



MOKSLAS • EKONOMIKA • SANGLAUDA



EUROPOS SĄJUNGA
EUROPOS SOCIALINIS FONDAS

Kuriame Lietuvos ateitį

**EVALUATION OF 2007–2013 M. EU STRUCTURAL ASSISTANCE SPECIAL
SELECTION CRITERIA**

SUMMARY

April 16th 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study was aimed at assessing the eligibility and sufficiency of SPSC (Special Priority Selection Criteria) of actions for 2007–2013, considering the objectives of priorities (measures) of actions and provisions for recommendations and methods for the improvement of SPSCs. Two levels were assessed during this study: the eligibility of the procedure of SPSC establishment and the eligibility of SPSCs as a result of the procedure. The results of the assessment report are based on interviews with staff of the supervising institution and intermediaries, interviews with the implementing bodies, the results of an online poll of SPSC 'user' groups i.e. applicants and the assessors of applications, an analysis of the practices of foreign countries (Estonia and the Netherlands), and an expert assessment of SPSCs of selected measures.

Assessment of procedural / system elements

The different practices of SPSC establishment and assessment in intermediary bodies, the time assigned to SPSC establishment procedures, the uneven participation of implementing institutions, social partners and potential applicants and other factors in the uneven establishment of SPSC procedure, does not ensure efficient SPSC establishment. Unified practices would allow for a more efficient dissemination of good practices in SPSC establishment and assessment, and also for the comparison of institutions and in establishing prerequisites for better control over compliance to procedure. One of the recommendations for SPSC improvement is a systemic improvement of the SPSC establishment procedure, which is presented in detail in the Methods for SPSC Establishment and Assessment. While improving the procedure, the principle of cooperation and strategic focus should be systemically applied and a suggested sequence of steps for SPSC establishment should be followed.

Monitoring Committee, SPSC planning. The related area to be improved is the planning of the procedure for SPSC establishment. There are two possible causes of this problem: the planning of actions and the quality of plans, as well as the ability to follow and implement the plans made. Meetings of the Monitoring Committee were convened rather infrequently with the submission for approval of generalized and abstract SPSCs, the details of which did not always correspond to the decision approved by the Monitoring Committee. The procedure lacked consistency in certain cases. A systemic improvement of planning for the establishment of SPSCs and approval by the Monitoring Committee is recommended, e.g. by institutions drawing up the plan for SPSC establishment and approval. The planning of meetings of the Monitoring Committee and the improvement of the content of SPSC presentations submitted to the Monitoring Committee is also recommended, in order that the Monitoring Committee is provided with the information necessary to make adequate decisions. In fact, the majority of actions are already in the planning stage e.g. the plan for the implementation of measures is currently under consideration, and a form for the improvement of SPSCs and submission to the Monitoring Committee has already been established. However, the weaknesses which have been identified show the need to improve the content of documents under preparation and to ensure the disciplined implementation of the plans.

Interpretation of SPSCs, transfer of information to assessors. According to the survey of assessors of applications, the amount of advice provided by intermediary body was indicated as an area in need of improvement. To ensure that assessors of implementing institutions have an appropriate understanding and to ensure the appropriate application of SPSCs established by an intermediary body (especially when SPSCs of expert assessment are established), improvements in the communication of SPSCs to assessors are recommended. One suitable measure is appropriate training (consultations) for assessors provided by an intermediary body.

Assessors of applications, resource planning. Even if in the majority of cases assessors were informed in advance that they were expected to perform Benefit and Quality Assessments, in some cases they did not have enough time to study the assessment material. While improving the procedure, the implementing institutions should plan for assessment procedure and the human resources needed for this, implement their training systematically and also organize internal meetings for assessors.

Feedback, improvement. The study also demonstrated the lack of sufficient feedback between the implementing institution and the intermediary body which records the assessment results. Therefore, the experience acquired by assessors was not used adequately. Issues were usually relayed to intermediary bodies, but a wholesale summarized presentation of calls for proposals in assessment practice was rarely implemented, even if it would have been useful in improving SPSCs. Systemic feedback is recommended when the discussion of assessments of applications is organized.

Foreign practice

The practices of Estonia and the Netherlands were analyzed. Even though the SPSCs of these countries are different in their details and number of criteria, they also have some common aspects. The main common features of their SPSCs are that both countries use expert assessment criteria and are dominated by SPSCs oriented not to the applicant but rather to specific project activities and their desired results. Estonia has an established SPSC of economic efficiency to assess project benefits with regard to their costs. To use the practices of Estonia and the Netherlands in Lithuania, SPSCs should be project-oriented and a cost-benefit SPSC should be introduced to prioritize economically efficient projects.

Assessment of SPSC eligibility

After summarizing the results of both the application assessor's and applicant's surveys, the conclusion is that SPSCs were not clearly defined and properly detailed. Also, the principles of marking were not completely clear. One of the main weaknesses of SPSCs indicated by applicants is that they are too abstract and that their assessment is subjective.

