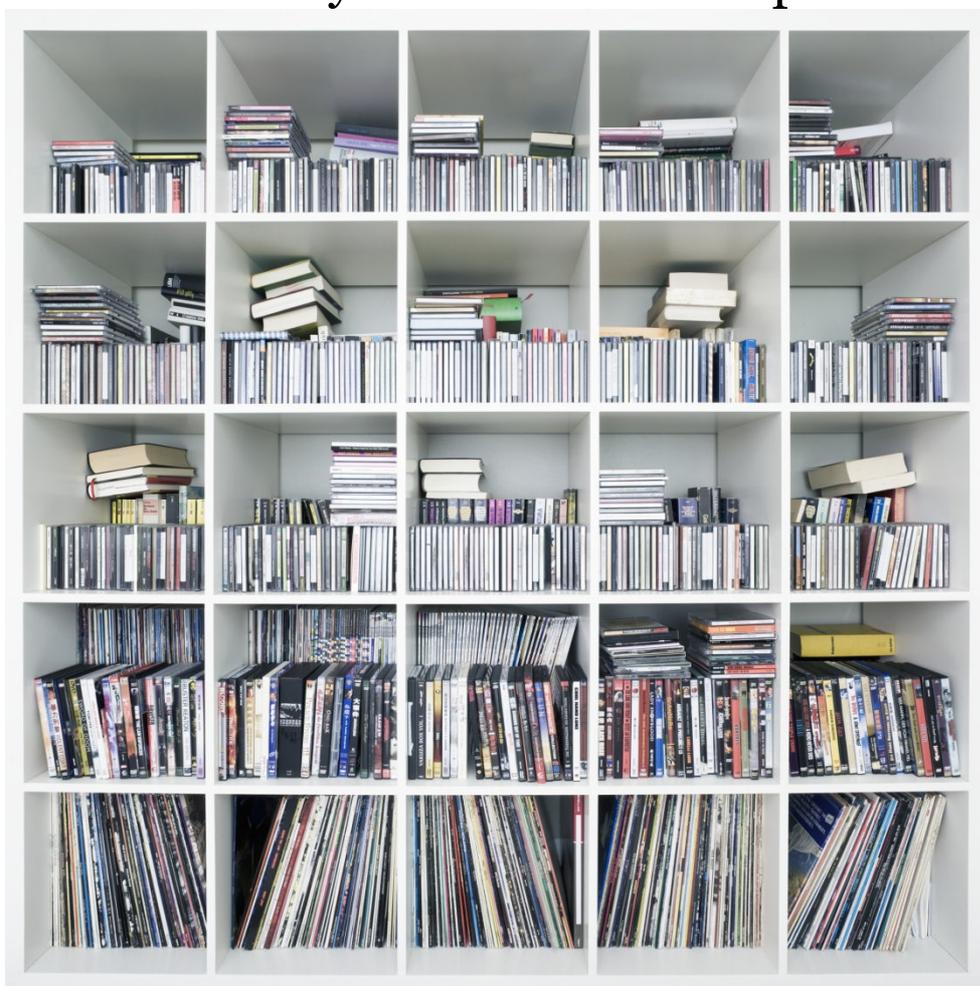




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Evaluation of quality and efficiency of trainings financed by ESF

Summary of evaluation report



16 May 2011

Summary

This evaluation was performed by PricewaterhouseCoopers UAB (hereinafter referred to as PwC) according to the contract with the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania No. 14P-47 on July 22, 2010.

Aim, objectives and scope

The aim of evaluation is to improve quality and efficiency of trainings that are financed by European Social Fund (hereinafter referred to as ESF) and the implementation of Human Resources Development Operational Programme (hereinafter referred to as HRDOP). During the evaluation comparison of 2004–2006 and 2007–2013 EU support periods was performed in order to evaluate sustainability of training and lessons learned. This evaluation includes quality, effectiveness and impact evaluation of trainings that are performed by four HRDOP Measures:

- *“Rural labour force change of focus from agriculture to other activities”;*
- *„Qualification development of general education, professional and higher education institutions’ teaching personnel”;*
- *“Qualification and skills development of scientists’ and other researchers’ (scientific databases, e-documents)”;*
- *„Qualification development of employees of government authorities and institutions”.*

Besides, analysis of foreign practices, examples of best and worst practices and recommendations are also included in this report.

