



# International Evaluation Conference

Cohesion Policy 2014–2020:

Towards Evidence Based Programming and Evaluation

## SUMMARY OF THE CONFERENCE

The Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion held an international conference "**Cohesion Policy 2014–2020: Towards Evidence Based Programming and Evaluation**" on 4–5 July in Vilnius (Lithuania).

**The first day covered programming and evaluation of the cohesion policy in 2014–2020**, including such issues as the intervention logic, indicators, monitoring and evaluation systems and new organisational, procedural and methodological needs in the field of evaluation.

**The second day dealt with the programming, monitoring and evaluation of the ESF.** Delegates heard about evaluations of ESF interventions, conducted by the Commission and MSs, what is relevant or should be changed in the fields of ESF programming and evaluation from 2014.

Programme of the conference and presentations are available at: [www.esparama.lt/2007-2013/en](http://www.esparama.lt/2007-2013/en). This document contains a short summary of presentations and discussions.

## 4 July (Day 1)

### Welcome Speeches and Opening Remarks by Conference Hosts

#### **Rimantas Šadžius, the Minister of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania**

Cohesion policy should continuously play an important role in reducing social exclusion, enhancing competitiveness and quality of life in all EU regions. To achieve cohesion policy objectives with limited resources we need to strengthen evaluation and monitoring instruments. The Minister of Finance emphasized that the new regulations of cohesion policy provide additional effective programming instruments: focus on the thematic priorities and ex-ante evaluation.

#### **Zoltán Kazatsay, Deputy Director-General of Directorate-General of Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission**

European Union is at the crossroad – new priorities, new regulations and new financial programming period. In order to seek more efficiency of cohesion policy it is very important to evaluate its impact. First of all, while implementing 2014–2020 cohesion policy we need to ensure data and essential information collection. Policy should be more evidence based, focused on the results – starting from evaluation and going to clear intervention logic.

### Plenary session 1: Result Orientation and Logic of Intervention in the Upcoming Programming Period

#### **Results and Performance for Cohesion Policy – a Step Change for the Future**

**Veronica Gaffey, European Commission, DG REGIO**

**Antonella Schulte-Braucks, European Commission, DG EMPL**

The speakers emphasized that current cohesion policy programmes are often designed only to spend money. Objectives are rather vague, indicators do not express objectives. Consequently, it has been difficult to demonstrate the impact of cohesion policy. For that we need to apply the result-orientation approach in the programmes. This approach includes four building blocks: result orientation of programmes, indicators, performance framework review and reserve, evaluation and reporting. The measurable dimension of results must be captured with indicators. Aim of the performance framework is to incentivize implementation as planned and also to anticipate problems and to tackle them in advance. Meanwhile stronger role should be given to ex-ante evaluation, because it focused more strongly on intervention logic and also possibility to obtain data for baselines.

## **Application of New Concepts in Programming: Lithuania's Experience** **Ramūnas Dilba, Ministry of Finance, Lithuania**

In his presentation Ramūnas Dilba presented new elements that appeared in the process of preparing Lithuania's Progress Strategy "Lithuania 2030" and National Development Programme: extensive involvement of society, focused value-based priorities, long-term planning (20 years), an integrated approach to public interventions, move from sector to planning topics and issues. Preparation process of "Lithuania 2030" was organized in such a way that various representatives of society and social partners would be included through public discussions (round table discussions) and consultations, social network and mass media. The Strategy "Lithuania 2030" provides the vision and development priorities as well as directions of implementation by 2030. The speaker mentioned that "Lithuania 2030" will be implemented by following three key principles – "quick wins", direct involvement of communities and NGOs and also through the system of strategic planning documents. When preparing National Development Programme (medium-term strategic document to implement "Lithuania 2030") special attention to the logic of intervention and causality was made – orientation to the compatibility between the intervention and various background conditions (various laws, strategies and taxes). The Strategy does not set any specific objectives for individual sectors of the economy, stressing instead the need for fundamental change. Priorities and objectives cover multi-sectoral areas and try to solve horizontal problems.

