Recurrent evaluation of the achievement of OPTA objectives for the period 2021 – 2027
2nd interim report

Management summary

Management Summary

Evaluation: definition and context

The evaluation report focuses on the Operational Programme Technical Assistance (OPTA) for the period 2021–2027, which is key to ensuring the successful implementation of EU funds in the Czech Republic. The programme pursues several objectives, including increasing the expertise of staff involved in the implementation of the funds, improving administrative capacity and optimising methodological processes.
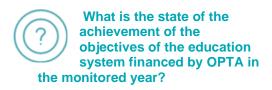
The evaluation of the OPTA programme takes place regularly once a year and provides feedback to the OPTA Managing Authority and the European Commission. It focuses on eight evaluation areas, including staff training, administrative capacity and the effectiveness of implementation processes. The aim of the evaluation is to monitor the progress of the programme, identify obstacles and propose measures to remove them in order to ensure the effective implementation of the programme objectives. The key objective is to ensure the replication of data collection each year in order to assess changes and trends in the implementation of the OPTA.

The evaluation was carried out in eight thematic areas, defined in the terms of reference documentation and elaborated in the Initial Evaluation Report, and one ad-hoc area specific to 2025:

- - Education
- - Setting up processes/methodological framework of OPTA
- - Administrative capacity of implementation supported by OPTA
- - Administrative costs of implementation – personnel costs
- - Personnel costs – satisfaction
- - Information and monitoring system
- - Support of Digital Information Agency and MoI
- - Institutional trust
- - LAG needs for the 2028+ programming period (specific topic of this interim report)

Training of staff of the EU funds implementation structure has sufficient capacity and covers relevant topics even in the second year of evaluation. Approximately one third of staff still do not participate in training, mainly due to time constraints and different needs

In the area of education, the majority of employees of the implementation structure have **sufficient information about available education** and this education also shows **sufficient capacity**. However, approximately a **third of employees of the implementation structure do not participate in education**. According to the data found, the reason is neither insufficient information nor a lack of education capacity.

What is the state of the achievement of the objectives of the education system financed by OPTA in the monitored year?

Interest in education courses is regularly monitored and the offer is adjusted to this demand. The primary reason for the non-participation of some employees in education is the lack of time and the fact that the offer does not fully meet their needs (similarly to the previous year). **The overall assessment of the system remains stably positive even in comparison with 2024**. These results confirm that the Education System is mainly perceived by the target group as a functional and beneficial tool. Critical feedback is marginal and concerns only a very small part of the respondents.

What are the main difficulties in administering educational courses?

The coordinator of the education system perceives the demand for new topics and tries to respond to it. Some of the topics proposed last year have already been included in the offer (e.g. the issue of the Do no significant harm principle). However, the key barrier to expanding the education system to include new topics is the long-term **lack of suitable lecturers**. Behind this lack, one can see the reluctance of managers to release key employees as education lecturers, and above all the lack of motivation of experienced employees of the implementation structure due to **low financial reward**. One of the causes of low financial reward is the ToR for education suppliers in the Education System.

The area of Specific Education was also part of the survey in 2025. 63% of relevant respondents have sufficient information about this option. Almost half of these respondents (46%) participated in some form of specific education in 2024. The respondents most often used **language education** - more than half of those who participated in specific education completed a language course. Another area was **foreign workshops and training**, which confirmed the interest in international cooperation. Specific training also included tailor-made courses with diverse content (e.g. project management, working with digital tools) and, to a lesser extent, individual coaching focused on personal development in the relevant group of employees. Participants rated the specific training mostly very positively..

The proposed recommendations in the field of education focus primarily on the issue of availability of hybrid and online courses, as well as on the terms of public procurement through which the Education System is implemented. According to information available from interviews in 2025, both issues are currently being addressed.

Methodological support and communication with MA staff is at a good level; more attention could be paid to clarifying and communicating changes in the methodological environment.