The results of evaluation are supported by desk research analysis, the performed survey data of trainings’ participants and their managers; interviews with project managers and personnel of administrative authorities. The cause-effect research model was applied for this evaluation linking the activities implemented with the effects achieved. First of all it was evaluated if trainings meet the needs of target groups; later on it was evaluated if trainings were implemented properly, for example selecting qualified service providers and lecturers. Finally, results of trainings were evaluated using **Kirkpatrick** model which consistently includes four levels of training effectiveness: 1) reaction – how the delegates felt about the training or learning experience 2) learning – measurement of the increase in knowledge before and after training 3) behaviour – the extent of applied learning on the job implementation 4) results – effect on the business or environment by the trainee.

Results and lessons learned from SPD period

Evaluating training related results achieved during the period of implementation of Single Programming Document (hereinafter referred to as SPD), it was noticed that results were several times or more high than it was planned. It means that monitoring indicators did not meet one of the most important validity criteria. Trainings implemented during SPD period had a positive impact, nevertheless not to the extent as planned in SPD. Comparing training interventions during different programming periods it is stated that similar interventions trends remained during 2007-2013 EU support period. Aims, some of the activities and target groups remain the same as during SPD programming period.

Lack of detailed training objectives, target groups and objectives could be identified as problems during SPD support period. In HRDOP period this problem has been dealt with more elaboration of HRDOP – priorities were separated to more measures better defining training objectives, target groups. A separate measure was formed for qualification development of public personnel. It is also important to mention some problems during SPD implementation related to trainings: inappropriately selected types of training, lack of training service providers in the market, high service prices, too high intensity of training and changing training needs. The problem related to the selection of training type was dealt focusing more on organization’s strategic objectives. Other implementation problems were solved partly, e.g., enabling to change trainings topics if the need for training has changed; problem related to high service prices was dealt by benchmarking prices proposed with the prices in the market and setting proportions of costs categories. While high intensity of training issue remained during both programming periods. Also problems related to lack of training quality control and monitoring indicators’ selection are identified. However, it is too early to assess monitoring indicators, while problem of quality control is still relevant, because services are purchased from third parties.

Quality and efficiency of training, implemented by four HRDOP Measures analysed

The portfolio of ESF financed training is fragmented and diverse: the different needs and goals of target groups influence the differences in training programs, its' length, methods, etc. On the one hand, big scale standardized trainings result in economy of scale. On the other hand, unification of training programmes leads to increased risk of failure to meet individual trainee needs and adapt to changing economic situation. Therefore it is important to maintain the balance of these aspects. The foreign experience revealed that trainings that are organized at the scale of whole country or sector and its creation is based on the training needs analysis provided desirable effects.

Many participants of the trainings were representatives from budgetary institutions or citizens of rural areas that usually get lower income than those living in cities. This means that financing of trainings by own funds would be too heavy financial burden for many target groups therefore support for these groups is purposeful. However, improvements can be made at some measures in order to increase training efficiency.

Generally, the quality of trainings and its' particular elements were evaluated positively. However, some weaknesses were determined (e.g. the expertise of lecturers, training organization, the training need fulfillment). To add, at some instances, the lack of qualified lecturers arises especially when specific trainings are needed. Thus, additional training quality control procedures are beneficial in such cases. The quality of formal trainings was evaluated lower mostly due to their poorer practical application.

Overall, trainings financed by ESF had positive impact on target groups' qualification increase. The indirect positive effects, such as practice sharing among colleagues, making contacts, increases in cooperation, were also noticed. However, not all the trainings achieved expected positive results or its' extent was lower than expected. For example, the high probability of missing expected results is seen at the mean "Rural labour force change of focus from agriculture to other activities ". The improvement of training needs determination, better balancing of special and general trainings could result in increased positive effects of the measure "Qualification development of employees of government authorities and institutions".