## **Stimulating Sustainable Growth Using Cohesion Policy: Realistic or a Holy Grail?** **Dr. John Bradley, „EMDS Consulting“, Ireland**

John Bradley stated that main tools of evaluation are result indicators. Change in result indicators are comprised of contribution of intervention and contribution of other factors. Using result indicators needs to measure the change that can credibly be attributed to an intervention. Effects of an intervention can be identified using counterfactual impact evaluation and theory-based impact evaluation. Evaluation of cohesion policy faces these problems: policy monitoring and evaluation become detached from design and implementation, use of "performance indicators" is known to distort execution of core tasks, rare use of counterfactual and theory-based impact evaluation. In order to solve these problems it is important to use a new integrating, holistic and clarifying approach of evaluation. Counterfactual and theory-based impact evaluation needs to be treated as a single evaluation, integrated process of the cohesion policy programming, as well as impact analysis need to be based on knowledge of the structure and performance of the regional economy and/or enterprise target. Macro, micro and enterprise perspectives are needed in policy design and impact evaluation. Business strategy frameworks should also be used to understand the region's enterprise sector. Narrative analysis and case studies can generate insights about the regional economy actors.

## **Plenary session 2: Role of the Ex-Ante Evaluation for Developing Operational Programmes**

### **Ex-ante Evaluation of the EU Structural Funds: the New Challenges of 2014–2020** **Haroldas Brožaitis, PPMI, Lithuania**

The key point of his presentation was that ex-ante evaluators developing the theory (-ies) of change for 2014–2020 Operational Programmes face such challenges as EU regulatory requirements, time pressure and lack of evidence. He also pointed out that linking intermediate results to longer-term outcomes can be a politically sensitive process, as it may imply major resource reallocation or power shifts. However, application of the theory based approach can contribute to a better and more transparent planning process, management of expectations among stakeholders and identification of existing gaps of knowledge and evidence.

### **Evidence-Based Programming – the Role of Ex-Ante Evaluations** **Paul Casey, Welsh Government, Welsh European Funding Office, United Kingdom**

In his presentation Paul Casey focused on the process and governance of the ex-ante evaluation of Welsh Operational Programmes 2014-2020, which depending on the type of the programme includes different elements, such as Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA), Assessment of Financial Instruments and Equality Impact Assessment (EAI). As some of the ex-ante evaluation activities are planned to be finished in the mid of 2013, the further steps will be indicator review, second iteration analysis, SEA/EIA and evaluation of the finances planned to implement the OPs. In this context ex-ante evaluators are seen as "critical friends" for programmers, ensuring the clearness of objectives and focus on results to be achieved.

## **Punctuated Equilibriums: the Added Value of the Ex-Ante Evaluator in R&D and Innovation focused Operational Programmes**

**Dr. Derek Jan Fikkers, Technopolis Group, the Netherlands**

The key point of the presentation was that the ex-ante evaluators of the R&D and innovation focused Operational Programmes must not perform only their conventional role, nor advocate sectoral interests (e.g. universities) during the programming process. The added value of ex-ante evaluators rather could be a proactive role involving different stakeholders (especially SME), creating a wide network and proposing smart instruments to manage the process of smart specialization and R&D and innovation focused OP preparation.

## **Plenary session 3: Evaluation of Cohesion Policy after 2013: Need for More Robust Methods, Reliability and Availability of Data**

### **The Ex-Ante Evaluator: Super Hero or Ordinary Mortal?**

**Prof. Michael Wiseman, The George Washington Institute of Public Policy, United States**

Ex-ante evaluation instructions are extensive and detailed; thus the ordinary mortals (evaluators) find it difficult to implement them. Reliable evidence base is the main condition for a high-quality evaluation. One of the methods for building the evidence base is counterfactual impact evaluation. However, only a few counterfactual impact evaluations have been carried out so far, thus “the evidence cabinet is near-empty”. In order to form a reliable evidence base, agencies need to develop a culture of improvement. Managing authorities should form sort of a “club” through which discussions and mutual learning would help to develop a culture favourable to evidence-base building.

