

EIB GROUP EVALUATION

# Evaluation of EIB Project Advisory Support in Bulgaria and Romania

December 2022



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## **Evaluation of EIB Project Advisory Support in Bulgaria and Romania**

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This evaluation was carried out by the EIB's Evaluation Division (IG/EV), under the supervision of Sabine Bernabè, Head of Evaluation. The team, led by Emmanuel Pondard (evaluation expert), included Mónica Lledó Moreno (senior evaluator), Melanie Pinet (evaluator) and Eirini Pouchtou (senior operational assistant).

The evaluation team was assisted by Bettina Rafaelsen and Adriana Rodica Iliescu, consultants from COWI A/S, as well as Julie Pellegrin and Matteo Pedralli, consultants from CSIL.

The report was peer reviewed by Luc Lefebvre and edited by CDI.

The team would also like to thank the management and staff of the European Investment Bank for the information and insights they have shared, as well as for their extensive and constructive cooperation throughout the process.

Finally, the team is grateful to the clients and beneficiaries of the PAS programme in Bulgaria and Romania for making themselves available for interviews.

# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ANAP</b>	National Agency for Public Procurement (Romania)
<b>CBA</b>	Cost Benefit Analysis
<b>CFR</b>	National Railway Company (Romania)
<b>CPB</b>	Centralised Procurement Body (Romania)
<b>DFI</b>	Decentralised Financial Instrument
<b>EBRD</b>	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EIAH</b>	European Investment Advisory Hub
<b>EIB</b>	European Investment Bank
<b>ERTMS</b>	European Rail Traffic Management System
<b>FIDIC</b>	International Federation of Consulting Engineers
<b>IFI</b>	International Financial Institution
<b>IT</b>	Information Technology
<b>IB-T</b>	Intermediary Body in Transport (Ministry of Transport - Romania)
<b>JASPERS</b>	Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions
<b>LIOP</b>	Large Infrastructure Operational Programme (Romania)
<b>MA</b>	Managing Authority
<b>MEF</b>	Ministry of European Funds (Romania)
<b>MoEW</b>	Ministry of Environment and Water (Bulgaria)
<b>MoH</b>	Ministry of Health (Romania)
<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>ONAC</b>	National Office for Centralised Procurement (Romania)
<b>OP</b>	Operational Programme
<b>PAS</b>	Project Advisory Support programme
<b>PASSA(s)</b>	Project Advisory Support Service Agreement(s)
<b>PJ</b>	Projects Directorate of the European Investment Bank
<b>SPL</b>	Structural Programme Loan
<b>SRS</b>	Structural Reform Support
<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>WSS</b>	Water Supply and Sanitation

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Context

**The Project Advisory Support (PAS) programme was established in 2015** under Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between the EIB and the governments of Bulgaria and Romania. It is implemented through individual service agreements signed by the EIB and sovereign or sub-national entities. Since 2015, the EIB has signed three agreements with Bulgarian beneficiaries and eight with Romanian beneficiaries, for a total of €67.33 million. PAS is entirely funded by the EU funds managed by Bulgarian and Romanian authorities.

**PAS aims to address technical and administrative capacity gaps in the implementation of EU-funded projects.** It consists in providing technical advisory and capacity-building support to administrations to prepare and implement EU-funded projects and programmes. Some of these investments are also co-funded by the EIB, which is why the purpose of the programme is also to facilitate the design, disbursement and implementation of the associated EIB operations.

**PAS services are a continuation of previous support in the 2007-2013 programming period.** The programme was renewed to ensure that this support continued and to help beneficiaries address persisting problems in all stages of the project cycle — preparation, tendering, contracting and implementation works.

## Key Findings

**PAS support has largely succeeded in strengthening the implementation of EU fund in Romania and Bulgaria.** Unlocking EU funds was client's key motivation for requesting these services. The programme has produced tangible effects in terms of timely implementation and the quality of projects, covering almost all stages of the project cycle. PAS has also facilitated investment programmes: it has helped managing authorities improve control systems and procedures, monitoring and risk analysis. It has also helped them to build capacity or undertake reforms to meet the conditions required by the use of EU funds.

**The programme has also directly contributed to EIB operations in both countries.** It has facilitated the alignment with EIB standards during the loan appraisal process and advised EIB clients on how to comply with EIB disbursement conditions. It has also indirectly raised the EIB's profile as a partner of choice, both in partner countries and vis-à-vis the European Commission. However, the extent to which this has resulted in lending opportunities for the Bank is difficult to assess.

**The programme's success builds on a "boutique" delivery model: tailor-made and flexible support that relies on a limited number of highly skilled experts.** PAS teams are made up of a combination of long-term EIB advisors, EIB specialists and short-term consultants. The vast majority of the partner authorities interviewed considered that the expertise was "*worth the money paid.*" There is a shared view among beneficiaries about the strengths of this model: the quality of the expertise provided and independence from external interferences, the flexibility in addressing a vast range of needs, and hands-on support from experts who are partly hosted within recipient organisations. Overall, the characteristics and delivery model of the programme are unique within the EIB's advisory portfolio and its services are fit for purpose. PAS services complement other EIB advisory services and to some extent the other advisory services provided by other international financial institutions as well.



## Challenges

**The programme is currently working at maximum capacity.** The demand for services is higher than what it can deliver in its current form. The main downside of a model based on the on-site presence of EIB experts is the limit on scalability. First, the small size of the PAS team limits the number and size of the assignments that the team can take on. Second, increasing the use of external consultancy to address supplementary demands may come at the expense of quality and hands-on support.

**PAS resources were not always directed to assignments with a significant leverage on EU funds or EIB lending.** While the programme is working at maximum capacity, the EIB did not always mobilise PAS teams where needs were the most critical. In two out of 11 assignments, the institutions receiving PAS support were only indirectly involved in the implementation of EU funds; this support was relevant for the institutions concerned, but not necessarily the most critical for mobilising EU funds or for supporting EIB lending operations.

**PAS has achieved mixed results in building administrative capacity due to the structural weaknesses of clients.** Often, institutions in need of PAS support face serious capacity problems both in terms of having sufficient staff and having staff with adequate experience and profiles. The programme sought to improve this, but it is not always clear whether these institutions will be able to take over the tasks once the PAS support ends, mainly due to staff turnover. Moreover, PAS teams sometimes responded to limited capacity by acting as a “substitute”; beneficiaries sometimes found it easier to let PAS staff carry out difficult technical tasks, which did not result in improved capacity.

**In the future, PAS could make an even greater contribution to the absorption of EU funds if it is directed to climate action.** A significant portion of future EU-funded projects will support climate action. The Commission has defined an overall target of at least 30% for climate-relevant expenditure in the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework. However, a number of Member States will have difficulty to convert this ambitious objective into tangible projects, as they have not yet developed the required expertise in this area. The need for advice in designing or implementing projects with a climate focus is therefore likely to be significant. The programme could significantly contribute to the absorption of EU funds, if support for climate action in EU-funded projects and programmes could be scaled up. Such efforts would also contribute to achieving the EIB’s climate objectives and the objectives of the Climate Bank Roadmap.



## Recommendations

**This evaluation makes the following recommendations:**

**Recommendation 1:** Prioritise PAS assignments that can facilitate both the absorption of EU funds and EIB lending activity.

- Give a clearer priority to assignments that also support the EIB’s lending activities.
- Give less priority to assignments that solely support administrative capacity or institutional reforms if the institutions concerned play a limited role in EU funds absorption or in EIB lending activities.

**Recommendation 2:** Define a realistic handover strategy to ensure that the knowledge material produced through the programme is shared within organisations and remains accessible despite staff turnover.

**Recommendation 3:** Assess the feasibility of scaling up PAS support for climate action in EU-funded projects, including in terms of expertise needed and delivery model.

# RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

The Management Committee appreciates the positive conclusions on the EIB Project Advisory Support in Romania and Bulgaria. The purpose of this Programme is to provide advice to Promoters to boost the implementation of EU funded projects. It combines knowledge of EIB staff and consultants to support the project implementation and capacity building. EIB experts work hand-in-hand with the Promoters on strategic and complex projects, providing bespoke advisory products not available off-the shelf. That brings tangible and concrete results to the authorities and project promoters in Romania and Bulgaria.

As recognized by the evaluation the Project Advisory Support team contributed to strengthening EU fund implementation in Bulgaria and Romania and directly contributed to EIB operations. In addition, the Programme presents a unique delivery model amongst the EIB's advisory services offer that helps EIB to position itself as a partner of choice.

At the same time the operating environment remains challenging and persistent structural weaknesses prevent embedding all the benefits of the Project Advisory Support at the clients' institutions. The Management Committee welcomes the valuable recommendations, which implementation will further strengthen value added provided by the Project Advisory Support.

**Table 1: Recommendations and management response**

## Recommendation 1

**Prioritise PAS assignments that can facilitate both the absorption of EU funds and EIB lending activity.**

**1.1 Give a clearer priority to assignments that also support the EIB's lending activities.**

**1.2 Give less priority to assignments that solely support administrative capacity or institutional reforms if the institutions concerned play a limited role in EU funds absorption or in EIB lending activities.**

Rationale: The demand for services is higher than what PAS can deliver in its current form. The PAS team is working at maximum capacity and cannot take on more parallel assignments than it currently does. Therefore, there is a need to make the best use of scarce PAS resources and carefully prioritise which assignments are the most relevant for the Bank to support.

First, the objective of mobilising PAS to also support the EIB's lending activities should be better taken into account, in decisions to accept or decline new assignments.

- IG/EV recommends taking on assignments where the EIB also has (ongoing or potential) lending activities. This should be an explicit criterion to justify the EIB's decision to take on new assignments. This objective should also be communicated externally. Providing potential partners with clarity about the EIB's interest will help justify the Bank's decision to accept or decline a request for support.
- This objective will also require some monitoring, and the metrics of this monitoring will have to be harmonised with the EIB's ongoing efforts to better determine the contribution of its advisory work to EIB lending activity.

Second, supporting the development of new institutions or the reform of existing institutions is not always the best use of PAS resources. This support is justified if it conditions the success of the co-financed projects. However, if these organisations have a limited role to play in EU funds absorption

or are not directly linked to EIB investments, the Bank should probably give less priority to this type of support.

## Management Response: Agreed

Project Advisory Support has been visibly contributing to the lending activities of the Bank in the relevant countries, notably for the Structural Programme Loans. It has also played an instrumental role in unlocking the absorption of EU funds. The Member States that benefit from EIB Project Advisory Support have also pronounced needs in terms of institution building. Responding to those needs is in the mutual interest of the Bank and Member States as it builds the foundation for and facilitates future lending operations.

Each Project Advisory Support Service Agreement is approved by the Management Committee. The Project Advisory Support team will develop a prioritization approach taking into consideration the recommendations made. The application of such approach will support the Management Committee in making informed decisions when approving Project Advisory Support Service Agreements.

## Recommendation 2

**Define a realistic handover strategy to ensure that the knowledge material produced through the programme is shared within organisations and remains accessible despite staff turnover.**

Rationale: The structural fragility of partner organisations prevents them from retaining knowledge and from keeping skilled staff. PAS alone would not have been able to address the root cause of fragility and of staff turnover within these organisations.

The EIB should therefore define a realistic handover approach to ensure that the knowledge material is shared within organisations and remains accessible despite staff turnover.

## Management Response: Agreed

The Project Advisory Support has already built considerable experience in knowledge management support to its clients with a view of enabling them to use the deliverables and advisory products independently.

This experience will be further leveraged. For this, the Project Advisory Support team will develop a realistic and flexible handover approach reflected in Project Advisory Support Service Agreements to be signed by the client. It will take into consideration the heterogeneous levels of the clients' capacity and capability.

## Recommendation 3

### **Assess the feasibility of scaling up PAS support for climate action in EU-funded projects, including in terms of expertise needed and delivery model.**

Rationale: A significant portion of future EU-funded projects will support climate action. However, a number of Member States will have difficulties in converting this ambitious objective into tangible projects, as they have not yet developed the required expertise in this area. This means that the need for expertise in designing or implementing projects with a climate focus is likely to be significant.

PAS services could significantly contribute to EU funds absorption if the programme scales up its support for climate action in EU-funded projects and programmes. Such efforts would also contribute to achieving the EIB's cross-cutting climate objective and the objectives of the Climate Bank Roadmap.

Further analysis is recommended to assess the opportunities and implications of doing more in this field, including in terms of the type of expertise needed and the delivery model.

## Management Response: Agreed

The Project Advisory Support has already considerably engaged in building capacities of the clients and supporting the implementation of the Climate Action projects. These successful elements of the Project Advisory Support should be preserved. Scaling up in response to the climate challenge will only be possible if it addresses the implications in terms of direct resources necessary, and the need to optimize Bank's public procurement and contract management processes.