The important factor is quality of tender documentation. A set of public procurement documentation elements can help in selecting competent providers and lecturers (requirements for service providers and experts, application of economic benefit evaluation criteria, requirement for public purchases participants to provide recommendations on services provided). The application of economic benefit criteria should be used as it is recommended by Public purchase agency in order to choose high quality services and it enables to evaluate qualitative aspects of the offer.

It is noticed that active project management team involvement, high competency, cooperation with services providers also can contribute to the higher level of training quality.

The results of training monitoring are used insufficiently (only the measurement of participants' satisfaction is performed in most cases). Evaluation of training quality and efficiency is essential in the process of planning future training and achieving better training results.

To sum up, the determinants of training quality and efficiency are stated:

- The correct identification of trainings needs and the trainings adjustment to trainees needs;
- The motivation of participants, personal features, receptivity;
- Competence of suppliers of training services and lecturers;
- Competently arranged training services purchase documentation, thoroughly arranged requirements for suppliers, experts, the comprehensiveness of technical specification, and application of economic benefit criteria;
- Convenient training place, timetable, intensity.
- Adequate material resources.
- The evaluation of training efficiency, the supervision of training results.
- Competence of project management group, involvement into quality control processes, interaction with supplier during the period of services provision.
- The priority for trainings that provide economy of scale could result in cost efficiency.

Below the detailed results with respect to particular four means are provided.

Measure „Rural labour force change of focus from agriculture to other activities“

The goal of the Measure „Rural labour force change of focus from agriculture to other activities“ is to increase abilities of people, who retreat from agricultural activities, to integrate into the labour market in Lithuania and to encourage people of rural areas to participate in non agriculture activities.

There is a need to seek the aims of this measure because the change of employment structure in rural area is a long term strategic objective of the country. However, the Measure is not efficient as it is implemented today. Assessing the achieved results and its dynamics it is very likely that the desired effect won't be achieved under the current supported activities and target groups. The majority of participants referred that there was a need for training, consultations and the quality of trainings and consultations was evaluated positively (formal training was evaluated not so good). However, the increase in the level of knowledge and practical application of knowledge in practice was evaluated not so positively. The conclusion is that the knowledge has been acquired, but not applied in practice. This is also illustrated by poor monitoring indicator results. It was expected that after implementing the Measure around 40% of participants of training will switch to non agriculture activities (it should be noted that the target value is very ambitious and difficult to achieve). However, during this assessment period just approx. 6% of participants have switched to non agriculture activities. Considering the dynamics, it is very likely that the planned effect would not be achieved. Therefore the continuity of the measure or the possibility to transform it must be considered. The main reasons influencing the low efficiency are the following:

- The change of economic situation had an impact on the results. Agriculture was one of the most stable areas during the downturn. Therefore it is quite natural that the need to switch to non agriculture activities has decreased.
- The efforts and procedures are put in place and reinforced during the implementation phase in order to select motivated target group; however, during the evaluation it was found out that quite a significant part of participants took part in trainings seeking to hear something new. Thus, it is assumed that they were not self-determined to switch to non agriculture activities. In this situation the resources are not concentrated to a target group and used inefficiently.
- Formal trainings are targeted for people who are seeking for a job. Due to high unemployment rates in the market, there is very limited possibility to find a job with adequate competencies and salary. Project formal trainings also overlap with trainings performed by The Lithuanian Labour Exchange. The latter ones are more attractive for participants because of better funding conditions therefore it is difficult to attract participants to formal trainings of the project.
- Some of project (and Measure) activities are targeted to promote entrepreneurial skills, creating a job for themselves and others. The work in the following areas should be continued, but it is necessary to transform the Measure as it does not generate the expected result.
- One of the difficulties preventing from the switch to non agriculture activity is limited access to financing sources. Therefore it is important to link consultations and trainings funding sources (for example linking with financial engineering measures). Similar initiatives are implemented through the Fund for Promotion of Entrepreneurship (also including training activities and access to grants).
- Another important notice is related with the “depth-width” dilemma. It is planned to train quite a considerable number of participants therefore there is a push on achieving quantitative indicators while putting less focus on selecting motivated target group and training efficiency.
- The instrument fails in practice, so it is very likely that the desired effect will not be achieved under current sponsored activities and target groups. It is recommended to decide on instrument's future perspectives: 1) Decide on the continuity of the instrument – to reallocate resources to other instruments with similar goals 2) Transform the instrument preparing the next call for proposals documents.