Qualitative requirements for SPSC. Expert assessment revealed that some SPSCs lacked integrity and clarity and were difficult to measure. Some SPSCs were comprised of a number of components. The assessment of such criteria could raise questions as to which component is more important and give rise to a different interpretation of the nature and purpose of the assessment criterion. Additionally, concepts were occasionally used that did not have a clear and unambiguous definition, thus providing the opportunity for different interpretations. The definition of 'innovation' was the most challenging to institutions. Details of some SPSCs did not correspond to the wording of the SPSC or the list of assessment aspects was left incomplete. This lack of clarity in criteria, as well as the vague assessment system, was probably determined by the fact that some SPSC were hard to calculate, or due to the fact that when comparing the qualitative features of projects clear comparison criteria were not established.

An SPSC of the measures assessed was related to the objectives of the measures and actions, as well as to supported target groups and activities. Nevertheless, based on the survey of application assessors, SPSCs did not completely perform their function, i.e. select projects with maximum added value which contribute most to the implementation of objectives. The majority of respondents pointed out that SPSCs were merely formal and not entirely suitable for assessing a project's impact and results.

Project-oriented SPSCs. Some cases SPSCs were established which were oriented to an assessment of the applicant's status and experience. In certain cases such SPSCs were assigned a high relative score weight, e.g. a score of 30 or 35. The history or extent of activities undertaken by the applicant in the past do not guarantee the quality of the project. Therefore, such SPSCs do not ensure the selection of the most efficient projects. Likewise, such SPSCs allow for unequal competition among individual applicant groups. Moreover, such SPSCs place an additional burden on assessors, since it is they who must assess the eligibility of the applicant. The criteria for the eligibility of applicants and their partners are established in DPFC (Description of Project Financing Conditions) first and foremost, and their conformity is assessed in the 7 GSC (General Selection Criteria) section. With regards to the study results and foreign practices, the suggestion is to orientate SPSCs towards a specific nature, objectives, reasoning, target groups and tasks, activities and physical indicators for the implementation of the project for which support has been applied for and to avoid SPSCs intended for the assessment of the applicant's experience. To ensure the transparency of project selection procedures and equal competition for applicants, all applicants should be adequately grouped according to the different calls for proposals.

Costs and benefits. While assessing the suitability of SPSC sets, a main weakness was identified, i.e. that SPSCs of economic benefit were not established to allow for an assessment of a projects efficiency with regards to costs. Considering the fact that EU financial support is limited, and has to be assigned to projects which are able to achieve same result for lower costs, a cost-benefit SPSC should be applied. It should be noted that in Estonia, SPSC of economic efficacy are established and assigned a considerable score.

Expert assessment SPSC. The measures administered by MSSL (The Ministry of Social Security and Labour) were lacking in an expert assessment SPSC, which would have allowed for the expert assignment of a higher score to projects, thus enabling better implementation of the objectives of the measure. Assessment criteria providing more space to experts provide prerequisites for disputes, but also allow for greater flexibility and better usage of the applicants creativity, leaving some space for new solutions to a specific issue which was probably not predicted when announcing the call for proposals. Therefore, a SPSC set should include expert assessment criteria.

Minimum score. The assessment system should be improved by setting a minimum score. This is due to cases where projects awarded just a few points were financed. A minimum score is necessary as the financial resources of EU funds are limited, and therefore only target projects should be financed.

Summary. The study results demonstrated that the procedures of SPSC establishment and planning and the communication and presentation of SPSCs to assessors should be improved. Also parameters of SPSC quality and sufficiency must be established – the use of which would help ensure the effective implementation of actions. When considering the results of assessment, methods for the establishment of special priority selection criteria for 2007–2013 European Union structural support and for assessing their eligibility / sufficiency submitted together with this assessment report provide for three kinds of requirements, with regards to objectives for SPSC quality and sufficiency:

- 1) *Requirements for SPSC establishment procedure*, as the organization, course and features of the procedure has a direct influence on the final result, i.e. SPSC set.
- 2) *Requirements for individual SPSC*, i.e. requirements applied to each SPSC. Each SPSC must conform metacriteria of consistency, clarity, complementarity, ability to estimate, and project-orientation.
- 3) *Requirements for SPSC set*, i.e. requirements applied to the SPSC system as a whole.
 - A Universal SPSC – to encourage the implementation of horizontal priorities in Lithuania and to shape the practice of the assessment of project efficiency the following universal SPSC were established: Cost Benefit SPSC; Horizontal Priority SPSC;

Special SPSC – to ensure that financing is assigned to projects which are most oriented to priorities of specific actions and with maximum compliance with regards to the purpose of the measure, the following SPSC were established: SPSC for Actions / Priorities; SPSC for Measures.