The Management Committee will assess the general feasibility of scaling up Project Advisory Support for Climate Action in EU-funded projects and in particular when approving new Project Advisory Support Service Agreements.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The Project Advisory Support programme

**The Project Advisory Support (PAS) programme was established in 2015 under Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between the EIB and the Governments of Bulgaria and Romania.** It addresses the technical and administrative capacity gaps facing managing authorities and project promoters in Bulgaria and Romania. To do this, it provides technical advisory support to the Bulgarian and Romanian administrations for project and programme preparation, implementation, and capacity building under EU-funded investments. Some of these investments are also co-funded by the EIB, which is why the purpose of the PAS programme is also to facilitate the design, disbursement, and implementation of the associated EIB operations.

**PAS services are a continuation of previous support provided in the 2007-2013 programming period.** Although this previous support did contribute to improved administrative capacity in Bulgaria and Romania, problems persisted at all stages of the project cycle preparation, approval, tendering, contracting and implementation<sup>1</sup>. This second round of services was introduced to ensure the continuation of assistance and support for the two countries and to improve project implementation and institutional capacity.

**The PAS programme is implemented through individual service agreements signed by the EIB and a sovereign or subnational entity.** Since 2015, 11 agreements have been signed — three with Bulgarian beneficiaries and eight with Romanian beneficiaries — for a total of € 67.33 million. The EIB Board of Directors had initially approved a partnership up to €70 million. In September 2022, the Project Advisory Support Unit (PASU) began implementing the first agreement with Greek authorities. An overview of the agreements signed thus far is provided in Table 2. PAS is entirely funded by the EU funds managed by Bulgaria and Romania.

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<sup>1</sup> Renewal of Memoranda of Understanding to cover the 2014 to 2020 programming period – Project Advisory Support Programme (Romania and Bulgaria).



**Table 2: PAS service agreements signed as at mid-2022**

<b>Beneficiary</b>	<b>Signature date</b>	<b>Duration/Closure date</b>	<b>Budget (€)</b>
<b>Romanian Ministry of European Funds PASSA RO MEF</b>	15/07/2016	+42 months 15/01/2020	16 000 500
<b>Romanian National Agency for Public Procurement PASSA RO ANAP</b>	15/07/2016	+18 months 15/01/2018	2 425 000
<b>Bulgarian National Railway Infrastructure Company PASSA BG NRIC</b>	19/05/2017	+18 months 19/11/2018	575 000
<b>Sofia Municipality and Toplofikacia Sofia EAD PASSA BG SOFIA MUNICIPALITY</b>	26/02/2018	+36 months 26/11/2021	700 000
<b>Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Water PASSA BG MoEW</b>	07/12/2018	+60 months* 07/12/2023	4 900 000
<b>Romanian National Agency for Public Procurement, for the continuation of implementation support PASSA RO ANAP II</b>	05/07/2019	36 months 31/01/2023	7 240 840
<b>Regional Emergency Hospital project, for implementation support PASSA RO MoH</b>	08/07/2019	58 months: 08/07/2024 or 31/12/2023, the earliest	12 899 600
<b>Romanian Ministry of European Funds, for the continuation of implementation support in 2020-2023 PASSA RO MEF II</b>	30/12/2019	31/12/2023	20 000 000
<b>Romanian Ministry of Transport, for implementation support for Connecting Europe Facility projects PASSA MoT CEF</b>	09/03/2020	31/12/2022	365 800
<b>Romanian Ministry of Environment, for capacity building in the solid waste sector PASSA RO MoEnv</b>	20/08/2020	31/03/2023	497 000
<b>Romanian National Office for Centralised Procurement PASSA RO ONAC</b>	14/10/2020	+26 months* 14/10/2022	1 729 900
<b>TOTAL signed</b>			<b>67 333 640</b>

Source: EIB database; PAS legal frameworks.

(\*) From the commencement date; from the signature date in all other cases.

## 1.2 Purpose of the evaluation and structure of the report

**The evaluation of the PAS programme has two objectives: accountability and learning.** Initiated by IG/EV, it is directed at the EIB's management and Board of Directors. It is intended to be a stand-alone assessment of the relevance and performance of the PAS and the underlying Project Advisory Support Service Agreements (PASSAs) signed since 2015. Its purpose is also to provide lessons. The insights will directly contribute to an overarching evaluation of the EIB's advisory activities in the EU, including in cohesion regions (the "thematic evaluation"), which is part of the IG/EV 2022 Work Programme.

**The evaluation covers all agreements signed in Bulgaria and Romania since 2015.** In terms of *thematic scope*, the evaluation covers all activities undertaken by the PAS programme since 2015, which includes the 11 legal agreements (PASSAs) that were signed with Bulgaria and Romania. All types of PAS activities are covered, including support for programme implementation and management, project implementation, building administrative capacity and to institutional reforms. In terms of *geographical scope*, all activities in Bulgaria and Romania are covered by the evaluation. The evaluation does not cover PAS Greece since the discussions in this respect are ongoing. Finally, in terms of *temporal scope*, the evaluation covers the PAS programme's activities since 2015 to date (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Evaluation scope**







**The evaluation assesses the programme's relevance to needs, its effectiveness and organisational efficiency and to what extent it complements other advisory services and identifies areas for improvement in the short term as well as lessons for the future.** It aims to add value by analysing the PAS programme and services not only from the beneficiaries' perspective but also from the EIB's perspective. The evaluation investigated several dimensions and research questions as shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Evaluation dimensions and questions**

<b>RELEVANCE</b>
<p>The evaluation assesses whether the PAS programme <b>is fit for purpose</b> in responding to the needs of targeted beneficiaries in terms of <b>the modalities</b> and the <b>timing</b> of the support. It also investigates to what extent the programme complements other EIB initiatives and other alternative advisory services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• EQ 1. How <b>relevant</b> has PAS been for addressing technical and administrative capacity gaps that hinder the implementation of EU funds in Bulgaria and Romania?</li><li>• EQ 2. To what extent have PAS activities complemented each other and created synergies with the EIB's other advisory initiatives? (<b>Internal complementarity</b>)</li><li>• EQ 3. How complementary are PAS services vis-à-vis alternative advisory services available in Bulgaria and Romania? (<b>External complementarity</b>)</li></ul>
<b>ORGANISATIONAL EFFICIENCY</b>
<p>The evaluation assesses whether the service delivery model ensures adequate use of resources for the types of services provided.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• EQ 4. Is the <b>organisational setup</b> of PAS adequate to make efficient use of the available resources?</li></ul>
<b>EFFECTIVENESS AND ADDED VALUE FROM A CLIENT'S PERSPECTIVE</b>
<p>The evaluation investigates the extent to which PAS services have been effective in building technical and administrative capacity in the national authorities, facilitating the implementation of EU-funded programmes and projects, and strengthening the institutions supported.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• EQ 5. To what extent have PAS services <b>supported the implementation of EU-funded projects</b> and <b>reduced capacity gaps</b> in the partner institutions?</li><li>• EQ 6. To what extent do final <b>beneficiaries believe that the PAS "package"</b> (what the EIB provides, how, and at what cost) <b>is commensurate with the cost</b> (both financial and non-financial) of other alternatives and <b>how does it compare</b> with these alternatives?</li></ul>
<b>EFFECTIVENESS FROM THE EIB'S PERSPECTIVE</b>
<p>The evaluation <b>aims to understand under which conditions PAS is likely to contribute to lending activities</b> (by facilitating the <b>appraisal and signature of future operations or by unlocking EIB disbursements</b>) and therefore to the <b>EIB's public policy goals</b>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• EQ 7. To what extent are PAS assignments likely to contribute to furthering the EIB's public policy goals by facilitating the generation or disbursement of EIB lending operations?</li></ul>
<b>FORWARD LOOKING</b>
<p>With a view to informing future developments related to PAS services, the evaluation also investigates the extent to which the PAS services continue to be adequate in light of evolving needs.</p>

**The evaluation uses a combination of data collection and analysis methods.** It includes document reviews and interviews (with beneficiaries of the PAS programme in Bulgaria and Romania, the PAS team, other EIB services, and other alternative advisory services in the two countries). It relies on three process-tracing case studies to test whether PAS advisory support made either a decisive or a marginal contribution to building capacity within the recipient organisations. It also relies on thematic case studies to illustrate how it complements other advisory activities, its synergies with EIB lending activity, and how it is distinct from similar services provided by another organisation. An overview of the key data collection and analysis methods is provided in Figure 2 below and explained in further detail in Annex 2.

**Figure 2: Evaluation methods**

-  • **Document review** of PASSA and portfolio data.
-  • **Two missions** in Bulgaria and Romania
-  • **Ten interviews** with beneficiaries in Romania
- **Five interviews** with beneficiaries in Bulgaria
- **Four interviews** with EIB staff (PAS Unit, JASPERS)
- **Two interviews** with the European Commission
- **Two interviews** with other international financial institutions (World Bank, EBRD)
-  • **Three process-tracing case studies**
  - PASSA RO MEF II – transport
  - PASSA RO ANAP II
  - PASSA BG MoEW
- **Two thematic case studies**
  - PASSA RO MoH
  - Water sector in Bulgaria

**This report presents the key findings of the evaluation.** Chapter 2 explains what makes the PAS programme relevant and how it complements other EIB advisory services and the advisory services provided by other IFIs. Chapter 3 presents findings on the achievements of the PAS support in project and programme preparation and implementation, and administrative capacity building and institutional reform. This chapter also presents findings on the extent to which the PAS programme contributed to the EIB's public policy goals and other activities. Chapter 4 outlines the key findings on the enabling and challenging factors that have influenced the programme's results. Chapter 5 sets out the findings on the forward-looking dimension of the evaluation, particularly reflections on the best way forward for the PAS programme.

## 2. IS PAS RELEVANT AND COMPLEMENTARY TO OTHER ADVISORY ACTIVITIES?

**The PAS programme was set up to address the administrative and technical capacity gaps in the implementation of EU funds.** Although substantial support has been provided through several advisory initiatives<sup>2</sup>, public administrations and project promoters in Bulgaria and Romania continue to be challenged when it comes to the appropriate management and implementation of EU funds and projects. Overall, the PAS programme is unique within the EIB's advisory portfolio (in its characteristics and delivery model), and it offers services that are fit for purpose and correspond to the needs of beneficiaries. PAS services complement other EIB advisory services and to some extent the advisory services provided by other international financial institutions as well.

### 2.1 The PAS programme and its service agreements have a broad coverage, which allows flexibility in the delivery of the services

**The mission and mandate of the PAS programme are broadly defined in relation to the Strategic Orientations for Advisory Services.** PAS services are intended to improve the quality of projects and investments supported by the EIB Group; contribute to enhanced cohesion in countries where the absorption of EU funds is low, enhance the effectiveness of decentralised financial instruments, and disseminate best practices. The Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) for Bulgaria and Romania follow on from the delivery of similar services in the 2007-2013 programming period. For Bulgaria, the MoU focuses on support to two areas: (i) assistance in the implementation of sector investment programmes and assistance in project delivery to ensure effective, efficient, and timely implementation of projects or investment programmes; and (ii) institutional capacity building and support in the implementation of governance reforms to aid programme and project implementation. For Romania, the MoU covers two similar areas: (i) horizontal needs related to capacity building that can contribute to an effective, efficient and timely project implementation; and (ii) specific needs related to the implementation of operational programmes and projects. It does not specify the sectors or institutions to be covered by the support, indicating that the focus should be on large infrastructure programmes. The two MoUs outline the scope of the advisory services with an indicative list of types of support based on an initial screening of needs<sup>3</sup>. This gives the PAS team flexibility to define the types of support and expertise needed at a later stage in dialogue with the relevant beneficiaries.

**The generic formulation of activities — to provide a type of “expertise” rather than a number of “tasks” — enables them to be quickly and easily adapted to evolving needs not foreseen from the outset.** While the MoU sets the general directions of PAS interventions, individual legal service agreements formalise the engagement of the PAS team. Each agreement defines a type of expertise (such as “long-term legal advice,” or “transport engineering”), as well as a list of tasks, and the

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<sup>2</sup> PASSA signatories in both Bulgaria and Romania also have access to a substantive number of advisory services provided both by the EIB (e.g., JASPERS, EIAH), as well as other organisations and IFIs (e.g., European Commission, World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development).

<sup>3</sup> For Bulgaria, the MoU indicates as areas of support: support in the preparation of sector strategic documents, multi-annual planning, programming, and budgeting; support in the preparation of projects and investment programmes; methodological support in the preparation of guidance documents; support in institutional capacity building measures to enhance administrative procedures for preparation and implementation of projects; and support in the development of and implementation of DFIs. For Romania, the MoU sets out as areas of support: administrative capacity building in the identification, preparation, and implementation of projects; support for the implementation of action plans / measures for the fulfilment of specific ex-ante conditionalities; support to project preparation and implementation and support to the deployment of DFIs in Romania.

institutions and sectors to be supported. However, these tasks are usually indicative only, and the PAS team, in dialogue with the beneficiary, may modify their scope according to emerging needs.

