:** It is recommended to collect information on employment in a differentiated manner among women and youth, at least based on a sample of projects and/or through ad-hoc surveys or evaluation activities, within the specific objectives where the indicators RCR01 and RCR102 are reported.
- **Proposal 14:** Future evaluation activities can also focus on complementing the information collected through the monitoring system with specific elements of interest to the European Pillar of Social Rights, such as: equal opportunities, gender equality, active support for employment, child care and support for children, health care, inclusion of people with disabilities and vulnerable groups, housing and assistance for homeless people, access to essential services, education, training, and lifelong learning.

Cross-cutting recommendations:

- **Proposal 15:** It is proposed to unlock the flexibility amounts and reallocate them according to the proposals presented in chapter 4.5. Progress in achieving the milestones.
- **Proposal 16:** Given the anticipated challenges faced by beneficiaries in implementing projects, it is recommended to organize information and support sessions for beneficiaries in the later stages of project implementation to facilitate addressing potential issues that may arise, where such a need is identified among beneficiaries/there is interest from them.



VIII. Action plan for implementing the evaluation recommendations

The following table represents an initial indicative proposal for an action plan to implement the recommendations/proposals formulated in this evaluation report.

Proposal	Description	Period	Responsible entity
Proposal 1; Proposal 3; Proposal 5; Proposal 6; Proposal 7; Proposal 8; Proposal 15.	<p>Transfer of funds between specific objectives or intervention codes and the reallocation of the flexibility amount in accordance with this reallocation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer of an amount from code 040 - Energy efficiency and demonstrative projects in SMEs to code 021 - Commercial development and internationalization of SMEs, including productive investments, within Priority 1; • Reallocation of part of the remaining funds available under Priority 2, RSO 1.2 (intervention code 013. Digitization of SMEs) to RSO 1.3 (intervention code 021. Commercial development and internationalization of SMEs, including productive investments) within Priority 1; • Reallocation of part of the available funds within P2, RSO 1.2, to Priority 1, RSO 1.6 - Supporting investments that contribute to the objectives of the Strategic Technologies Platform for Europe (STEP platform), associated with intervention areas 188 (Productive investments in large enterprises mainly related to clean and efficient technologies from the perspective of resource use), 190 (Productive investments in large enterprises mainly related to biotechnology), and 192 (Productive investments in large enterprises mainly related to digital technologies and innovations in deep technologies). 	2025	Managing Authority



Proposal	Description	Period	Responsible entity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reallocation of part of the available funds under Priority 3, RSO 2.7 (intervention code 079) to RSO 2.1, code 045. Thus, it is recommended to transfer all unspent amounts related to OS 2.7 (including amounts reserved under the Flexibility Quantum) for financing projects on the reserve list of the call "Investments in public buildings to increase energy efficiency," SO 2.1, which are currently funded from the state budget; Reallocation of part of the available funds under P7 (RSO 5.1 and RSO 5.2 phased projects), to Priority 6, RSO 4.3 – Promoting the socio-economic inclusion of marginalized communities, low-income households, and disadvantaged groups, including people with special needs, through integrated actions targeting housing and social services. <p>Updating the final targets as a result of the reallocation of funds.</p>		
Proposal 5; Proposal 7; Proposal 11; Proposal 12.	<p>The introduction of two new specific objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Considering the opportunities provided by the STEP platform initiative, it is recommended to create a new Priority – Priority 9. Strategic technologies, in which to introduce RSO 1.6 - Supporting investments that contribute to the objectives of the Strategic Technologies Platform for Europe (STEP platform) be introduced within Priority 1 of the program. It is recommended to reallocate any available funds from other specific objectives for the financial allocation of RSO 1.6. ➤ Based on country-specific recommendations regarding poverty reduction and social inclusion, including providing social housing for vulnerable households, it is recommended to rename Priority 6 as "Modern Education and Inclusion," and introduce RSO 4.3 - Promoting the socio-economic inclusion of marginalized communities, low-income 	2025	Managing Authority



Proposal	Description	Period	Responsible entity
	households, and disadvantaged groups, including persons with special needs, through integrated actions targeting housing and social services.		
Proposal 2; Proposal 4.	<p>Intensifying efforts to launch project calls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launching project calls within the specific objectives where the progress analysis has highlighted delays: for example, within RSO 1.1 and 1.4. • Launching a new call "Investments in public buildings for improving energy efficiency – Call 2" (under SO 2.1), considering the significant regional interest in enhancing the energy efficiency of public buildings. • Launching project calls for the newly adopted initiatives under RSO 1.6 and RSO 4.3. • Considering the importance of investments in educational infrastructure, supported by the context analysis, it is recommended to promote open calls and provide technical assistance to potential beneficiaries to facilitate the project submission process within this priority. 	2025	Managing Authority
Proposal 9	Careful monitoring of the progress of the indicators related to SO 2.1, SO 2.7, and SO 2.8, in order to identify any potential risks in achieving the established targets and take corrective actions if necessary.	2025-2029	Managing Authority
Proposal 13	<p>Collection of additional data and monitoring of indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collecting information regarding labor force participation, differentiated by gender and age group, particularly among women and youth, based on at least a sample of projects and/or through ad-hoc surveys or evaluation activities, under the specific objectives where indicators RCR01 and RCR102 exist. 	2025-2029	Managing Authority