### **Experience of Counterfactual Impact Evaluation in the CZ OP HRE, Case of Enterprise Support**

**Dr. Vladimír Kváča, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Czech Republic**

**Dr. Oto Potluka, University of Economics Prague, Czech Republic**

Counterfactual Impact Evaluation (CIE) examined the impact of employee training (grants for employers to train employees, funded by the ESF) on companies' employment. There were 31 604 firms in the sample, consisting of non-applicants (n= 28 974), successful applicants (n= 1447), and rejected applicants (n= 1183). Three different CIE methods were used: 1) Regression discontinuity which exploits a selection procedure cut-off at 65 points. Findings: positive effect for small companies, no clear effect for big enterprises. 2) Difference-in-difference and propensity score matching. Findings: positive effect for SMEs, no clear effect for big enterprises. 3) Instrumental variables (instrument – evaluators who differ by the strictness of evaluation). Findings: no significant numerical results. Evaluation showed that grants to train employees have positive effect on SMEs. Depending on the method used, enterprises that received support employed 4–7 more employees than enterprises that were not supported. It was also estimated that approximately 1.2 persons per project were employed in its administration.

### **Network Analysis as a Method of Evaluating Support of Enterprise Networks in ERDF Projects**

**Tamás Lahdelma, Urban Research TA Ltd, Finland**

A pilot study on the impacts of networking and clustering projects funded by the ERDF in Finland 2008-2011 combined network analysis and statistical methods. Selected business indicators (e.g. productivity, profitability) before and after the project were compared between the firms participating in the projects and a reference group. The evaluation confirmed that firms participating in the projects are faster growing and more productive than firms in the reference group. The second stage of evaluation was network analysis which identified the position of firms in a project network. Statistical analysis was carried out to evaluate whether enterprise's position in the network determines its productivity, profitability and the view on the benefits of the project. The evaluation found that “betweenness centrality” (the firm is in a central position to the extent that it falls on the paths between all other pairs of actors in the network) predicts higher productivity growth and ability to find new customers.

### **Measurement Approaches for Evaluation: We Get What We Measure**

**Diana Eerma, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, University of Tartu, Estonia**

When carrying out an ex-post evaluation, the evaluators should also use the methodology of social accounting. Social accounting measures not only financial costs and benefits for participants but also

takes into account the wider economic and social impacts for society as a whole (including groups that did not directly take part in the intervention).

Presentations were followed by a short discussion. According to participants, it is essential that society is informed about results of every evaluation. However, most of the reports are written in a highly-technical language which is hard to understand for non-specialists. Evaluators should find a way to transform these reports into reader-friendly formats: articles, press releases, etc.

#### **Parallel session 4.1: Challenges of the New Programming Period for the Programming and Evaluation of Cohesion Policy: Programming**

##### **Programming for 2014–2020 and the Implications for Performance**

**Prof. John Bachtler, European Policy Research Centre (EPRC), Strathclyde University, United Kingdom**

Partnership Agreements (PAs) are set to be adopted by the end of 2013 or early in 2014. Austria, Denmark, Finland and Slovenia are the frontrunners in the PA preparation process. European Commission is taking a more active role in regulating the preparation of PAs through position Papers. Bachtler noted that there is a mix of developments in the architecture of programmes. Some countries reduce the number of OPs (the Czech Republic, Finland, Slovenia), while others maintain *status quo* (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Spain). Similarly, there is a mix of centralization (the Czech Republic, Finland) and decentralization (France, Poland) of the management structures of Cohesion policy (CP). Ambitions for improving the performance of cohesion policy spending are based on: 1) strategic coherence: framing the policy as “delivering” Europe 2020 objectives; 2) thematic concentration: focus spending by setting minimum thresholds for spending on key priorities; 3) results focus: creating a performance reserve, improving coherence of programme objectives with indicators and targets, using fewer monitoring indicators, ensuring better availability and comparability of data. In order to solve implementation problems, member states have to provide the EC with clear control mechanisms. The oversight of European Parliament and transparent reporting of EC to European Council are also needed.