**Thanks in part to this open-ended scope, the PAS portfolio to date includes multiple examples of swift adaptation to evolving needs.** For support to the Romanian Ministry of European Funds for 2020-2023, the PAS team has adapted to evolving needs in providing support related to the emerging requirements of the Recovery and Resilience Plan concerning transport. Such needs had not been explicitly outlined since the plan was agreed only after the signature of the PAS agreement. Furthermore, the PAS team has adapted to evolving needs as projects and investments in the pipeline have had to be adjusted for cost increases from the hyperinflation generated by the Ukraine-Russia crisis.

## 2.2 PAS's delivery model is unique among EIB advisory services

**The PAS delivery model relies on a small team.** The programme is implemented by the Project Advisory Support Unit which reports to the Head of the Regional Development Division in the EIB Projects Directorate. Except for the head of unit located in Luxembourg, all other PAS unit staff are located in the countries of intervention: seven staff members in Bucharest, and one in Sofia.

**PAS is well integrated in the national environment (and the beneficiary institutions).** Unlike other EIB advisory services, PAS experts split their time between EIB local offices and client premises. The team on the ground was assessed as having in-depth knowledge and a good understanding of the political and legal context and the work culture in the two countries. While other EIB advisory services (such as JASPERS) also have a regional presence on the ground, they do not assign staff to work within beneficiary institutions.

**Another feature of the delivery model is its combination of in-house experts and external consultants.** The PAS team experts, EIB experts and third-party consultants work jointly to respond to the needs of clients. Thus, where appropriate, the PAS team may engage resources from other EIB services or third-party consultants managed by EIB staff to provide expertise on specific topics. Third-party experts are called upon case-by-case in the scope of procurement processes to deliver targeted support to the clients and complement the PAS team. All agreements signed so far allow the PAS team to engage third-party consultants in the provision of the services. The beneficiaries agreed that the delivery model allows PAS staff to provide complementary and high-level managerial, technical, legal, and financial expertise.

**Feedback from the field indicates that in some cases the expertise could not have been provided locally due to the highly technical nature of the procurement requirements or the absence of such expertise locally.** The PAS team was able to mobilise such expertise swiftly through the EIB procurement procedures.

## 2.3 The PAS programme offers a wide array of services that are fit for purpose and that reinforce each other

**PAS support responds to beneficiary needs in a demand-driven and tailor-made way.** The identification of capacity gaps and needs is informal rather than standardised, relying on an ad hoc dialogue with beneficiaries and relevant authorities. PAS legal agreements and services do not follow a one-size-fits-all approach but are tailored to the needs and demands of beneficiaries (Figure 3).

- Some services have a broad coverage, cutting across different sectors and activities. They offer an integrated response to beneficiary needs and often combine different types of support to institutions, including support for programme implementation and management, project implementation, addressing administrative capacity needs and supporting institutional reform.
- Other services are more focused on specific sectors or types of intervention and address the needs of a specific institution or project promoter.

**PAS delivery modes and technical expertise are relevant and fit for purpose.** PAS support is provided through a wide array of activities, such as on-the-job support, guidance, notes, training and workshops, and in different formats, such as experts hosted within the beneficiaries and combined EIB and consultant expertise. Beneficiaries feel that the modalities and activities are what make project advisory support so unique, notably the (part-time) presence of experts within the institutions. The quality, availability, and flexibility of technical expertise are considered highly relevant and adapted to the needs of beneficiaries.

**The portfolio includes several examples of complementary and continued support provided by the PAS team.** RO MEF II (second PAS assignment with the Romanian Ministry of European Funds) built on the work under the MEF I, and RO ANAP II (second assignment with the Romanian National Agency for Public Procurement) continued the work under RO ANAP I. The beneficiaries who were interviewed also found that the types of activities complemented each other. For RO ANAP I and II and RO ONAC (PAS assignment with the Romanian Office for Centralised Procurement), on-the-job support complemented training and workshops. For RO MEF II, transport beneficiaries received assistance in the form of in-house support from PAS experts hosted within the institution, who provided operational support in the tendering process and in managing claims, and in the form of training on specific topics, such as applying procurement legislation and managing cost changes.

**Figure 3: PAS support types and sectors**

PASSA	Types of support covered				Types of sectors covered
	Programme management / implementation	Project development / implementation	Capacity building	Institutional reform	
RO MEF II	✓	✓	✓	✓	
RO MEF I	✓	✓	✓	✓	
RO MoH		✓	✓	✓	
RO ANAP II			✓	✓	
BG MoEW	✓	✓	✓		
RO ANAP I			✓	✓	
RO ONAC			✓	✓	
BG Sofia Mun.		✓			
BG NRIC		✓			
RO MEWF I			✓	✓	
RO MoTIC		✓			

Sectors: Transport Environment Energy Procurement Health

Source: Based on PAS legal agreements. Full names of assignments in Table 2.

## 2.4 PAS services complement other EIB advisory services

**The services provided by PAS and the Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions (JASPERS) programme clearly complement each other in terms of their respective roles and the types of expertise they provide.** The PAS portfolio includes several cases in which both PAS and JASPERS teams advised project promoters that were developing and implementing projects, particularly where PAS had a sector focus. Data collected from project documentation and from interviews with beneficiaries and with PAS and JASPERS staff indicate that, in practice, four aspects make the initiatives complementary: the stage of the project cycle at which they intervene, the type of support, the type of investments supported and the scope of the expertise.

- Project cycle stage: JASPERS traditionally intervenes at a more strategic / upstream level, while the PAS intervenes at a more operational / downstream level, though it also provides upstream support, for example in setting up project pipelines.
- Type of support: JASPERS services focus on providing an expert opinion in the verification of project applications and their compliance with EU requirements, while PAS support concentrates on providing hands-on advisory support through expert guidance.
- Type of investments: JASPERS focuses more on major infrastructure projects, while PAS focuses mainly on providing advice to smaller projects (but also covers major projects particularly when it comes to support to project implementation).
- Scope of expertise: JASPERS brings technical and financial expertise focusing on checking the maturity of the project design and providing advice, while PAS covers technical aspects as well as legal and administrative issues that pose challenges for project and programme implementation.

**The programme also has synergies with the European Investment Advisory Hub (EIAH) and complements its work.** For example, in one instance both PAS and EIAH contributed to the delivery of strategic projects in the health sector in Romania (Annex 1.3). The EIAH set the basis for PAS support by providing the Ministry of Health with targeted support in updating and reviewing the feasibility study for regional hospitals. It prepared the ground for the subsequent involvement of the PAS team, which focused on preparing and implementing the projects, demonstrating the complementary nature of their work. This model of support is a flagship case of collaboration for advisory services with substantial potential in assisting potential beneficiaries. Thus, there is strong potential for PAS and the EIAH to add high value to beneficiaries by intervening jointly and exploring the synergies between the different and complementary services of their initiatives.

**While there is no standard form of cooperation between EIB advisory services, coordination does take place.** PAS and other advisory services complement each other and exhibit synergies (Annex 1.1). The modalities for ensuring coherent and coordinated action by multiple EIB advisory services vary.



## 2.5 PAS services are distinctive when compared to other advisory services available

**The PAS programme provides services that are not offered by others on the market.** Beneficiaries indicated that other IFIs do not offer the same combination of:

- Activities, such as guidance combined with intense mentoring.
- Delivery modalities, such as local presence, easy access, responsiveness, and the integration of services within the relevant beneficiaries.
- Mix of expertise, as PAS combines regulatory, technical, engineering, and “soft” skills (people management).

PAS Beneficiaries also perceived the programme as being more responsive and engaged in capacity building than, for example, the European Commission’s Structural Reform Support (SRS) programme.

**The PAS programme complements other advisory services present on the Bulgarian and Romanian market.** The World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development also work in sectors supported by the PAS programme and other EIB advisory services such as water in Bulgaria and procurement in Romania. Even so, PAS is found to complement the advisory activities of other IFIs, particularly in terms of the stage of intervention. PAS mostly intervenes downstream (in the project and programme implementation) but can also provide support upstream (such as in pipeline development). However, other IFIs provide advisory services that are more focused on upstream support (such as in governance). In the water sector in Bulgaria, the EIB, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the World Bank all provided complementary advisory services in terms of type and degree of intervention (Annex 1.1).

## 3. WHAT HAS THE PROGRAMME ACHIEVED SINCE 2015?

**Unlocking EU funds and supporting economic and social development are at the core of the PAS programme and clients' key motivation for requesting its services.** Overall, PAS support for projects and programmes has been largely successful in strengthening the implementation of EU funds and contributing to EIB lending operations, while capacity building has proved to be more problematic due to structural weaknesses within the recipient institutions. Through its activities, PAS has also contributed to EIB lending activities.

### 3.1 PAS contributed to unlock EU funds by supporting several stages of the project cycle

**PAS support is provided at almost all stages of the project cycle, with a focus on implementation.** Most PAS support includes activities related to projects and investment programmes, ranging from early-stage support in preparing applications and developing projects to technical support during implementation. Examples include:

- Supporting the preparation of applications and project development (for example cost-benefit analyses and feasibility studies under the RO MoT CEF assignment).
- Providing legal expertise related to project implementation (for example advice on contracting works, procurement procedures and tender documentation, and the review and supervision of procurement procedures under the RO MEF, RO MEF II, BG Sofia Municipality assignments).
- Providing technical expertise related to project implementation (for example advice on construction and works under the RO MoH assignment).
- Providing financial expertise related to project implementation (for example advice on budgeting and planning, assessments of cost eligibility, disputes and claims on specific projects, and risk management and mitigation measures under the RO MoH, RO MEF, RO MEF II, BG Sofia Municipality assignments).

**PAS support was successful in delivering relevant activities and outputs. This has produced positive effects in terms of the timely implementation and quality of projects and contributed to the wider goal of unlocking EU funds.** Through hands-on support in project implementation and the deployment of a comprehensive package of services, PAS services have made a tangible contribution to specific investment projects.

- Under RO MEF II, PAS contributed to the feasibility study for a track renewal project, making a decisive contribution to its preparation. Support was also provided during the preparation of tender documents and procurement procedures for a rolling stock modernisation project, specifically to address cost increases and help kick-start the project.
- Under BG MoEW, PAS contributed to increase the quality of water sanitation and sewage projects and ensuring their timely implementation. It addressed issues raised by project beneficiaries, focusing on managerial aspects, especially in relation to accounting and monitoring. It also contributed to a better understanding and application of FIDIC contracting standards<sup>4</sup>, which were new for most of the water supply and sanitation (WSS) operators.

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<sup>4</sup> The International Federation of Consulting Engineers (commonly known as FIDIC) is an international standards organisation for consulting engineering and construction technology. Standard FIDIC contracts are the most commonly used standard form of international construction contracts and are frequently used in both large and small construction projects.

- Under RO ANAP II, PAS aided the development of ex-ante controls for procurement in the form of opinions on tendering procedures, with the expectation that correct procedures in the tender phase would make implementation smoother.

**Factors limiting the effectiveness of support were observed as well.** Under BG MoEW, support was not consistently relevant for all water sanitation and sewage operators involved. One operator interviewed already had a project implementation unit that already had a good level of administrative capacity. More broadly, the weak administrative capacity of counterparts as well as the local socioeconomic environment and legal framework also presented significant challenges. Chapters 4.3 and 4.4 elaborate on this.

**Some PAS assignments replaced the staff of beneficiaries in carrying out the work for implementation.** The evaluation identified a case where PAS experts took over activities of the managing authority and beneficiaries, particularly in the case of the resource-intensive activity of processing contractual claims put forward by contractors. In another case, the experts deployed by PAS took over the managing authority's task of monitoring project implementation. Such a replacement of staff could jeopardise the underlying capacity building of PAS activities. It also points to trading off immediate assistance to enable implementation and unlock EU funds, and developing skills in the supported entity, which would add value intervention in a longer-term perspective.

## 3.2 PAS contributed to unlock EU funds by facilitating investment programmes and strengthening enabling frameworks and conditions

**PAS has facilitated investment programmes by providing methodological and strategic input to managing authorities to improve control systems and procedures and support the monitoring of risks.**

- Under RO MEF II, PAS support included developing guidance on procurement and monitoring. Outputs from these activities cover the development of a web-based knowledge management tool (a library of guidance documents), a methodology to establish impact indicators and targets, support in improving of procurement procedures, cost-benefit analysis guidance, and risk analysis of the project pipeline.
- Under BG MoEW, beneficiaries reported progress in the use of managerial tools and methods, which is expected to improve programme implementation, accounting and reporting, the identification of risks and the adoption of mitigation measures.

**PAS support has also contributed to institutional reforms and helped strengthen enabling frameworks for the implementation of EU funds.** Unlocking EU funds requires an institutional setup and enabling conditions that support and promote public and private investment.