Measure „Qualification development of general education, professional and higher education institutions’ teaching personnel”

The goal of the Measure „Qualification development of general education, professional and higher education institutions’ teaching personnel” is to increase qualification and competencies of general, professional and higher education institutions teaching staff.

The supported activities and projects are targeted to implement educational programs aimed at putting in place long-term reforms in education sector. So there is a need to invest in the professional development of teaching staff in order to achieve long-term development goals. Also the need to improve qualification is caused by changes in education system, such introduction of new teaching methods, development of ICT, improving ICT infrastructure at schools etc. Participants of the trainings also assured that trainings were useful. The suggestions for trainings topics indicate that there is a need for training in the future as well.

Two projects were being implemented at the period of evaluation according to the Measure analysed. One of them aimed at developing teachers’ skills to use information and communication technologies and applying innovative teaching models (hereinafter referred to as ICT project) received high score. Quality of training service, increase of knowledge and skills after participation in trainings and application of the gained knowledge in practice was ranked very high. Around 90% of participants stated that they have already applied knowledge in practice.

The second project implemented by the same Measure was aimed at developing network of learning schools (hereinafter referred to Network of Learning Schools (NLS) project). These trainings faced some weaknesses associated to training quality (faced organizational problems, low competency of trainers, lack of practical applications and practical examples). Participants indicated systemic weaknesses of training. Also knowledge and skills application in practice was evaluated weaker. Some of these weaknesses could be eliminated by improving the selection of service providers and by performing quality control during the project’s implementation phase in close collaboration with service providers. To sum up, although the practical usefulness of this training was evaluated weaker, some of the comments provided by participants indicate that training was useful for part of the participants.

To summarize, the trainings performed by this Measure were useful – participants have benefited from training and use knowledge gained in daily life. Participants gained new ideas, had an opportunity to share practice with colleagues, received methodological and other tools. They set up contacts with colleagues and maintain communication with colleagues in virtual community. Also it should be noticed that in addition to training, activities targeted at creating preconditions for long-term and purposeful qualification improvement were implemented, e.g., development and testing of qualification improvement models for educational personnel, development programmes, methodological tools, learning objects. Thus, it is likely that the impact will be long lasting and sustainable.

On the other hand it is noticed that there is a lack of competent service providers for such type of training. Therefore it is important to prepare a qualitative set of tender documentation and perform adequate quality control during implementation of training.

“Qualification and skills development of scientists’ and other researchers’ (scientific databases, e-documents)”

The goal of the Measure “Qualification and skills development of scientists’ and other researchers’ (scientific databases, e-documents)” is to improve qualification and develop skills of scientists and other researchers under relevant field and horizontal needs by enabling access to periodical and other scientific publications databases.

There is a need to ensure wider access to scientific information sources for scientists and other researchers in order to increase scientific innovations. Access to databases in Lithuania is not sufficient due to the lack of funding, so EU support provides a unique opportunity of seeking scientific development and quality improvement goals. However it should be noticed that sustainable effect will be achieved if access to databases will be continued in the future. Further funding of databases without EU support still remains unclear at the moment.

Trainings that are implemented by this Measure are evaluated very positively. This type of training is purposeful, because it helps to ensure greater publicity of databases, spread of information, sharing of ideas and news. Performed survey indicates that majority of respondents stated that training were useful. Also the need for training is illustrated by high interest and active participation in trainings. The quality of trainings was evaluated positively. Project managers claimed that they succeeded in attracting experienced and qualified lecturers.