##### **Contribution of Culture for Economic Development and Societal Cohesion: in Search of the Theory of Change**

**Eglė Saudargaitė, Ministry of Culture, Lithuania**

**Darius Žeruolis, ESTEP, Lithuania**

Darius Žeruolis refers to Pier Luigi Sacco, who states that culture policy context is in transition from *Culture 2.0* to *Culture 3.0*. According to Pier Luigi Sacco, some of the key features of *Culture 3.0* are: 1) digital shift leads to innovations of cultural production, dense interaction; 2) blurring boundaries between producers and consumers of cultural offerings; 3) culture moves from leisure into everyday opportunity; 4) creativity facilitates the adjustment to rapidly changing environment. Cultural spending priorities shift from heritage (1999–2006) to cultural and creative industries (2007–2013, continuation/ increase of support in 2014–2020 financing period) as well as digital culture (2014–2020). Case studies show that although funding of culture is important, the evidence of what it is achieving is still scarce, as current monitoring material is mostly descriptive. Lithuania is viewed as a relatively closed society with insufficient conditions for the development and expression of creativity. Civic engagement, inter-personal trust, tolerance and postmaterial values are not widespread among the Lithuanians. Furthermore, cultural-artistic activities are not yet important for most Lithuanians. Culture is a horizontal priority of the National Progress Programme 2014–2020. The main objectives are strengthening of creativity and strengthening of (cultural) identity. EU funding is an important cultural policy stabiliser and driver of cohesion in EU member states. It is important to go beyond established EU investments in culture and focus on demand.

##### **Concept of Intervention Logic in Preparation of 2014-2020 Programmes-the Case of the Czech Republic**

**Lenka Sekyrova, Ministry of Regional Development, Czech Republic**

Lenka Sekyrova in her presentation focused on using the intervention logic in the preparation of 2014–2020 programmes in the Czech Republic. The Ministry of Regional Development is responsible for the preparation of Partnership Agreements (PAs) and the coordination of Operational Programmes (OPs). Sekyrova noted that Managing Authorities (MAs), responsible for the preparation of Operational Programmes, do not always understand the purpose of applying Intervention logic,

claiming that EC does not require it. OPs must be driven by PA, not the opposite way. PA should be based on: 1) national, regional, macro-regional and sea-basin strategies; 2) country-specific Council recommendations; 3) distance to the Europe 2020 targets; 4) National Reform Programme; 5) Common Strategic Framework; 6) experience from the period 2007–2013. Development needs and priorities must be evidence-based. Internal coherence of OP is very important. Mutual coherence of identified problems, objectives, measures and activities must be ensured. OP must be more detailed than PA. Challenges to Intervention logic are: 1) controlling the effect of conditions, external factors and other measures; 2) multi-level causality: what are the initial causes of the problem? At what level should we stop? 3) making sure that the activities and the change sought respond to the problem and its causes. Sekyřova concluded that there is a significant improvement in the construction of programmes and overall understanding of programming in Czech Republic.

#### **Parallel session 4.2: Challenges of the New Programming Period for the Programming and Evaluation of Cohesion Policy: Evaluation**

##### **Quality and Use of Results of EU Structural Funds Evaluation in Lithuania. Standards for EU Structural Funds Evaluation**

**Dr. Vitalis Nakrošis, PPMI, Lithuania**

**Danutė Burakienė, Ministry of Finance, Lithuania**

In order to meet the main challenges for the evaluation of EU Cohesion policy in the programming period 2014–2020, the presenters argued for the application of an evidence-based approach to evaluation planning and capacity building. Vitalis Nakrošis assessed a link between the quality of evaluation of the EU Structural Funds and the implementation of evaluation recommendations. Danutė Burakienė presented the document of evaluation standards that could improve the quality of evaluation or, alternatively, could act as a straightjacket to evaluation innovations.