- PAS actions have helped push through institutional and organisational reforms, facilitating the efficient implementation of EU-funded investments and ensuring they are sustainable. Examples include setting up local central procurement bodies in Romania under RO ANAP II and establishing a new agency for health infrastructure (ANDIS).

- PAS actions have also ensured that enabling frameworks and conditions comply with the rules and principles governing the implementation of EU funds. RO MEF II strengthened the technical standards and other conditions required by Structural Funds. For example, it supported the set-up of a European Rail Traffic Management System in line with EU technical standards.

### 3.3 PAS has moderately strengthened administrative capacity due to the structural weaknesses of clients

**Capacity-building support provided under the programme ranges from formal training sessions and workshops to on-the-job training and developing guidance tools and documentation.** Workshops and on-the-job training are particularly appreciated by the beneficiaries of support. The combination of different types of capacity building allows for an integrated approach, with the different activities complementing each other.

- Formal training was an important pillar of RO ANAP II. It included dedicated sessions on IT aspects, and support in building up the general skills of staff at both central and local levels. Training also covered sector-specific procurement aspects. In the case of RO MEF II, capacity building was, in principle, a priority compared to the previous assignment, but sessions were frequently postponed, and some were ultimately cancelled due to the COVID-19 crisis.
- Workshops are largely considered a natural way of transferring knowledge, and particularly useful for exchanging experiences with peers.
- On-the-job training occurs when administrations engage in specific activities under PAS guidance or when the PAS team carries out specific tasks in cooperation with the administration.
- Guidance tools and documents are widely used. Under RO MEF II, guidance specific to projects has been developed into more general guidelines on price increases for the final beneficiaries.

**Despite capacity building consistently being a main priority, PAS is limited in terms of what it can do to mitigate institutional weaknesses.** This is particularly so where PAS experts have acted as substitutes of the organisations receiving support to ensure project implementation. For example, the fact that no managing authority representative takes part in site visits conducted by PAS experts relying only on debriefing sessions by these experts limits the possibility for learning-by-doing and calls the monitoring function into question.

**The limited effects of capacity building in the entities supported jeopardise the sustainability of PAS achievements, as these entities often depend on prolonged PAS support to perform tasks.**

**PAS support generates learning effects, but uptake depends on pre-existing capacity.** Beneficiaries with a good level of administrative capacity (generally at the national level) have shown to be more able to benefit from PAS support. This support develops and strengthens capacity within beneficiaries through both formal and on-the-job training. Formal training activities are usually specified in legal agreements but are not always fully implemented in practice. On-the-job training is the main type of support provided and is often the most effective knowledge transfer mechanism for beneficiaries with limited administrative capacities. Workshops are also seen as particularly effective in sharing knowledge across different stakeholder groups. In general, these different forms of knowledge transfer are effective when combined.

### 3.4 Most assignments have directly supported EIB lending operations

**Supporting existing and new EIB lending activities has been critical in the EIB's decision to engage in specific PAS assignments, albeit with exceptions in recent years.** The EIB had expected the PAS programme to also facilitate its existing and new lending activities. There is indeed a mutual benefit for both partner entities and the EIB in ensuring that grant financing made available by the European Union (EU) is complemented by EIB lending, and in ensuring that the underlying investments are completed. In practice, most PAS assignments in Bulgaria and Romania have been in sectors or entities where the EIB has had financial commitments in the form of Structural Programme Loans (SPLs) or investment loans co-funded by EU funds. However, this evaluation identified two recent agreements (ONAC and ANAP II) for which the potential contribution of PAS activities to EIB lending is very indirect or potential. In these two cases, the EIB's decision to engage in PAS assignments was primarily based on consolidating previous achievements, as these two organisations are only indirectly involved in unlocking EU funds or facilitating EIB lending. These two assignments are therefore relevant from the viewpoint of national entities but less so in terms of the EIB's interest.

**Evidence from the field suggests that PAS activities have directly contributed to the launch and disbursement of EIB operations, hence contributing to the EIB's public policy goals.** Providing advisory services to facilitate EIB lending activities was not made an explicit objective at the level of individual assignments, so this objective was not converted into performance indicators for EIB experts to achieve and was not systematically monitored. However, this evaluation identified several cases of PAS activities making a direct contribution to EIB lending activities, to varying degrees. Annex 3 indicates which EIB lending operations benefited from PAS support, and the type of support provided. These EIB operations represent €3.98 billion worth of signed agreements.

**PAS facilitated the alignment with EIB standards during the loan appraisal process.** Under RO MOH (see Annex 1.2), the PAS team advised the Ministry of Health (MoH) on preparing a lending application to the EIB, which led to three loans being signed for the implementation of projects, for a total value of over €900 million. Under RO MEF II (see Annex 1.4), the PAS team provided support to road company CNAIR in dealing with queries from the EIB regarding the company's status to satisfy the requirements of the Structural Programme Loan (SPL), securing EIB co-financing for a large infrastructure operational programme (LIOP). In cooperation with JASPERS, PAS also provided technical input on the project Rehabilitation of Simeria km 614 railway line. The support included updates of the cost-benefit analysis and the environmental risk assessment. The design of this project was fully financed by the EIB. Thanks to its good quality, 75% of the project's eligible cost was ultimately covered by the EU, amounting to over €1.3 billion.

**PAS advised beneficiaries to enable them to meet EU or EIB disbursement conditions.** Under RO MoH, the PAS team, together with JASPERS, aided the preparation of the application to the European Commission to secure EU funds. This application was ultimately approved by DG REGIO. The support provided unlocked EU funds, and EIB lending was made available. Under RO MEF II, PAS helped the Romanian authorities to fulfil the enabling conditions under the 2021-2027 programming period in the sectors currently covered under the LIOP and co-financed by the EIB. In practical terms, PAS contributed to the preparation of a mandatory roadmap for advisory services.

**PAS has also indirectly raised the EIB's profile as a partner of choice, but the extent to which this has resulted in lending opportunities for the Bank is difficult to assess.** It has made a strong contribution in the Romanian health sector: the inputs of PAS experts on project implementation and on the optimal use of EU funds have positioned the EIB as a preferred investor, which has led to the signature of investment loans for three regional hospitals in Iasi (€250 million), Cluj (€305 million) and Craiova (€368 million). RO ANAP II also included information sessions to local authorities, county councils and municipalities, helping to raise the EIB's visibility among potential clients. In the Bulgarian water sector (see Annex 1.1), the EIB believes that the 14 water operators supported under BG MoEW could potentially be financed under the SPL for Bulgaria. In the other PAS assignment analysed, contributing to the EIB's future lending pipeline did not constitute an explicit objective of the PAS experts at the level of individual assignments; in the absence of explicit incentives, the actions of PAS experts in that field were mainly informal and sporadic. Finally, PAS has also raised the EIB's profile in Brussels as a knowledgeable partner. The work conducted in these countries has established PAS as a credible, well-informed source of information for the European Commission (DG REGIO) on the challenges associated with the design and implementation of EU funds, further raising the EIB's profile.

**In the fields of environment, climate and digitalisation, PAS support has indirectly contributed to progress in achieving the EIB's public policy goals, but no specific priorities have been set for these sectors (or other policy areas).** Some activities performed by PAS can be linked to public policy goals in the areas of environment, climate and digitalisation. In the environment sector, PAS has provided assistance in relation to water and wastewater projects under BG MoEW. For climate aspects, PAS contributions to the development of the Romanian rail sector under RO MEF II are relevant, as is the inclusion of climate friendliness in a document prepared by PAS to suggest improvements to feasibility studies and project designs of hospitals, under RO MoH. In innovation and the digitalisation of public administration, RO ANAP is the most relevant project, as it includes the development of IT tools as well as basic IT training for ANAP staff. PAS has also contributed to the EIAH assignment for an innovative scientific hub project in Magurele, close to Bucharest. Yet, PAS's delivery model is demand-driven, which constrains higher proactivity in support of the green and digital transitions.

**PAS did not cover decentralised financial instruments, although these were eligible under the MoU with Romania and could have been implemented by the EIB Group.** No activities were undertaken by the PAS team in this regard because technical assistance had been made available by the Commission to provide such support. Further difficulties relate to constraints at the national level. While the use of decentralised financial instruments was discussed at the level of regional operational programmes in Romania, the decision on which authority (whether at the central or local level) would have to contribute financially to such support was still to be taken.

## 4. WHAT FACTORS HAVE INFLUENCED PAS RESULTS SO FAR?

**PAS's mandate and delivery model show strengths and weaknesses.** There is broad agreement among the beneficiaries about the strengths of PAS support: the quality of the expertise provided, the flexibility in addressing a vast range of needs, hands-on support, and independence from external interferences. Yet, in a complex interplay between factors related to the original delivery model and factors inherent to the national environments in which the programme operates, some of the strengths of PAS interventions may turn into weaknesses. Overall, its success builds on a very highly skilled, tailor-made approach that relies on a small number of in-house experts (a “boutique” delivery model). The main downside of this model, and the flexibility on which it builds, is that it limits scalability.

### 4.1 The broad mandate makes it possible to address emerging needs

**Beneficiaries highly appreciate that PAS can respond to a very wide set of needs.** A broad choice of eligible activities is listed in most service PAS agreements from which beneficiaries can pick the most appropriate interventions according to their needs. Action plans might provide a detailed overview of the planned and proposed interventions, but the plan is implemented flexibly, leaving room for reassessed needs: planned actions can be replaced by new actions that reflect emerging issues. The scope of eligible activities is large, making it possible to cover a wide range of technical or administrative issues related to programme implementation at virtually all stages of the project cycle.

**PAS includes a combination of planned and on-demand support, which makes it particularly agile.** Needs are not necessarily entirely known at the start, and the programme makes it possible to quickly adapt the support to cope with heterogeneous situations at the local level. PAS is particularly well equipped to deal with unforeseen and diverse needs, thanks to the flexibility in defining planned activities, an ability to amend the assignment scope in a matter of days, and the presence of local coordinators who help counterparts redefine needs and convert them into a demand. In other words, some needs are “foreseen to be unforeseen,” and PAS is generally ready to tackle them. A broad description of advisory activities in the legal agreements offers a buffer to address ad hoc requests and makes it possible to deal with varying administrative, political and technical situations.

**Adapting to evolving needs also makes it possible to redirect PAS support to where it is more needed and where it can generate the most value added.** Under RO MEF I, the support team was able to swiftly react to requests related to the ex-ante conditionalities. Under MoEW, training on procurement procedures was initially arranged but became less frequent with time. As the service evolved, the main focus of support shifted to the performance of the project implementation unit (see Annex 1.1).

**The combination of horizontal programme support for the managing authorities and project-specific support for project implementers enables PAS to cover a wide set of needs and become an indispensable interlocutor at national level.** Under BG MoEW, programme management and monitoring support to the managing authority complement targeted project support provided to water operators.

## 4.2 PAS's hands-on support is flexible and delivers, but risks overdependence

**Hosting PAS experts within beneficiary institutions facilitates the relevance and responsiveness of the support.** Stakeholders highly value PAS experts' participation in activities, as opposed to only providing advice, and preferred this to ad hoc support. Moreover, the local presence of the PAS team coordinator is one of the features particularly appreciated by supported beneficiaries since it enables the support to be hands-on and facilitates familiarity with the local context. It also contributes greatly to smooth and effective communication between the PAS team and support beneficiaries. In addition, it can improve trust-building in relations as well as team building, which typically require time and dedication. It also ensures the close monitoring of progress, and awareness of evolving needs on a practical basis. Since a long-term presence has advantages but increases dependency risks, a trade-off is expected to remain for PAS in future.

**The composition of the PAS teams is also instrumental in keeping support activities flexible and relevant. By effectively combining EIB in-house expertise and external consultants, the PAS can deliver custom timely support based on solid expertise.** Typically, PAS involves a core team composed of PAS experts and third-party consultants, assisted by a monitoring and coordination officer acting as primary contact point for contractual issues, as well as an administrative assistant and a programme coordinator who provides strategic management. In addition, the team may be assisted by colleagues from EIB headquarters, such as the Consultant Procurement and Contract Management Division and the Legal Department. A similar team structure, and especially the agile mobilisation of third-party experts, makes it possible to rapidly deploy the skills needed. Procuring external consultants through national procedures would typically be more burdensome and time-consuming for the organisations supported.

**The small, agile and highly specialised team, complemented by third-party consultants, enable the efficient use of resources. From the clients' perspective, the benefits of PAS largely outweigh its costs.** PAS support has been shown to help implement investments (or strengthen enabling conditions) with few experts, and therefore has strong leverage. In addition, in terms of the organisation of activities, beneficiaries feel that PAS is efficient, with quick reaction times, timely delivery and smooth communication. The COVID-19 pandemic has not significantly disrupted the performance of PAS activities either, as communication on online platforms allowed frequent contact with counterparts.