Proposal	Description	Period	Responsible entity
Proposal 10; Proposal 14.	<p>Future evaluation activities may also be focused on specific areas of interest, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiating the programme's contribution to climate change mitigation (through interventions targeting energy efficiency, for example) and adaptation to climate change. The principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, such as: equal opportunities, gender equality, active support for employment, childcare and support for children, healthcare, inclusion of people with disabilities and vulnerable groups, housing and support for homeless individuals, access to essential services, education, training, and lifelong learning. 	2025 - 2029	Managing Authority
Proposal 16	Organizing information and support sessions for beneficiaries in the later stages of project implementation to facilitate addressing potential issues that may arise.	2025 - 2029	Managing Authority



IX. Lessons learned for improving fund absorption and enhancing the system of indicators and statistical data required for future evaluations

The implementation of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme 2021-2027 has highlighted several essential lessons for optimizing the fund management process and increasing the efficiency of monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

The 2021-2027 programming period marked a significant change for RDA South-West Oltenia, which acquired the status of Managing Authority, replacing its previous role as an Intermediate Body. This transition generated new challenges and responsibilities for ADR which, although it did not necessarily perceive the change as an administrative burden, faced increased complexity in its tasks. Some of the main challenges resulting from RDA SW Oltenia's new role include the responsibility of making strategic and operational decisions and managing the heightened expectations from beneficiaries, especially regarding the support provided in the implementation process.

From the beneficiaries' perspective, this change was perceived positively, as they reported in interviews and focus groups a simplification of procedures compared to the 2014-2020 ROP period. The evaluation and contracting processes have been significantly shortened, and the processing time for reimbursement requests has been considerably reduced, facilitating project implementation.

The key lessons learned that can facilitate the improvement of fund absorption and the efficient preparation for future programming periods are outlined below:

- **Prioritizing the launch of calls based on milestones:** One of the identified challenges was the need to better align the launch of project calls with the milestone objectives set at the programme level, ensuring that calls with performance framework milestones are prioritized.
- **Aligning reporting for phased projects:** The Managing Authority identified differences in how targets were set at the beneficiary level for phased projects. In the 2014-2020 programming period, the definition of indicators was different, and although phased projects adopted indicators from the current programming period, reporting revealed discrepancies (in some cases, even the unit of measurement was different).
- **Ensuring the accuracy of beneficiary reports to maintain correct data aggregation in MySMIS:** The quality of programme progress analyses directly depends on the accuracy of the data reported by beneficiaries. Thorough verification of information related to indicators, intervention fields and





codes used in MySMIS is essential to prevent data aggregation errors and to ensure that strategic decisions are based on correct and consistent data.

- **Increasing beneficiary involvement in the preparation of project calls and the development of applicant guidelines:** Although the MA organized consultation sessions and published applicant guidelines for public debate, the level of engagement from potential beneficiaries was low, with only a limited number of suggestions or modification proposals submitted. However, their interest increases significantly when they start preparing funding applications—a stage at which the guidelines have already been approved and can no longer be adjusted.





X. Annexes

Annex 10.1 Bibliography

Annex 10.2 Literature review

Annex 10.3 Reconstruction of the theory of change and refined intervention logic based on evaluation findings, if applicable