##### **Can Participatory Evaluation Approach Trigger an Increased Demand for Results of Relevant Stakeholders in 2014+ Programming Period?**

**Krunoslav Karlovceć, Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, Slovenia**

The key point of his presentation was that the active involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation process increases the ownership of evaluation results and their effective delivery. He also suggested applying the method of stakeholder analysis and developing evaluation standards that include stakeholder involvement. Slovenia is testing participatory evaluation and preparing a monitoring and evaluation handbook for the period 2014–2020 focused on participatory evaluation.

##### **2003–2023 Brief History of Two Decades of Cohesion Policy Evaluation & Result Oriented Approach** **Stanisław Bienias, Evaluation Expert, IDEA for Development, Poland**

By retrospectively and prospectively assessing the 2003–2023 period, the presenter identified which main factors could contribute to the development of a result oriented approach. For instance, Stanisław pointed to the significance of evaluation culture that is developing due to stronger evaluation requirements and emphasised the need for better coordination that ensures a more strategic approach and a better use of evaluation findings.

The presentations were followed by a short question-answer session and discussion. The conference participants discussed which factors affect the quality of evaluation (different types of evaluation, evaluation budget, etc.), as well as the (mandatory and non-mandatory) status of recommendations and their implementation in different European countries.

#### **5 July (Day 2)**

##### **Welcome Speeches and Opening Remarks by Conference Hosts**

**László Andor, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion**

László Andor emphasised the importance of ESF interventions as the main instrument for investing in human capital. However, lack of evidence, lack of measurable impact and visible progress are most frequently criticised ESF aspects. The upcoming programming period presents an opportunity to

further develop ESF induced changes in social cohesion. It is a time for innovative solutions and result-based management, which must be the common denominator for all EU cohesion policies. Evaluation gained even more importance during these years. It is a principal approach for assessing the impact of EU structural funds. Therefore the key question is focused not on the spending, but rather on the results-achieving aspect.

#### **Aloyzas Vitkauskas, Viceminister of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania**

Aloyzas Vitkauskas stressed ESF's significance in promoting Europe's competitiveness in the world. ESF provides new opportunities for growth and improvement. Ensuring competent human resources and promoting practice exchange among EU member states will lay a solid foundation for a more competitive Europe.

### **Plenary session 5: Experience and Lessons Learnt from Programming and Evaluation of the European Social Fund 2007–2013**

#### **Overview of ESF Evaluations by Member States in the Current Programming Period Antonella Schulte-Braucks, European Commission, DG EMPL**

The key message of the presentation was a great disparity in evaluation efforts among EU member states. Even for the main ESF themes such as Access to Employment and Social Inclusion efforts are insufficient or lacking evaluation findings. To sum up, there is a need for more impact evaluations and better evaluation design with clear intervention logic and well defined indicators and definitions.

#### **Challenges Addressed? The Contribution of ESF to Ameliorating Employment and Social Inclusion Situation in Lithuania during 2007–2013 Dr. Egidijus Barcevičius, PPMI, Lithuania**

The presenter argued that the contribution of ESF is not always used successfully. EU-supported investment in the employment/social field is significant but not sufficient to make an impact at the macro level in Lithuania. However, it is necessary to create the right conditions for learning. The success of ESF can be measured in four different ways: (1) achievement of targets, (2) following a reasonable intervention logic, (3) doing better than in the doing nothing scenario or (4) creating ground for change and experimentation that would not be possible without the SF. Barcevičius argued for a mixed strategy when several methods (e.g. theory-based and counterfactual approach) are applied during the evaluation.