**However, there is a risk that the beneficiary organisations will become reliant on the PAS team taking over the tasks within the beneficiary organisations and that this will affect these organisations' long-term autonomy.** While overreliance on PAS support is linked to administrative capacity issues and staff shortages, its limited effect on capacity building and on ensuring the sustainability of achievements over time cannot be overlooked.

## 4.3 Low capacity and high staff turnover in the entities supported limit the transfer of knowledge

**A certain pre-existing level of skills or expertise is necessary to fully benefit from PAS experts and their advice, and its absence puts the transfer of knowledge and skill development that should be at the core of PAS services at risk.** The weak administrative capacity of the organisations supported is the first factor hampering the effectiveness of PAS support. The different pre-existing skills within project management units can lead to different outcomes in learning and capacity building.



**The institutional development of the organisations supported is undermined by the lack of specialised human resources, a considerable level of staff turnover and the lack of attractiveness of the public sector for highly skilled professionals.** Even in cases where skills are successfully developed, the sustainability of such achievements is jeopardised by the risk of the skilled professional moving to other public authorities or the private sector, due to the appeal of job opportunities with more favourable conditions. Moreover, the problem also concerns the type of profiles available within the organisation, especially where technical expertise or experience with project management would be required.

**The frequent turnover of office holders or insufficient awareness of the problems at hand are also evident.** While administrative capacity gaps would require strong managerial input, it is precisely in these organisations that such input is frequently fragile. This complicates the work of PAS services and, in particular, the possibility of achieving greater autonomy within the supported entity and delivering results that are sustainable over time.

## 4.4 The legislative and administrative framework and the socioeconomic environment pose recurring challenges

**The lack of a modern administrative culture in the beneficiary organisations makes it difficult for PAS to trigger change.** Further external factors influencing the results of PAS activities are related to the legal and administrative framework and the broad socioeconomic environment in Bulgaria and Romania. A recent OECD study on the governance of EU funds in five cohesion countries found that staff are not managed as a strategic asset, and that training lacks a strategic vision and strategies for retaining staff are missing<sup>5</sup>. This reluctance often leads to PAS experts having to prepare written opinions, giving counterparts the necessary confidence to go ahead. Moreover, public officials seldom engage in a negotiation with a private party, as this is seen as a corrupt practice regardless of its scope and purpose. For example, in the case of support in contractual claims management, PAS experts have recommended reducing the amount of claims that are taken to court and instead engaging more in negotiations, a proposal met with scepticism.

**Suboptimal legislative and administrative practices slow down or complicate the delivery of PAS and project implementation.** From a legislative perspective, the frequency of amendments to procurement legislation in Romania is particularly problematic. In recent years, there has been a tendency to repeatedly introduce changes aiming to improve or streamline public procurement law, bringing in elements that have not always properly been discussed with relevant stakeholders beforehand. As time is needed for stakeholders to familiarise themselves with legislative modifications and start applying them, uncertainty and delays in procurement have been common. In addition, where procurement is a core element of PAS support, the evaluation of tenders has become longer as a result of such changes, as numerous clarification questions contribute to delays. On a different note, ineffectiveness in administrative activities also represents a contextual hurdle. For example, poorly planned and executed expropriation processes have been one of the main issues hindering the proper implementation of motorway projects.

**Finally, the consultancy market is less than mature.** The private market for consultancy services would not necessarily be able to provide services addressing the specific needs of public organisations in need of support. This hurdle is also demonstrated by the difficulties experienced in recruiting consultants in the field of public procurement for PAS services. In addition, the lack of a mature consultancy market contributes to the risk that staff members of the entities receiving PAS support and benefiting from training leave the public sector to join more attractive positions in private consultancies, leading to a loss of valuable expertise and to a renewed need for PAS support.

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<sup>5</sup> OECD. Strengthening Governance of EU Funds under Cohesion Policy: Administrative Capacity Building Roadmaps. January 2020.

# 5. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

## 5.1 The PAS programme has been largely successful thanks to its unique delivery model

**The PAS programme was established in 2015** under Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between the EIB and the governments of Bulgaria and Romania. It is implemented through individual service agreements signed by the EIB and sovereign or sub-national entities. Since 2015, three agreements have been signed with Bulgarian beneficiaries and eight with Romanian beneficiaries, for a total of €67.33 million. The programme is entirely funded by the EU funds managed by Bulgaria and Romania.

**PAS has successfully contributed to unlock EU funds in Romania and Bulgaria.** It consists in providing technical advisory and capacity building support to the Bulgarian and Romanian administrations to prepare and implement EU-funded projects and programmes. Unlocking EU funds is at the core of the PAS programme and client's key motivation for requesting PAS services. The programme has addressed this need by offering project level support at virtually all stages of the project cycle, with a focus on the project implementation stage. This has produced positive effects in terms of the timely implementation and quality of projects. PAS has also facilitated investment programmes: it has helped managing authorities improve control systems and procedures, monitoring and risk analysis. It has also helped them undertake reforms to meet the conditions required by Structural Funds. According to the partner authorities paying for PAS services, the benefits of the programme outweigh the fees paid to the EIB.

**The programme has also directly contributed to EIB operations in both countries.** The EIB had expected PAS services to also facilitate its existing and new lending activities. Even if this objective was not formally mentioned in partnership documents, it was largely reflected in the PAS portfolio: most assignments in Bulgaria and Romania have been in sectors or entities where the EIB has had financial commitments in the form of Structural Programme Loans (SPLs) or investment loans co-funded by EU funds. PAS has contributed to EIB operations worth €3.98 billion, to varying degrees. Concretely, the programme has facilitated the alignment with EIB standards during the loan appraisal process and advised clients on how to meet EIB disbursement conditions. It has also indirectly raised the EIB's profile as a partner of choice, but the extent to which this has resulted in lending opportunities for the Bank is difficult to assess.

**The main strength of the programme is that it builds on a small, specialised and very experienced team capable of delivering top-of-the-range advisory support.** The "boutique" delivery model (small, experienced team of in-house staff combined with external experts) means that the services provided respond well to the needs of beneficiary institutions. It also allows for a high level of flexibility and adaptability in the delivery of these services. The local presence of experts, partly hosted within recipient organisations, is also central to the success of the PAS team. Beneficiaries particularly appreciate the team's knowledge of the local environment and fast response times. The success of the strong local presence is down to particularly dedicated and experienced individuals.

**This boutique model, which is unique within the EIB's portfolio of advisory activities is a good complement to other EIB advisory services.** For example, it is clear that the roles of the PAS and JASPERS and types of expertise provided complement each other and the EIAH as well. PAS services are also distinct from the advisory services of other IFIs, which do not offer such a combination of activities (guidance and mentoring), delivery modalities (local presence, easy access and responsiveness), and a mix of expertise (regulatory, technical, engineering and management expertise).

## 5.2 But the programme is working at maximum capacity and its limited resources were not always directed to the most critical assignments

**The programme is working at maximum capacity, and the PAS team can barely deliver more parallel assignments than it already does.** The EIB recently turned down a specific request for support due to a lack of resources. Indeed, the small size of the PAS team limits the number and size of the assignments that the team can take on. It also has limited recourse to third-party consultants because this risks jeopardising the quality of the services provided, in the absence of formal procedures for managing the quality of services provided at a larger scale.

Given that the programme is working at maximum capacity, the EIB needs to make the best use of scarce resources. However, the evaluation found that the EIB sometimes took on assignments that were not the most critical for achieving the programme objectives.

**Most, but not all assignments were likely to significantly unlock EU funds.** Support provided to develop new institutions or reform existing institutions responsible for central procurement, was relevant for the institutions, but not the most critical for unlocking EU funds. There is little doubt that better procurement systems and practices need to be developed and that this is important for the efficient implementation of Cohesion funds; however, the question is whether the EIB made the best use of limited PAS resources by allocating them to this area. Furthermore, the Commission is, in general, in a better position to support institutional reforms of the public administration in Member States.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the evaluation found cases of partnerships for which the added value was lower for the second project than for the first, hence not optimising limited PAS resources.

**Not all assignments contributed to the EIB's lending activities.** The evaluation spotted specific assignments for which the contribution to EIB lending activity was only indirect or potential. This evaluation considers that these assignments were not an optimal use of the scarce PAS resources, from the EIB's perspective.

### Recommendation 1

**Prioritise PAS assignments that can facilitate both the absorption of EU funds and EIB lending activity.**

- 1.1 Give a clearer priority to assignments that also support the EIB's lending activities.**
- 1.2 Give less priority to assignments that solely support administrative capacity or institutional reforms if the institutions concerned play a limited role in EU funds absorption or in EIB lending activities.**

Rationale: The demand for services is higher than what PAS can deliver in its current form. The PAS team is working at maximum capacity and cannot take on more parallel assignments than it currently does. Therefore, there is a need to make the best use of scarce PAS resources and carefully prioritise which assignments are the most relevant for the Bank to support.

First, the objective of mobilising PAS to also support the EIB's lending activities should be better taken into account, in decisions to accept or decline new assignments.

- IG/EV recommends taking on assignments where the EIB also has (ongoing or potential) lending activities. This should be an explicit criterion to justify the EIB's decision to take on new assignments. This objective should also be communicated externally. Providing potential

<sup>6</sup> For example, the Technical Support Instrument of DG REFORM (formerly SRSS) is the European Commission's facility to support institution and capacity building in Member States in the period 2021-2027, the EC has set aside EUR 864 million to this end.

partners with clarity about the EIB's interest will help justify the Bank's decision to accept or decline a request for support.

- This objective will also require some monitoring, and the metrics of this monitoring will have to be harmonised with the EIB's ongoing efforts to better determine the contribution of its advisory work to EIB lending activity.

Second, supporting the development of new institutions or the reform of existing institutions is not always the best use of PAS resources. This support is justified if it conditions the success of the co-financed projects. However, if these organisations have a limited role to play in EU funds absorption or are not directly linked to EIB investments, the Bank should probably give less priority to this type of support.

### 5.3 In a complex environment, PAS has achieved mixed results in building administrative capacity

**Capacity building activities did not always make a long-term impact, due to the structural weaknesses of clients.** Within the organisations supported, the evaluation identified different levels of uptake of the support received, depending on the level of pre-existing capacity. Often, institutions in need of PAS support face serious capacity problems both in terms of having sufficient staff and having staff with adequate/appropriate experience and relevant profiles. The programme sought to improve this and generates learning effects. Nevertheless, it is not always clear whether that these institutions will be able to take over the tasks once the PAS support ends. Furthermore, guidance materials and tools were not systematically handed over.

**PAS sometimes responded to limited capacity by acting as a “substitute.”** Building capacity in public institutions is complicated, takes time and does not necessarily deliver immediate results in terms of better (and faster) implementation. In the short term, the goal for administrations and managing authorities is to get the job done — that is, speed up the implementation of EU funded programmes and projects. Several cases were found where the programme prioritised the fast and professional implementation of EU-funded investments over capacity building. For example, tasks were conducted without the participation of the relevant counterpart staff, and the capacity-building element was lost. In order to ensure the delivery of projects, the programme often ended up “doing the job” in the absence of staff and/or skills in the institutions supported. Beneficiaries sometimes found it easier to let PAS staff carry out difficult tasks for an organisation under time pressure to implement an operational programme.

#### Recommendation 2

**Define a realistic handover strategy to ensure that the knowledge material produced through the programme is shared within organisations and remains accessible despite staff turnover.**

Rationale: The structural fragility of partner organisations prevents them from retaining knowledge and from keeping skilled staff. PAS alone would not have been able to address the root cause of fragility and of staff turnover within these organisations.

The EIB should therefore define a realistic handover approach to ensure that the knowledge material is shared within organisations and remains accessible despite staff turnover.

## 5.4 In future, PAS expertise could make an even greater contribution to EU funds absorption, if directed to climate action

In the future, capacity gaps will challenge the efforts of managing authorities and promoters to convert the ambitious new EU objectives for a green and just transition into tangible projects. In the context of the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework, the Commission has defined an overall target of at least 30% for climate-relevant expenditure in the EU budget. The EIB Operational Plan also sets more ambitious targets for climate action and sustainable energy and infrastructure<sup>7</sup>. However, a number of Member States will have difficulties in implementing programmes and projects with a green or climate focus, as they have not yet developed the required expertise in these areas.

These new objectives provide an opportunity for PAS services to assist Member States in implementing the ambitious EU climate agenda. At present, PAS is already supporting climate action and climate mainstreaming within assignments in transport, water and energy. However, the number of internal staff offering this type of expertise is limited.