Beneficiaries of OPTA support express a **high level of satisfaction** year-on-year with methodological support and communication with MA staff. Overall, **satisfaction has even increased** slightly year-on-year. In 2025, 32% of respondents are definitely satisfied with the settings (19% in 2024) and 65% of respondents are **rather satisfied** (73% in 2024). Nevertheless, specific difficulties have been identified that limit the effective management of OPTA projects. The most important ones include, above all, **the scope and fragmentation of rules and procedures among a number of partial documents** and annexes, differences in the requirements of individual operational programs, which complicate or increase the administrative burden in the event that an applicant draws support from multiple programs, and last but not least, the fact that **methodological documents are written generally for all types of projects and beneficiaries**, not specifically.

To what extent does the OPTA management documentation create an effective framework for implementation?

In relation to **updates and amendments** to the Rules for Applicants and Beneficiaries (hereinafter referred to as the "Rules for Applicants and Beneficiaries"), in addition to the frequency of these amendments, the main subject of criticism is the **lack of clarity** of updates, the form of processing updates and amendments, when specific changes and their impacts are not apparent from the updates made at first glance. In 2025, changes were made to the clarity of shared documents, therefore a more positive assessment can be expected in the coming years.

The procedures themselves for beneficiaries of support in OPTA are **rather less time-consuming** than in the case of other operational programmes, and the requirements of the management documentation do not represent an unreasonable administrative burden. The recommendations are therefore aimed more at making this framework clearer than at amending processes in the sense of reducing the administrative burden. At the same time, however, beneficiaries also place emphasis on a stable environment, therefore even long-term non-interference in the existing system can be perceived positively..

How effectively is communication set up between the MA and beneficiaries regarding the setting of rules for beneficiaries and the MA's requirements?

Feedback in relation to communication between the MA and beneficiaries is very positive, especially the **stability of the team** on the MA side and the fact that the beneficiary has **only one project manager*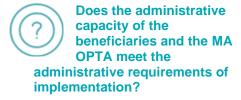* with whom it communicates everything is highlighted. The friendliness of communication on the MA side and its transparency are rated very highly. The "**partnership approach" and the speed of responses** are also highlighted. In 2024 and 2025, almost 100% of respondents to the questionnaire survey know who to contact in case of ambiguities, and most of them also appreciate the willingness and speed of responses..

Recommendations in the area of processes and methodological framework focus on strengthening and maintaining clarity by updating key documents and also propose specific options to make working with methodologies easier and clearer, especially for less experienced recipients.

The administrative capacity meets the implementation requirements and is comparable (or better) to other OPs, mainly thanks to the introduction of flat rates, which are a significant benefit. However, some beneficiaries are limited by the low percentage of flat rates.

The administrative capacity on the part of beneficiaries and the MA **corresponds to the administrative requirements of the implementation** of the OPTA in 2024 and 2025. The main benefit is the introduction of flat rates and the reduction of obligations regarding reporting monitoring indicators. There were no fundamental changes in this area year-on-year.**.**

Does the administrative capacity of the beneficiaries and the MA OPTA meet the administrative requirements of implementation?

What are the sources of potential administrative burden in implementing OPTA?

One of the main sources of excessive administrative burden on beneficiaries is the **short project cycle**, or rather the need to submit new and largely identical projects, e.g. every two years. This incentive appears in 2024 and 2025, but according to current information, this interval will probably be further shortened for some beneficiaries..

Flat rates

What impact does the introduction of flat-rate financing of other costs have on the administrative capacities of the MA and beneficiaries??

In relation to the introduction of flat rates, the **feedback has been very positive in the long term**, especially from regional partners. In the case of larger institutions, some of their representatives have observed that, rather than reducing the administrative burden, the introduction of flat rates has led to the **transfer of this burden to other employees** (who are often not directly involved in the implementation of the OPTA). However, the causes of this problem lie in the internal regulations and processes of these institutions, not on the OPTA side - they cannot be solved by the program.