#### **How does the Institutionalisation of Development Policy Influence the Effectiveness of ESF Interventions? Evidence from the Evaluation of Human Development Programmes in Hungary Gábor Balás, HÉTFA Research Institute, Hungary**

Gábor Balás suggested that in order to solve such problems as cherry-picking of clients, evaluation should make recommendations for changing institutional incentives. This requires an institutional approach in evaluation. Hungary has chosen to separate managing authority from the sectoral ministry and have separate intermediate bodies. However, in order to overcome principal-agent dilemmas trust in sectoral administration must be created. Planning for 2014–2020, the focus should be on easy-to-measure developments and contracts should go beyond crude use of indicators.

### **Parallel session 6.1: Employment and Social Inclusion**

#### **Using Quantitative Theory Based / Counterfactual Impact Evaluation to Evaluate Actions for the Unemployed Benedict Wauters, ESF Agency Flanders, Belgium**

Speaker presented a counterfactual impact evaluation assessing Public employment service (PES) actions for the unemployed in Flanders, Belgium. The evaluation aimed to identify the effect of ESF-modules on job-seekers when they are not randomly assigned to treatment. The study used administrative data from PES and national databank Dimona surveying 2005 individuals in years 2010 and 2011. The evaluation sought to model a real-life situation where PES modules were not assigned randomly to the unemployed. It took into account relevant factors (age, gender, education, medical concerns etc.) that PES employees used to determine the assignment of particular models for the unemployed. Results showed that professional orientation module had the highest impact, followed

by coaching and training on the work floor and diagnosis module. One of the key topics addressed in the study was the effectiveness of individual modules for different target groups. Based on the results, a number of policy recommendations was generated: 1) assign non-EU persons more into professional training and into diagnosis modules; 2) assign mid-schooled more into training / coaching on the work floor module; 3) assign young more into diagnosis module; 4) assign positive action in place for clients over 50; 5) emphasise the quality of search behaviour, rather than the quantity. Presenter noted some methodological assumptions that could have affected findings: the evaluation focused on modules as the main unit of analysis, while in reality, Flemish job seekers get a pathway with a customised sequence of modules; the study did not control the intensity and duration of each module.

### **Impact of the ESF 'Fight Against Discrimination Operational Programme' Managed by Non-Profit Organisations in Spain**

**José Manuel Fresno, Network of NGOs managing operators under the OP: Spanish Red Cross, Fundación ONCE, Fundación Secretariado Gitano, Caritas, Spain**

The presentation introduced an impact evaluation of "Fight Against Discrimination Operational Programme", which was implemented in Spain between 2006 and 2011. The programme was managed by four Spanish NGOs and aimed at integrating vulnerable people (immigrants, people with disabilities, severely excluded people and Roma) into the labour market. During the period of implementation, 244 million euro, an average of EUR 40.7m per year, was spent on the programme. The evaluation assessed the programme across three dimensions: 1) economic impact; 2) effectiveness of the social and labour inclusion; 3) institutional development and innovation. Using macroeconomic impact evaluation method and Hermin analysis tool, the evaluation found that the economic returns of the investment were significantly higher than the expenditures. OP generated EUR 56m contribution to the economy per year, which comprised 140% of the annual expenditure. With regards to the effectiveness of social and labour inclusion, the evaluation also found a clear positive impact. Despite severe situation in Spanish labour market, the share of participants becoming employed using mediation services has increased. OP has been generating around new 10000 job places per year. Finally, it has increased the capacity and cooperation of NGO's that managed the programme. The impact evaluation concluded that despite the economic crisis, OP has succeeded in helping vulnerable people find employment.