Any potential scaling up of PAS activities in climate action would have implications for the organisation and composition of the PAS team. Beneficiaries value a model based on the on-site presence of EIB experts and their hands-on approach, but the main downside of this model is the limit on scalability. First, the small size of the PAS team limits the number and size of the assignments that the team can take on. Second, increasing the use of external consultancy to address supplementary demands may come at the expense of quality and hands-on support. If a decision were made to enlarge the team in response to the demand, new fields of expertise and a change of model would be required. Specifically, such a decision would entail more formal procedures and more decentralisation of coordination and decisions to local or regional PAS teams. It is also likely that the PAS team would need to take on different roles—and to move from hands-on advisory locally to managing more external consultants or new internal recruits. This entails threats to the quality of the services delivered.

### Recommendation 3

**Assess the feasibility of scaling up PAS support for climate action in EU-funded projects, including in terms of expertise needed and delivery model.**

Rationale: A significant portion of future EU-funded projects will support climate action. However, a number of Member States will have difficulties in converting this ambitious objective into tangible projects, as they have not yet developed the required expertise in this area. This means that the need for expertise in designing or implementing projects with a climate focus is likely to be significant.

There is an opportunity for PAS services to significantly contribute to EU funds absorption if the programme can scale up its support to climate action in EU-funded projects and programmes. Such effort would also serve EIB's transversal climate objective and Climate Bank Roadmap.

Further analysis is recommended to assess the opportunities and implications of doing more in this field, including in terms of the type of expertise needed and the delivery model.

<sup>7</sup> EIB Group (2022). "Operational Plan 2022-2024."

# ANNEX 1 – CASE STUDIES

This annex presents a summary of five case studies. Two focused on how PAS complements other EIB and IFI advisory services and contributes to EIB lending. The other three adopted a process-tracing approach<sup>8</sup> to assess the contribution of PAS to the expected results.

## A1.1 PAS agreement with the Ministry of Environment and Water in Bulgaria – Complementarities with other EIB and IFI activities

In December 2018, the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Water signed an advisory support agreement to kick-start water projects with a total volume of about €1billion. Under this agreement, the EIB provides technical assistance to monitor project implementation and help solve implementation issues. Support is provided by a team of around 15 EIB experts and third-party consultants. The service started in 2019 and is expected to run until September 2023.

### How the programme complements other EIB and IFI advisory services

Overall, different advisory support services provided to Bulgaria by various IFIs complement each other well. The World Bank, the EIB/PAS, and JASPERS, as well as the EBRD, are all active in the water sector in Bulgaria. Nevertheless, advisory services are provided for different processes, authorities and phases, supporting the global water management sector.

The stakeholders interviewed mentioned that support from donor and IFI is no longer closely coordinated by the Bulgarian authorities. They also indicated that there is little direct contact between donors and IFIs and, thus, limited knowledge is shared between them about their respective activities. Even so, there is a clear division of work (possibly building on the previous coordination required by the Commission).

### Contribution to EIB lending activities

This assignment has the potential to contribute to EIB lending. For example, the Structural Programme Loan (SPL) for Bulgaria in 2014-2020 (SPL 0545) finances the following operational programme: transport, environment, regions in growth (which is a multisector OP), OP Innovation and competitiveness (which covers SMEs but also energy efficiency). The SPL finances the environment operational programme, but because this is a framework loan, allocation for the large projects must be approved by the EIB Board of Directors. The 14 water operators receiving PAS support could potentially be allocated loan financing under the SPL, but no allocation has been made yet as all 14 projects are large (above €50 million). So far, the Bulgarian Ministry of Finance has favoured the allocation of funds to smaller projects.

The PAS programme assists the water division of the EIB Projects Directorate by providing information on the large water projects supported, anticipating that they will need to request the allocation of funds since about €130 million under the SPL are not allocated. While the loan has a total value of €500 million, of which €370 million has been allocated so far. An allocation of €40 million is under preparation.

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<sup>8</sup> The methodological approach is presented in Annex 2.

# A1.2 PAS agreement with the Ministry of Environment and Water in Bulgaria – A contribution to the project implementation but with capacity building mainly towards beneficiaries

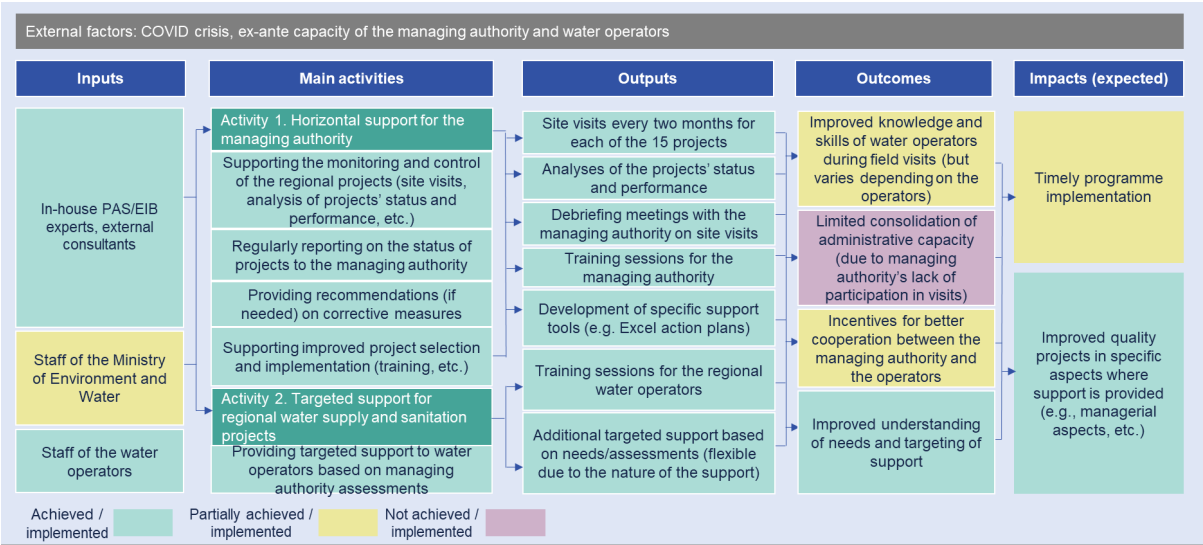
## Results in capacity building and sustainability

The chain of effects (how inputs and activities translate into outputs and outcomes) suggests that the service has so far been successful in converting its inputs into relevant activities and outputs (Figure 4)<sup>9</sup>. These have produced positive effects in terms of improved project management procedures, contributing to faster project implementation that is of higher quality and to the overarching goal of unlocking EU funds.

PAS services have helped to increase the quality of projects and ensure their timely delivery. They have also helped to improve the procedures and managerial capabilities of the managing authority and water project beneficiaries by bringing about progress in reporting, identifying risks, adopting mitigation measures, and ensuring a better understanding and application of FIDIC contracting and regulations, which were new for most of the project beneficiaries. However, the support does not ensure that staff at the Ministry of Environment and Water consolidate their capabilities in the long term or maintain close dialogue with water project beneficiaries.

Overall, improved project quality, faster implementation and the unlocking of EU funds can reasonably be expected to be achieved under this ongoing PAS, albeit more through monitoring functions and ad hoc implementation support than long-term enhanced capacity.

**Figure 4: Chain of effects of the PAS support provided to the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Water**



Source: Authors' own, based on documentation review and interviews

<sup>9</sup> A process-tracing analysis was performed for this case study. See Annex 2 for the methodological approach.

# A1.3 PAS agreement with the Romanian Ministry of Health– How it complements other EIB and IFI activities

On 8 July 2019, the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the EIB signed an agreement for advisory support running until 23 December 2023. The total budget amounts to €12.8 million. Of this, 14% is earmarked for EIB experts, and 86% for third-party consultants.

## How the programme complements other EIB advisory services






PAS, JASPERS and the European Investment Advisory Hub were involved in the development and implementation of three regional hospital projects. The European Commission advisory services – SRSS also provided support. The analysis indicates that the advisory services of the EIB have complemented and reinforced each other well throughout the life cycle of the regional hospital projects.

Stakeholders feel that both PAS and JASPERS staff have helped to establish good collaboration between these initiatives. PAS distinguishes itself from other advisory services provided by the EIB, the European Commission and other IFIs through its flexibility and hands-on approach, as well as the high level of expertise provided by the team. PAS who are also more reactive to the needs of beneficiaries and can adapt to demands more quickly.

## Contribution to EIB lending activities

The advisory support provided by the EIB has made an indirect contribution to new lending activities. The construction of the three regional hospitals is an unprecedented flagship project with an estimated investment cost exceeding €1.6bn. The EIB is co-financing each of the projects with three investment loans: Cluj Regional Hospital (up to €305 million), Craiova Regional Hospital (€368 million) and Iasi Regional Hospital (€250 million). The total value of the loans amounts to over €900 million, which is around 57% of the total value of the projects (estimated at around €1.6 billion). The beneficiaries and other EIB services feel that project advisory support has been instrumental in informing and advising the MoH on the preparation of the lending application.

Figure 5: Involvement of the EIB advisory services in the regional hospital projects in Romania

	 Europe's gateway to investment support	 Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions	PASSA – Project Advisory Support Service Agreement
 Project preparation and financing applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support in reviewing and preparing the feasibility study for the three regional hospitals (feasibility study financed by the Structural Reform Support Service)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of deliverables (feasibility study including option analysis, technical definition and cost of projects, cost-benefit analysis, environmental impact assessment, etc.) and ensuring necessary quality standards. Guidance notes containing methodological advice and opinions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advice on and support in preparing the project application (contracting external party to draft project application)</li> <li>Advice on and support in preparing the EIB lending application (advice on compliance with requirements)</li> </ul>
 Project implementation	No involvement	No involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support in developing a project management plan</li> <li>Design of review services and preparation of tender documents</li> <li>Preparation of communication strategy</li> <li>Implementation of capacity-building measures</li> </ul>
 Structural reforms	No involvement	No involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advice on the set-up and implementation of the national health infrastructure agency (ANDIS)</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' own, based on documentation review and interviews



## A1.4 PAS agreement with the Romanian National Agency for Public Procurement—Strengthened capacity but risks of dependency

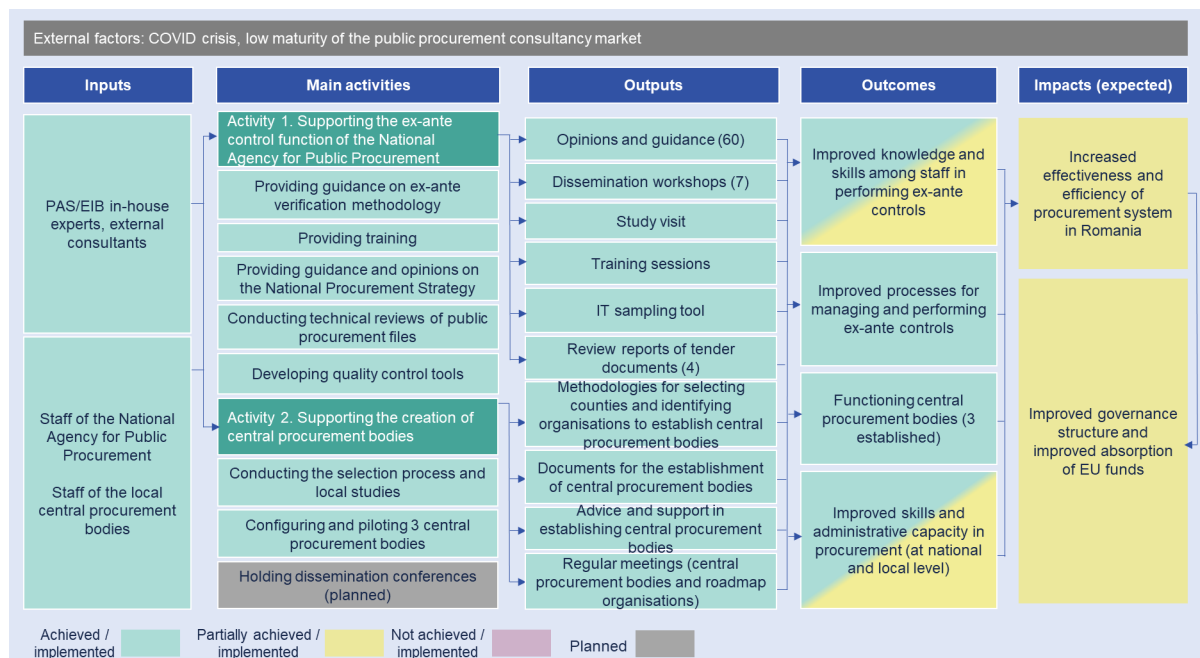
An advisory support agreement was signed with the National Agency for Public Procurement in June 2019. It has a budget of €7 million and will be implemented between July 2019 and January 2023. A team of approximately 20 people was set up, including a programme coordinator, a team leader, five or six experts (monitoring and coordination officers, administrative assistants and technical experts), six EIB consultants, as well as third-party consultants.