Despite the very positive feedback, some flat rate limits were noted, which may have a negative impact on the implementation of the OPTA. The biggest criticism is the low amount of flat rates (20%). This amount is considered insufficient mainly by regional actors (in 2024, especially LAGs, in 2025, also ITIs). According to respondents, the flat rates are lower than in other programs used, which leads to a reduction in spending on other ancillary costs.

The limits on personal expenses were also considered too low. However, the OPTA MA proceeded with an increase (without changing the overall allocation), which allowed some beneficiaries to better distribute costs. The perceived adequacy of remuneration also improved slightly in 2025 thanks to this increase, which was reflected mainly in interviews with regional partners and focus groups with LAG representatives.

Flat rates also partially complicate the financial management of projects - due to fluctuations in wage costs, uncertainty arises in the availability of funds. Failure to draw down flat rates in a given year causes problems with their transfer to the following period, especially in state administration. However, beneficiaries manage to **resolve these complications over time.**

Despite the above-mentioned partial criticisms, the vast majority of participants find flat rates beneficial because they significantly reduced the administrative burden associated with the implementation of programs - especially reporting.

Recommendations in the area of administrative capacity and administrative requirements of implementation mainly elaborate on key bottlenecks that have been identified – conditions and parameters, especially in Call No. 3, concerning the maximum possible project implementation period, the length of reporting periods, and possibly the amount of lump sums.

Most internal and external users of the information and monitoring system are rather satisfied with the user-friendliness, but a significant number of users formulate a number of complaints.

What is the perception of user-friendliness of CSSF21+ and ISKP21+, and the usefulness of selected functionalities?

Most internal users are **rather satisfied with the MS2021+** monitoring system. In 2024, 74% of respondents were satisfied with the monitoring system, and in 2025, 83%. Due to their increasing experience, users are **less likely to find themselves in situations where they do not know how to proceed**. This increasing level of experienced users is also evident in the results of the questionnaire survey. In 2024, 78% of respondents had been working with the MS2021+ system for more than a year, and in 2025, this figure was 90%. Most users also **give rather positive feedback regarding manuals**, training and other tools that are intended to make their work in the system easier. Most respondents are familiar with the possibilities of training using e-learning and consider e-learning to be rather beneficial.

Positive evaluations prevailed among internal users. If respondents mentioned any complaints, they were rather general in nature and did not vary much from year to year (clarification, acceleration, system lightening, the need for too many "clicks" for a partial action, etc.) or users mentioned specific difficulties (uploading attachments, system speed, problems with logging in, etc.). A frequent request is the ability to open multiple tabs/windows on the screen. In open responses, many users also address, like ISKP21+ users, **the separation of the public procurement module from the project module, which in their opinion is not intuitive and significantly complicates working with the system.**

External users also made a number of comments on user-friendliness and, more generally, on the functioning of the system. In addition to rather technical complaints, one can mention, for example, **requests for better connection with other state administration systems**, and a number of respondents specifically expressed dissatisfaction with the new solution for the public procurement module - similarly to the case of internal users.

The level of awareness about the available technical support through the Technical Call Line and other user support tools is rather low. Most respondents do not even know about the existence of instructional videos. However, the proportion of those who not only know about these tools but also use them is increasing slightly year-on-year. Those users who know about the existence of the tools and have used them in the past mostly consider them useful, which is why it makes sense to provide further information about them. In relation to the change in the method of logging into the ISKP21+ system, **most respondents stated that they no longer have a major problem with this change** and their satisfaction with this solution is increasing year-on-year.

The recommendations in this section focus primarily on increasing awareness of technical support options, strengthening e-learning and better linking project and procurement modules, and further simplifying and strengthening a more user-friendly environment.

Regional partners highly value trust in their relationship with the MA and other partners in the region.