### **Impact Evaluation of an ESF-Funded ALMP for People with Disabilities, Anna Adamecz, Budapest Institute, Hungary**

The presentation introduced the impact evaluation assessing ALMP measures for people with disabilities in Hungary. The share of people with disabilities in Hungary reaches 22% and is the second-highest among all OECD countries. The employment rate for this target group is the lowest among all EU countries. The ALMPs under evaluation were used between March 2008 and December 2010 and sought to reactivate/reemploy people with disabilities through wage subsidies, mentoring, counselling and training services. The evaluation was performed using a counterfactual impact assessment design. It used data provided from National Labour Organization. Participants came from two sources: 1) Rehabilitation subsidy programme and 2) Incapacity benefits registry. Both sources included persons with limited working ability (40-50%). The participants in control and treatment groups were matched at an individual level based on numerous categories (age, sex, education etc.). The evaluation found that 53% of participants in the treated group got employed compared to only 2% in the control group. Data also showed that 81% of treated participants did not return to unemployment. In control group, this figure reached 60%. Relatively large share of individuals not returning to unemployment pointed to significant levels of undeclared (illegal) employment among people with disabilities. Taking into consideration the factor of shadow economy, the evaluation found that the employment rate of treated individuals was 21 percentage points higher compared to the control group. The effect of ALMPs for people with disabilities (including long-term unemployed) in Hungary was much higher than other international studies found. However, it is important to keep in mind that the results included substitution and deadweight effects. Also, the results could have been affected by potential selection bias on unobserved characteristics (e.g. motivation, ethnicity).

## **Parallel session 6.2: Education and Life-Long Learning**

### **Lessons learned for monitoring indicators during 2007-2013 period: the case of Higher Education Rima Rubčinskaitė, International Business School at Vilnius University, Lithuania**

The presentation commenced with a brief overview of EU and national context in the area of HE for the programming period of 2007-2013. It was followed by a more detailed explanation of National Higher Education Programme and difficulties to monitor national objectives when they are incompatible with common indicators. Rima Rubčinskaitė concluded that the monitoring of national HE programmes should follow the EU framework, however, at the same time be tailored according to the national needs.

### **Supporting cooperation of education and business – the case of vocational education in Poland Agnieszka Rybińska, Educational Research Institute, Poland**

Agnieszka Rybińska presented the research which targeted the sustainability of cooperation activities between VET providers and business entities in Poland. It analysed the projects under the measure the ultimate goal of which was to increase the employability of students. The initial findings suggested that percentage of cooperating entities was low, however, quite sustainable as most activities under cooperation were continued. Further analysis showed that the continuity of activities was to a large extent affected by the prior cooperation and therefore the interventions appeared to be inefficient at the initiation of cooperation. Rybińska concluded by presenting the following phase of the evaluation which should provide a more in-depth analysis of factors stimulating sustainable cooperation between schools and business.

### **Learning about the effectiveness of EU structural fund projects in Italian schools: A large scale RCT for math teachers Aline Pennisi, Ministry of Economy and INVALSI, Italy**

Aline Pennisi presented the Italian project aimed at improving students' performance in maths through the improvement of teachers' competences. It was observed that students' performance was significantly different between North and South and that most Italian teachers did not have specific training in teaching. Pennisi introduced the intervention logic of M@t.abel programme and its impact assessment on students and teachers. The programme had several shortages, namely a large share of teachers quitting the project and worse students' performance in short term. However, the treated students expressed more interest in studying the subject, stronger self-confidence, and less frequently attributing academic failure to chance. Moreover, middle-aged teachers were found to be positively affected by the programme which strengthened their collaboration with peers skills and the method of teaching. Pennisi concluded with general observations on the strengths and weaknesses of the impact assessment.

The presentations were followed by a short question-answer session and discussion. The conference participants discussed the inconsistency between often positive evaluations and decreasing participation in lifelong learning. Also, the importance of networking in the small states, as well as some technical issues of the particular evaluations, was discussed.