### Results in capacity building and sustainability

The analysis of the chain of effects underlying the provision of advisory support shows that it has contributed to improving ex-ante controls (see Figure 6 below). At the national level, staff at the National Agency for Public Procurement have consolidated administrative capacities and integrated new tools into their normal work processes. At the local level, three central procurement bodies have been established and nine others are under discussion. Differences in circumstances, levels of preparedness, commitment and political interference mean that the situation within central procurement bodies, varies, creating unforeseen needs that the support has been able to address. Planned and ad hoc support is combined flexibly to best satisfy emerging needs.

However, the National Agency for Public Procurement continues to rely on EIB support, which may hinder its ability to perform ex-ante controls on its own. Overall, there are some limitations concerning the extent to which PAS support has managed to ensure a sustainable improvement in staff knowledge and skills to perform the necessary procurement-related tasks independently. An unexpected consequence of the extensive hands-on support provided by PAS experts is the risk of creating overreliance on the service.

**Figure 6: Chain of effects of the PAS support provided to the Romanian National Agency for Public Procurement**



Source: Authors' own, based on documentation review and interviews

# A1.5 PAS agreement with the Romanian Ministry of European Funds– Decisive contribution to project implementation, but limited impact on administrative capacity

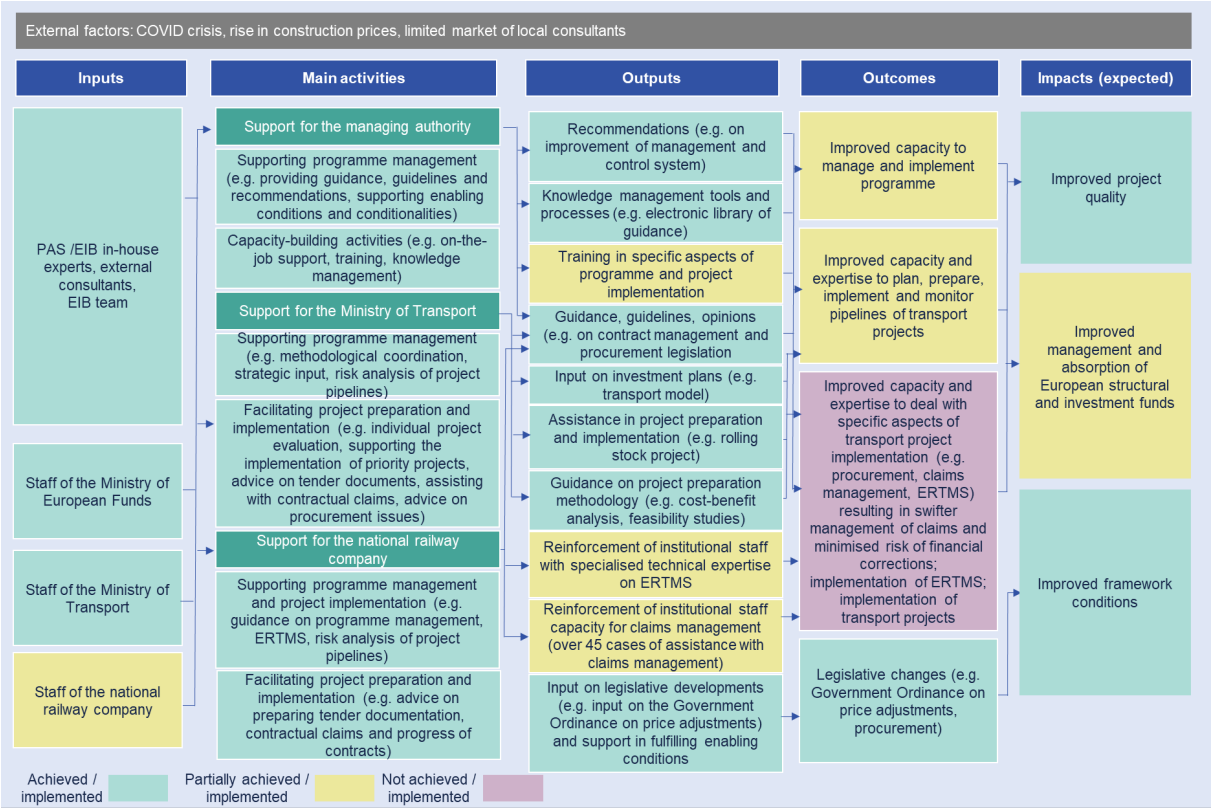
The advisory support agreement signed with the Ministry of European Funds has a total budget of €20 million and covers the period January 2020 to December 2023. Its main objective is to support the Ministry of European Funds in the implementation of the Large Infrastructure Operational Programme.

## Results in capacity building and sustainability

The chain of effects in Figure 7 shows that advisory support was successful in converting activities into expected results in terms of project quality and enabling conditions. The active involvement of PAS experts in the daily workflow of the staff of the Ministry of European Funds (managing authority) has helped to improve programme management and implementation. Hands-on support provided to the Ministry of Transport has improved project implementation and consolidated enabling conditions. On-the-job support provided to the National Railway Company helped process claims and establish the European Railways Traffic Management System (ERTMS). A good combination of training and pragmatic guidance has made it possible to transfer expertise to local staff, but staff turnover means that this enhanced capacity is not permanent.

Overall, advisory support has contributed to the better absorption of EU funds but has had a more limited impact on the development of administrative capacity. Pre-existing levels of administrative capacity are an important prerequisite to taking advantage of the support and further strengthening capacity.

**Figure 7: Chain of effects of the PAS support provided to the Romanian Ministry of European Funds**



Source: Authors' elaboration based on documentation review and interviews

# ANNEX 2 — METHODOLOGY

This report builds on a methodology based on two levels of analysis. At a general level, the available evidence available was explored for all the PAS programmes as a whole. An overall analysis of the full range of PAS activities built on existing data and utilised the following methodological tools:

- Portfolio analysis.
- Document review of PAS governance documentation (such as Memorandum of Understanding, internal notes and other Monitoring Committee documents) and of PAS agreements (such as legal agreements, deliverables and reports on specific PAS agreements).
- Interviews with EIB staff (PAS Unit and JASPERS).
- Interviews with the European Commission (DG REGIO).
- Interviews with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the World Bank.

At a more detailed level, the analysis focused on specific PAS agreements (or parts of agreements if these had a large portfolio of activities covering different areas and sectors). Two types of case studies were carried out.

- **Process-tracing case studies.** The objective was to analyse the extent to which PAS advisory services had had a decisive role in improving project and programme implementation and enhancing administrative capacities, as well as how and under which conditions such results have been achieved by the partner institutions and pushed them “to do things better”. The application of the process-tracing approach makes it possible to analyse with rigour the specific contribution of PAS to the changes observed. Three such case studies were carried out (see below).
- **Thematic case studies.** These case studies provide evidence to illustrate and exemplify specific aspects of interest such as how project advisory support services complement other advisory activities, synergies between these services and lending activity, and how PAS is distinct from other similar services provided by other organisations. Two thematic case studies were carried out.

Below, the approach adopted to carry out the process-tracing and thematic case studies and the agreements selected are described in more detail.

## *Process tracing in a nutshell – an innovative approach*

The process-tracing approach analyses the extent to which an intervention (here the provision of PAS advisory support) makes a decisive or marginal contribution to desired outcomes and results (here, improved capacities and better ESIF disbursement in Cohesion regions). It does so by focusing on a single intervention or area of intervention and reconstructing the chain of effects that successively transforms inputs into activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. At each step, the hypotheses enabling the next step to be reached are explored through in-depth empirical research.

The advantage of process tracing is that it offers a rigorous approach to assessing causal effects. In particular, it identifies mechanisms and conditions leading to the observed effects, which explain how these effects are obtained. This is done by testing (validating, qualifying or rejecting) different hypotheses about how one step in the chain of effects is expected to lead to the subsequent one. This approach is particularly appropriate in the context of intangible outcomes such as capacity, and when multiple and complex causal relations are at work, making the attribution of effects difficult (see Box 1 below).

**Box 1: Basic principles of process tracing**

Process tracing is a qualitative method that uses probability tests to assess the strength of evidence for specified causal relationships, within a single-case design and without a control group. A process-tracing approach adopts a generative perspective of causality (as opposed to a counterfactual perspective on causality for example), i.e., one based on a detailed explanation of the mechanisms between a cause and an effect. Process tracing involves articulating the steps between a hypothesised cause (for example, a policy intervention) and an outcome. This involves unpacking the causal mechanism that explains what it is about a cause that leads to an outcome: the causal force or power that links cause A with outcome B.

Source: Punton M. and Welle K. (2015) based on Beach and Pedersen (2013).

The process-tracing analysis of the selected agreements consisted of four different steps: (i) the selection of relevant cases; (ii) the reconstruction of the mechanisms (or chain of effects); (iii) the collection and assessment of evidence; and (iv) the conclusion. These steps are detailed below.

**1. Selection**

Three PAS agreements were selected to undergo a process-tracing analysis based on how representative they were of the three main types of activities that are generally carried out under PAS agreements, namely:

- Support for project development and implementation
- Support for programme development and management
- Support for capacity building and institutional reforms.

Other selection criteria were also considered such as countries, status, and budget.

The table below presents the PAS agreements selected for process-tracing case studies and shows how they comply with the different selection criteria.

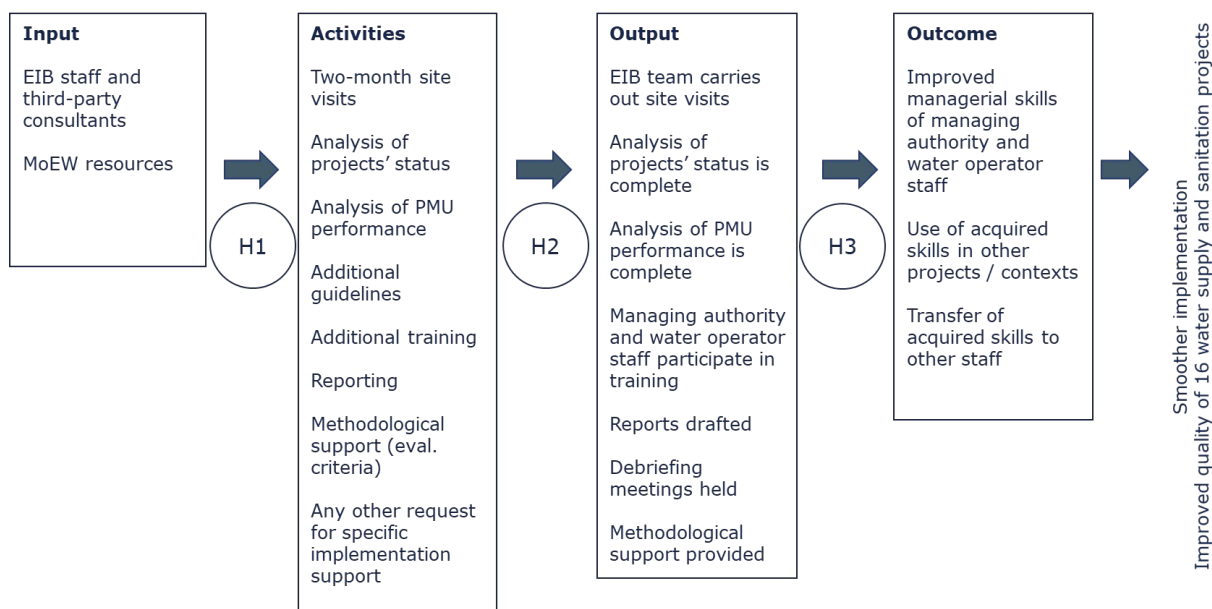
**Table 4: PAS agreements selected for process-tracing case studies**

Ref.	Member State	PAS	Type of intervention	Specific scope of activities
<b>A00361</b>	RO	MEF II	Programme development and management	<p>The case study focuses on activities related to programme management and implementation in the transport sector.</p> <p>Focus is placed on specific activities carried out in relation to support provided to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing authority of the large infrastructure operational programme</li> <li>• Transport intermediary (Romanian Ministry of Transport)</li> <li>• CFR (Romanian national railway company)</li> </ul>
<b>A00341</b>	RO	ANAP II	Capacity building and institutional reform	<p>The case study focuses on activities carried out under RO ANAP II concerning the ex-ante control system at the MA level and the development of CPBs at the local level.</p>
<b>A00323</b>	BG	MoEW	Project development and implementation	<p>The case study focuses on all activities carried out under RO MoEW in relation to the monitoring of project implementation and the resolution of project implementation issues for 14 water projects in Bulgaria.</p>

## 2. Reconstructing the chains of effects, and formulating tests

For each agreement selected, an expected chain of effects was reconstructed. Specific hypotheses about how the chain of effects is supposed to unfold were formulated (how inputs are expected to yield activities, how activities are supposed to translate into outputs, and finally how outputs are expected to turn into outcomes).