Annex 10.4 Evaluability study

Annex 10.5 List of interviewed persons

Annex 10.6 Survey analysis Report

Annex 10.7 Case studies

Annex 10.8 Benchmarking analysis

Annex 10.9 Consultation of the panel of experts

Annex 10.10 Database



List of figures

Figure 1 The financial allocation of SW Oltenia RP at the level of Policy Objectives	17
Figure 2 Value of submitted projects out of total financial allocation as of 31.12.2024 (%)	20
Figure 3 Regional competitiveness index in the South-West Oltenia region, compared to the European Union average	100
Figure 4 SMEs that introduced product innovations - left and SMEs that introduced innovative business processes - right (% of total SMEs).....	101
Figure 5 RDI performance, aggregated EIS indicators	104
Figure 6 Share of RDI expenditures at regional level in the national total (2021)	106
Figure 7 International scientific co-publications and public-private co-publications.....	109
Figure 8 Licences and patent applications (left licences, right patents)	110
Figure 9 NGA broadband coverage, by county, 2023	113
Figure 10 Share of SMEs reaching the basic level of digital intensity, compared to other Member States (2023)	114
Figure 11 Positioning of e-government in EU Member States, depending on the combination of penetration and digitalization performances	115
Figure 12 Digital public services for businesses at EU Member State level (score 0-100)	116
Figure 13 Degree of energy independence (MU: %).....	119
Figure 14 Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption, 2019-2022 (UM: %)	120
Figure 15 Green space index, in the counties of the South-West Oltenia region, in 2023 (MU: m ² /inhabitant)	121
Figure 16 New registrations of road vehicles for passenger transport in the South-West Oltenia Region (MU: no.)	125
Figure 17 No. of passengers/km travelled by buses, minibuses, trams and trolleybuses in the South-West Oltenia Region (MU: million passengers/km)	126
Figure 18 Distribution of public roads at regional level, depending on the type of covering, year 2023 (MU: %)	128
Figure 19 Distribution of public roads at county level, depending on the type of covering, year 2023 (MU: %)	129
Figure 20 Educational units in the counties of the South-West Oltenia region, in the period 2019-2023.....	132
Figure 21 Structure of educational units in the South-West Oltenia region, in 2023 (MU: no. units).....	133
Figure 22 School population in the South-West Oltenia region, in the period 2020-2023.....	134
Figure 23 Early school leaving rate for young people (18-24 years old)	137
Figure 24 Percentage of tertiary education graduates aged 25 to 34.....	138
Figure 25 Number of tourist reception structures, by development regions and counties, 2019-2023 ..	140
Figure 26 Number of tourist reception structures, by development regions and counties, 2019-2023 ..	141
Figure 27 Tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation functions, by type of structure, in the South-West Oltenia region, 2019-2023	141
Figure 28 Existing tourist accommodation capacity by development regions, 2019-2023	142



Figure 29 Tourist arrivals in tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation functions, by type of tourist, in the South-West Oltenia region, 2019-2023.....	142
Figure 30 Overnight stays in tourist accommodation facilities by type of tourist, in the South-West Oltenia region, 2019-2023.....	143
Figure 31 Average distribution of stays by counties of the South-West Oltenia region, in 2023	143
Figure 32 Net utilization index of tourist accommodation capacity in operation, by development region and nationally, 2019-2024.....	144
Figure 33 Net utilization index of tourist accommodation capacity in operation, by counties of the South-West Oltenia region, 2019-2024	144
Figure 34 Share of tourism in GDP, in Romania, 2014-2021	145
Figure 35 Surface area of green spaces by counties of the South-West Oltenia region, 2019-2023.....	145
Figure 36. Number of historical monuments in each county of the SV Oltenia region, 2015	146
Figure 37 Number of libraries by development regions, 2019-2023	147
Figure 38 Number of libraries by counties of the South-West Oltenia development region, 2019-2023	147
Figure 39 Museums and public collections by counties of the South-West Oltenia region, 2019-2023	148
Figure 40 State budget expenditures for culture, recreation and religion, 2014-2022, (Millions of lei) ..	148
Figure 41 Share of people who submitted completed forms to public authorities via the internet, in the last 12 months, 2015-2021	151
Figure 42 Share of people who interacted with public authorities via the internet, in the last 12 months, 2015-2021	152



List of tables

Tabel no. 1 Overview of EU climate amount performance (October 2024).....	73
Tabel no. 2 Overview of EU climate amount performance at the level of SW Oltenia RP (October 2024) – Values are in EUR	74
Tabel no. 3 Overview of the performance and contribution of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme to the European Pillar of Social Rights – Values are expressed in EUR	95
Tabel no. 4 Overview of the performance and contribution of the South-West Oltenia Regional Programme to the European Pillar of Social Rights for the selected areas of intervention (October and December 2024) – Values are expressed in EUR.....	96
Tabel no. 5 Întreprinderi nou create active, la un an de la înființare (UM: nr. întreprinderi)	102
Tabel no. 6 RDI expenditures in the South-West Oltenia region and share in total county GDP (2021) ..	107
Tabel no. 7 1 Employees in RDI activity, per 1000 employed persons	107
Tabel no. 8. 2 Mortality due to road accidents	130
Tabel no. 9 3 School laboratories by development regions and counties, in the period 2020-2023 (MU: number)	133
Tabel no. 10 4 Graduates by development regions and counties, in the period 2019-2022	135
Tabel no. 11 5 Teaching staff, by development region, in the period 2020-2023	135
6 Tabel no. 12 Early childhood education participation rate of children aged 3 to the official compulsory school age (MU: %)	136
Tabel no. 13 Milestones 2024	155
Tabel no. 14 Total financial credits per fund and per national co-financing	162