How does institutional trust develop over time between OPTA beneficiaries at the regional level, the MA and relevant stakeholders?

The feedback from representatives of regional partners regarding **institutional trust is very positive in 2025, especially in relation to the OPTA MA**. Almost all respondents in both years of measurement perceive **cooperation with the MA as a partnership-like and communication is described as transparent and helpful, while the stability and long-term cooperation with one project manager increase trust. Only slightly lower is** the share of respondents who feel like partners for other institutions in the region. Trust is influenced by informal relationships and personal contacts between regional partners and key stakeholders. The stability of teams and the long-term operation of LAGs in the region contribute positively to this trust. In 2025, the needs of LAGs for the 2028+ programming period were also newly mapped. Current findings from the questionnaire survey and focus group discussions point to **growing uncertainty** associated with financing, maintaining capacities and expanding the roles of LAGs in new areas. From the perspective of further development of activities, LAGs assessed that additional support for **strategic planning and cooperation** to ensure stability, which would enable their long-term operation without dependence on ad hoc subsidy calls, as most needed..

Evaluation methodology

The main method of data collection in 2025 was also a questionnaire survey, which followed on from the questionnaire survey conducted in 2024.

In 2024, data was collected in two phases - a pilot survey took place in February and March 2024, followed by a full survey from April to May 2024. The questionnaires were created after consultations with key stakeholders (including the evaluation of the pilot collection) and were divided into 11 thematic areas that reflected the various areas on which the evaluation is focused - education, methodological framework, wages, information and monitoring systems, or trust in institutions, etc. Each questionnaire was adapted to a specific target group. A total of seven of these target groups were defined, namely recipients of support, project implementers, external and internal users of the information system, beneficiaries of support from OPTA, subject matter experts and the e-Government team.

A total of 972 responses were obtained, which provided a quantitative basis for evaluating the implementation of the program in areas such as education, methodological framework, administration and e-Government.

In 2025, a questionnaire survey was conducted from May to July 2025. The content of the questionnaires followed the questions from the previous survey with minor adjustments to allow for year-on-year comparisons of the results.

In addition to the questionnaire survey, four other evaluation methods were used to provide deeper insight and context:

1. Content analysis focused on relevant documents related to the implementation of the OPTA, such as annual reports, program documents and methodological guidelines. The aim was to assess the effectiveness of the processes and procedures associated with the program.

2. Statistical analysis of secondary data used data from the MS21+ system, which included data on the use of funds, project monitoring and progress in achieving objectives. These data enabled a quantitative analysis of the effectiveness of the program implementation. Furthermore, ad-hoc data sets provided by the responsible entities of the MRD were processed as part of the analysis, which mainly dealt with the topics of education and administrative capacity.

3. In-depth interviews were conducted with key actors, such as representatives of regional partners and horizontal institutions, to provide qualitative insight into the problems identified in the questionnaire surveys. The interviews contributed to a deeper understanding of all topics covered by the evaluation. A total of 17 interviews were conducted for the preparation of the Interim Report, some of which were in the form of group interviews.

4. Focus groups conducted in September 2025 in Brno and Prague made it possible to identify shared experiences and specific problems among representatives of various LAGs. Their aim was (1) to identify what constitutes the greatest administrative burden for LAGs in the context of OPTA project administration and how it can be reduced, (2) to find out how LAGs finance their operations from European, national and regional sources and how stable their capacities are, and (3) to map the activities and needs of LAGs for the 2028+ programming period.

The Prague meeting was attended by 10 representatives from 8 LAGs from the Central Bohemian, Liberec, Pardubice, South Bohemian, Plzeň and Karlovy Vary regions. The Brno meeting was attended by 5 representatives of LAGs from the South Moravian, Zlín, Moravian-Silesian and Vysočina regions.

In conclusion, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods provided a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness and implementation of OPTA, with the main emphasis on questionnaire surveys, supplemented by other methods for deeper analysis and context.

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