**Figure 8: Reconstructing a chain of expected effects: Example from BG MoEW**



This first hypothesis assumes the adequate identification of needs and the relevant resources to convert the inputs into the activities (H1). By contrast, alternative hypotheses (H1') are put forward to investigate whether the subsequent steps of the chain of effects may have come about for reasons other than the inputs used for the evaluated agreement, for instance by making use of internal resources or other consultancy services or IFIs.

The second hypothesis rests on how outputs of activities correspond to the previously identified needs, and their adequate delivery in terms of timeliness and quality (H2). Alternative scenarios (H2'), it is investigated whether staff participating in the activities are only compliance-driven, or have easier access to alternative sources of learning, to which they are more receptive.

The third hypothesis emphasises the translation of the outputs into benefits that are sustainable at the level of the managing authority and the operators, namely a process of consolidating knowledge, tools used and skills, as well as accelerating project implementation and increasing project quality (H3). The alternative hypothesis (H3') instead suggests a poor translation of outputs into tangible benefits, stemming, for instance, from limited motivation and misalignment with needs.

## 3. Collecting evidence

The different tools mobilised to collect evidence were:

- Document review (such as legal agreements, action plans and progress reports)
- Interviews with beneficiary organisations (two missions: five beneficiary organisations interviewed in Bulgaria and ten in Romania)<sup>10</sup>,
- Interviews with EIB staff (three interviews)

<sup>10</sup> Some interviews were also relevant for the thematic case studies (see below).

#### 4. Assessing the strength of the hypotheses and conclusion

Based on the evidence collected, the different hypotheses were tested by assessing the probability that they account for the observed evidence in the three cases studies. Table 5 below presents an overview of the hypotheses tested, and the results obtained.

**Table 5: Hypotheses tested in the process-tracing cases and results**

	Results from tested hypotheses					
	From inputs to activities		From activities to outputs		From outputs to outcomes	
	H1	H1'	H2	H2'	H3	H3'
Ministry of European Funds (Romania)	<b>Validated</b> Expertise and resources mobilised with flexibility	<b>Not Validated</b> No alternative resources (neither internal nor external)	<b>Validated</b> Activities produce a high number of guidance outputs, but formal training is less than planned	<b>Not validated</b> Activities lead to required outputs, according to expectations	<b>Partially validated</b> Improved project and programme management but capacity building shows signs of being unsustainable	<b>Partially validated</b> Transfer and consolidation of knowledge are hampered by PAS team taking over administration's tasks, insufficient capacity, and staff turnover
Ministry of Environment and Water (Bulgaria)	<b>Validated</b> Allocation of adequate resources to implement activities in response to needs	<b>Not validated</b> No alternative resources, (neither internal nor external)	<b>Validated</b> Activities give rise to expected outputs thanks to flexible responses to needs (in particular of water supply and sanitation operators)	<b>Not validated</b> Outputs delivered meet needs	<b>Partially validated</b> Improved capacity at the level of water supply and sanitation operators through on-the-spot training but less at managing authority level  Improved project quality and programme management (site visits make swift interventions possible)	<b>Partially validated</b> Managing authority loses a learning opportunity by not participating to activities  Different capabilities of water supply and sanitation operators impact the effectiveness of PAS support

National Agency for Public Procurement (Romania)	<b>Validated</b> Mobilisation of resources adapted to needs	<b>Not validated</b> No alternative resources	<b>Validated</b> Effective transformation of activities into relevant outputs (ex-ante controls realised, central procurement body pilots implemented.)	<b>Not validated</b> No competitive support, insufficient internal capacity	<b>Partially validated</b> Increased capacity of managing authority and central procurement body but managing authority is over reliant on support to address capacity gap and take advantage of the “stamp of approval” (reputational) effect	<b>Partially validated</b> Capacity building at managing authority level hampered by direct involvement of PAS experts
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### Thematic case studies

Two thematic case studies of PAS agreements were carried out that deal with specific issues of interest (how it complements other advisory activities, synergies with EIB lending activity, and how it is distinct from similar services provided by another organisation), namely:

- Ministry of Health in Romania
- Ministry of Environment and Water in Bulgaria

The same methodological tools used in the process-tracing cases were used to collect evidence:

- Document review (such as legal agreements, action plans and progress reports)
- Interviews with beneficiary organisations (two missions: five beneficiary organisations interviewed in Bulgaria and ten in Romania)<sup>11</sup>
- Interviews with EIB staff (four interviews)
- Interviews with other IFIs (two interviews)
- Interviews with the European Commission (two interviews)

### Methodological limitations and mitigation measures

As most of the PAS agreements reviewed are still ongoing, the time period available is insufficient to observe effects that may take time to materialise. For this reason, the analysis focuses mostly on evidence-based outcomes.

The other methodological limitation concerns possible bias in the qualitative evidence collected from stakeholders. To mitigate the risk of subjective assessments, systematic triangulation was conducted by contrasting evidence collected from stakeholders (beneficiaries), EIB staff and documentary evidence (such as progress reports).

<sup>11</sup> Some interviews were also relevant for the process-tracing case studies.

# ANNEX 3 — EIB LENDING OPERATIONS BENEFITING FROM PAS SUPPORT

**Table 6: EIB lending operations benefiting from PAS support (as of 1 August 2022)**

Overall, PAS activities contributed to 16 lending operations and underlying projects for an EIB approved amount of €3.98 billion between 2014 and 2022. As shown in the table below, the type of advisory support provided largely differs across assignments, as do their length and scope.

BULGARIA						
PAS assignment	EIB operation receiving PAS support (name and Serapis number)		Type of advisory provided by PAS	Value of operation (project cost) in € million	Net financing amount of operation in € million	Status of operation
PASSA BULGARIA SOFIA MUNICIPALITY Project Support Service Agreement between the European Investment Bank, Sofia Municipality and Toplofikacia Sofia EAD	TOPLOFIKACIA CHP PROJECT	2009-0545	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Project implementation support</li> <li>- Monitoring</li> </ul>	161.00	67.00	Active
	TOPLOFIKACIA CHP PROJECT BG NATIONAL COFINANCING (allocation of BU SPL 2014-2020)	2020-0842		35.00	13.50	Active
PASSA BULGARIA MoEW Project Support Service Agreement between the EIB and the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Water	BULGARIA EU FUNDS CO-FINANCING 2014-2020 (SPL)	2013-0545	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Project implementation support</li> <li>- Capacity building</li> <li>- Dissemination of best practices</li> <li>- Monitoring</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	6 223.70	500.00	Active (fully disbursed)
PASSA National Railway Infrastructure Company	MODERNIZATION ELIN PELIN-KOSTENETS RAILWAY SECT	2019-0575	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Project preparation and capacity building</li> <li>- Monitoring</li> </ul>	554.75	50.50	Active (approved by Board of Directors)



	(allocation of BU SPL 2014-2020)					
	REHABILITATION OF PLOVDIV - BURGAS RWY PHASE II (allocation of BU SPL 2014-2020)	2020-0555	- Project preparation and capacity building	345.17	43.19	Active (approved by Board of Directors)
<b>ROMANIA</b>						
PAS assignment	EIB operation receiving PAS support (name and Serapis number)		Type of advisory provided by PAS	Value of operation (project cost)	Net financing amount of operation	Status of operation
PASSA ROMANIA MoH for the implementation support for the Regional Emergency Hospital project	COVID-19 IASI REGIONAL HOSPITAL	2020-0204	- Support with technical project preparation - Project implementation support - Coaching and training - Monitoring	420.90	250.00	Active
	CLUJ REGIONAL HOSPITAL	2020-0892		455.41	27.00	Active
	CRAIOVA REGIONAL HOSPITAL	2020-0893		508.52	368.00	Active
PASSA MEF and PASSA MEF 2 Project Advisory Support Service Agreement with the Romanian Ministry of European Funds for the continuation of the implementation support during 2020-2023	ROMANIA EU CO-FINANCING FOR GROWTH 2014-20 (SPL)	2015-0396	- Project implementation support - Coaching and training - Monitoring	7 449.00	360.00	Active (fully disbursed)
	ROMANIA EU CO-FINANCING FOR ENVIRONMENT 2014-20 (SPL)	2015-0548		4 467.00	300.00	Active
	ROMANIA EU-COFINANCING FOR TRANSPORT 2014-20	2015-0712		6 809.00	1 000.00	Active

	(SPL) (see below sub-operation)					
	GALATI SOLID WASTE INFRASTRUCTURE (allocation of SPL RO Environment 2014-20)	20190226	- Project preparation and implementation support	107.00	14.36	Active (under appraisal)
	2019-0393 - LUGOJ-DEVA MOTORWAY II (allocation of SPL RO Transport 2014-20)	20190393	- Project preparation and implementation support	534.13	80.12	Active (under appraisal)
	SEBES-TURDA A10 HIGHWAY (allocation of SPL RO Transport 2014-20)	20190588	- Project preparation and implementation support	350.41	86.62	Active (under appraisal)
	T MURES-OGRA-C TURZII A3 HIGHWAY (allocation of SPL RO Transport 2014-20)	20190589	- Project preparation and implementation support	330.46	81.12	Active (under appraisal)
	CFR ARAD-SIGHISOARA RAIL UPGRADE (allocation of SPL RO Transport 2014-20)	2019-0587	- Project preparation and implementation support	3 019.00	745.00	Active (approved by the Board of Directors)
PASSA ROMANIA MoENV with Ministry of Environment for capacity building in the solid waste sector	ROMANIA EU CO-FINANCING FOR ENVIRONMENT 2014-20 (SPL) Also supported by PASSA MEF (see above) (see below sub-operation)	2015-0548	- Project implementation support - Coaching and training	4 467.00	300.00	Active
	DOLJ WATER AND WASTEWATER (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20)	2022-0265		374.62	42.33	Active (under appraisal)

BACAU COUNTY WATER AND WASTEWATER (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20FL 2015-0548)	2021-0625		391.00	47.80	Active (under appraisal)
CLUJ COUNTY WATER AND WASTEWATER (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 2015-0548)	2021-0623		355.60	42.20	Active (approved by the Board of Directors)
BUCHAREST GLINA II (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 2015-0548)	2020-0264		354.34	30.85	Active (approved by the Board of Directors)
GALATI WATER AND WASTEWATER (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20FL 2015-0548)	2019-0034		151.40	16.80	Active (approved by the Board of Directors)
VRANCEA WATER AND WASTEWATER (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 2015-0548)	2019-0033		207.00	26.40	Active (approved by the Board of Directors)
TURDA WATER AND WASTEWATER (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 2015-0548)	2019-0032		130.50	16.90	Active (approved by the Board of Directors)
ALBA COUNTY WATER AND WASTEWATER (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 2015-0548)	2019-0031		114.10	13.00	Active (approved by the Board of Directors)
HUNEDOARA WATER AND WASTEWATER	2019-0030		71.50	8.80	Active (approved by

	(allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 2015-0548)				the Board of Directors)	
	CARAS SEVERIN WATER & WASTEWATER II (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 20150548)	2018-0797		92.90	3.60	Active (under appraisal)
	BOTOSANI WATER AND WASTEWATER II (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 20150548)	2018-0796		84.10	7.50	Active (under appraisal)
	BIHOR WATER AND WASTEWATER II (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 20150548)	2018-0795		54.10	1.50	Active (under appraisal)
	BACAU WATER AND WASTEWATER II (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 20150548)	2018-0794		95.40	1.70	Active (under appraisal)
	ARGES WATER AND WASTEWATER II (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 20150548)	2018-0793		91.20	4.20	Active (under appraisal)
	COVASNA WATER AND WASTEWATER II (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 20150548)	2018-0792		64.20	0.90	Active (under appraisal)
	SATU MARE WATER AND WASTEWATER II (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 20150548)	2018-0791		69.00	1.40	Active (under appraisal)

	VALCEA WATER AND WASTEWATER II (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 20150548)	2018-0790		79.50	1.10	Active (under appraisal)
	MURES WATER AND WASTEWATER II (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 20150548)	2018-0789		91.80	0.40	Active (under appraisal)
	MEHEDINTI WATER AND WASTEWATER II (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 20150548)	2018-0788		43.80	4.80	Active (under appraisal)
	MARAMURES WATER AND WASTEWATER II (allocation of RO SPL ENV 2014-20 FL 20150548)	2018-0757		82.80	0.90	Active (under appraisal)

# THE EVALUATION DIVISION OF THE EIB GROUP

The Evaluation Division of the EIB Group conducts independent evaluations of the EIB Group's activities. It assesses the relevance and performance of these activities in relation to their objectives and the evolving operating environment. It also helps the EIB Group draw lessons on how to continuously improve its work, thereby contributing to a culture of learning and evidence-based decision-making.

Evaluation reports are available from the EIB website: <http://www.eib.org/evaluation>



# Evaluation of EIB Project Advisory Support in Bulgaria and Romania



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