It is important to note that expenditures for training of this instrument constitute a minor part of the budget (the major part is provided for the development of data, for subscriptions). Mostly trainings are implemented in order to publicize databases and are short term (mostly lasting one day). Therefore it is difficult to evaluate the impact and practical application of such kind of training. One of the objective indicators in this case could be the use of databases and the increased quality of scientific publications. Due to confidentiality restrictions the usage of scientific databases was not analyzed. However, the usage of database "Lituanistika" has increased and, according to project manager, the quality of publications provided for database has improved. The number of collected scientific publications in this database exceeded the planned ratio and this indicates the increasing activity of scientists and researchers.

Measure "Qualification development of employees of government authorities and institutions"

The purpose of the Measure „ *Qualification development of employees of government authorities and institutions*” is to increase administrative capacity of public administration by improving staff qualification in priority areas, such as strategic management, foreign languages, IT literacy, skills related to participation in EU decision making and preparation for chairmanship in EU.

In the context of the changed economic situation, EU funds have become probably the only one source for financing qualification development initiatives. It is even difficult for institutions to finance own share of the project. Therefore there is a need for financing training of employees of government authorities. However, EU support must be used efficiently. Firstly the process of training need identification and target group selection must be improved. According to the findings of National audit office of Lithuania, the survey of employees in government sector performed by Civil service department (2010) and this analysis, there are weaknesses in training need identification, which, in turn, affect the effectiveness of training. For instance, it was intended to train all the employees but not all of them were motivated to participate in trainings. It is also worth to mention that in some cases the content of training was not related to direct job position and functions performed. Therefore there is high probability that acquired knowledge will not be used in practice. In many cases surveys were performed in order to find out needs for trainings; however this is not a sufficient tool for determining need for training. Identification of training needs has to become an integrated part of the personnel management system. Identification of training needs has to be linked with strategic objectives of organization and staff performance evaluation and development system. Besides, the results of previous trainings must be used when planning new ones. In this case, projects related to creation and development of personnel management system must be promoted (which is directly linked to better identification of training needs). Also there could be a priority for projects that identify training needs better and plan training programs based on the needs identified.

According to the survey performed by *PwC*, most respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the training. All types of trainings were rated very similarly. However, some comments reveal that problems with the quality exist to some extent. For instance, the trainings were conducted using out of date software; the number of people in class could be reduced, etc. The prevention of the aforementioned weaknesses could be performed by formulating more comprehensive public tender documentation. The quality of training, increase of knowledge and knowledge application in daily activities was ranked positively, but in order to increase training effectiveness, the process training needs identification has to be improved.

The majority of trainings were in the field of foreign languages, computer literacy and for developing general type of skills. Computer literacy and skills gained in special type training (application is limited in other institutions) were more easily applied in practice. In contrast, other types of general training, strategic management and foreign language trainings were evaluated as less applicable in practice. The largest part of all trainings was foreign language trainings. It takes time to learn foreign language and use it in daily activity

(especially at the basics level), therefore it should be a continuous process. However, the majority of institutions could not provide the plan on how they are going to continue this type of training.

The cost analysis of the Measure “Qualification development of employees of government authorities and institutions” revealed that the lowest costs are associated with projects which had the largest number of participants. There is a moderate negative correlation between the number of training participants and costs. This means that the smaller number of participants at the organization, the larger the costs associated with the project and opposite – the larger the number of participants – the smaller costs. Cost per participant in some trainings varied significantly compared to the mean. The solution of the aforementioned problems could be implementation of some types of trainings centrally and achieving scale of economy.

Examples of good practice

Identification of the training needs. Project aimed at developing teachers’ skills to use information and communication technologies and innovative teaching models (referred to as *ICT project* which is implemented by the Measure “Qualification development of general education, professional and higher education institutions’ teaching personnel”) and project “eMoDB.LT: providing the electronic science databases for Lithuania” (referred to as *eMoDB project* which is implemented by the Measure “Qualification and skills development of scientists’ and other researchers’ (scientific databases, e-documents)”) could be examples of good practices in the field of identification of training needs.

Training participants’ selection procedures were applied in ICT project (applicants needed to send applications in which the motivation statement was required). In eMoDB project case a research was conducted and report prepared in order to determine the need of such training and training programmes adapted to the needs. As a result, participants of these trainings highly ranked training correspondence to their needs.