## **Parallel session 6.3: Institutional Capacity and the Efficiency of Public Administrations**

### **Strengthening Institutional Capacity under the Future ESF Florian Hauser, European Commission, DG EMPL**

Speaker provided detailed information about the factors underlying the growing need to strengthen administrative capacities of ESF interventions and promote efficiency of public sector. Report introduced general and specific context of 2014–2020 policy and discussed key institutional challenges emerging in public sector (such as declining funding, change of societal needs and expectations (Facebook generation), as well as the need for economic growth and competitiveness). In addition, Hauser overview features of 2007–2013 ESF interventions in institutional capacity building among all EU member states and introduced the main ex-ante conditions of 2014–2020. Features of future interventions were discussed (during upcoming period greater emphasis not only on public sector institutions, but also on key partners), as well as other related challenges, such as the partnership assurance, a greater focus on results and outcomes of interventions evaluation. Despite



the focus on results of interventions, it is complicated to select informative indicators to measure efficiency and good governance of public sector. While evaluating the latter, it is important to use indicators not only based on the views of interested people but also those that are based on facts.

### **The Institutional Bottleneck and How to Avoid it Dr. Rolf Boehnke, AGEF, Germany**

Rolf Boehnke presented constraints of institutional capacity and ways to overcome them. Boehnke advised to identify the key tasks that must be implemented by a specific authority before the evaluation. Later on, three "tests" for institutions were discussed that could be used to assess the needs of the organization while building institutional capacity and operational efficiency. 1) The performance test for the evaluation of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and sustainability; 2) ability and motivation tests for evaluation of internal environment of organisation; 3) external environment test for assessment of economic, political, legal, administrative and other factors that influence functioning of the institutions. The collection of required data to perform the tests should be selective, and data should be collected analysing documents, conducting interviews and carrying out surveys. Finally, if the test results are not clear-cut (the organization has both strengths and weaknesses), the first steps should be taken to remove the weaknesses that pose the most risk to organization's work.

### **Creation of Intervention Methods and Solutions in Administrative Capacity and Efficiency of Public Sector Fields of ESF Programmes**

**Antanas Šabanas, Municipality of Birštonas, Lithuania**

Antanas Šabanas provided specific, practical, experience-based insights into how to reduce the administrative burden on projects at local authorities and how to increase efficiency of activities of public sector institutions related to EU support and EU-funded project management. According to Šabanas, main barriers to effectiveness of interventions usually are poor planning, attachment to the results achieved, integration of tools funded by other programs, lack of qualified staff, long and complicated procedures, slow implementation, different standards, use of the local language, etc. Šabanas also made recommendations on how these problems can be addressed through the internet, communication technologies and other (common mistakes and best practices promotion, procurement development, expert concentration, certain legal measures, document digitization, streamlining reporting procedures, etc.)

Questions and discussions focused on indicators of efficiency evaluation of public sector institutions – what the best indicators of individual institutions are to assess indicators that could be applied to different ESF interventions, how to ensure comparability of results of evaluation at EU level. Rapporteur Klaudijus Maniokas noted that although there is a broad consensus on the need for ESF interventions in increasing efficiency of public sector, it is important not to focus only on civil servants training. Future interventions should include other stakeholders and intermediate institutions in order to strengthen the partnership and to increase confidence in public institutions.

## **Plenary session 7: Preparation for the New Programming Period: What is Most Relevant for ESF Interventions, Their Monitoring and Evaluation?**

### **Summary of the Day 2, conclusions from the conference. conclusion of parallel sessions 6.1–6.3**

Closing remarks of the session were made not only by rapporteurs of 6.1–6.3 parallel sessions (Benedict Wauters, Žilvinas Martinaitis, Klaudijus Maniokas) but also by Georg Fischer, who stressed that sharing practice of international evaluation was the utmost importance of the conference. This is particularly important in evaluation sphere, as it is a relatively new activity and discussion of problems of methods used and insights of evaluators play part in achieving better quality of evaluation. Rapporteurs of parallel sessions and chair Ramūnas Dilba noted that the conference was highly useful, as it highlighted the main difficulties faced by evaluators and provided opportunity to share good evaluation practice.