The project “The retraining of workforce from countryside from agriculture to other activities” can be attributed to the examples of bad practice. This is because of the fact that trainings do not fit current economic situation and there is insufficient focus on selection of motivated target group. Therefore project fails to meet its targets. Besides, identification of training need should be improved at public organizations and institutions.

Training implementation. ICT project is good example in training realization: the distance courses were created, innovative training methods are applied. Project management personnel is involved in training quality control. Trainings received significantly higher participants’ evaluations compared to other training projects. “The retraining of workforce from countryside from agriculture to other activities” project can be named as inappropriate example. The funds in it are used inefficiently, actions do not correspond to strategic goals and prices of services are set above the market average.

Results. ICT project can be named as good example, because of the fact that nearly 90% respondents claimed applying skills and knowledge gained in practice. The bad practice is represented by project “The retraining of workforce from countryside from agriculture to other activities”. The anticipated effect of this project most probably will not be achieved because of insufficient focus on selection of motivated target group, changes in economic situation and “depth – width” dilemma.

Monitoring and use of the results for improvement. In most cases the first *Kirkpatrick* model evaluation level is used (although, it is applied not for all cases) – the satisfaction of participant about the training. It was observed that monitoring of training results should be strengthened and the results should be used when planning future trainings. The ICT project can be mentioned as a good practice because the efficiency of trainings was measured using all four *Kirkpatrick* evaluation levels.

Practices of foreign countries

Practice analysis of foreign countries was performed in order to find out how similar problems are addressed in other countries. In the analysis of training quality assurance practices in foreign countries the ex ante and ex post actions were identified. The analysis of training needs determination process and project selection criteria were named by Estonian and Slovenian institutions as important *ex ante* actions assuring training quality and efficiency. This is a very general evaluation because the aforementioned methods are applied in all analyzed countries according to the law regulations of structural support. Application of foreign countries practices is limited due to the great variance in projects and means for human capital development.

The different determination of needs detection methods, project selection criteria systems and different criteria itself also increases the problematic.

Among the *ex post* actions the most common ones were surveys of training participants, in depth interviews with training participants and external evaluations on the efficiency of EU support Operational Programmes. There is no common practice in foreign countries and training quality control is left in the responsibility of project manager.

It is worth to mention the training planning and execution guidelines set by Denmark foreign affairs ministry. They provide a training cycle which is divided into six important implementation stages. Although some of the elements are fulfilled in Lithuania, however some crucial steps are omitted, such as training evaluation. This leads to the failure of reaching the best training results.

Recommendations

The quality and effectiveness analysis of four training measures was performed, thus separate recommendations for particular measures as well as general recommendations are provided.

Recommendations regarding Measure “The retraining of workforce from countryside from agriculture to other activities”:

- 1) It is recommended to decide on instrument’s future perspectives:
 - Decide on the continuity of the instrument – to reallocate resources to other instruments with similar goals;
 - Transform the instrument preparing the next call for proposals documents.
- 2) In case the decision to transform the Measure is made, possible alternatives are:
 - Make a decision on formal trainings. Due to high unemployment rates in the market there is very limited possibility to find a job with adequate competencies and adequate salary;
 - More emphasis should be placed on resources concentration – train less, but the right and motivated target audience;
 - Training and consultations should be linked to financing sources (possible linking with financial engineering measures);
 - Increase the qualification and skills of audience that is already implementing non agriculture activities (e.g. have received aid under Rural Development Programme);
 - Support countryside communities’ “down – top” initiatives as it is done in foreign countries.

Recommendations regarding Measure “Qualification development of general education, professional and higher education institutions’ teaching personnel”:

- 1) Improve the identification of training need:
 - Promote projects which aim at creating and developing personnel management systems (e.g. employees’ competence model, creation of competence evaluation methodic, etc.). This could be realized by arranging separate measure or activities;
 - Give priority for projects that identify training needs better and plan training programs based on the needs identified (e.g. by setting appropriate selection criteria);
 - Give priority for the projects in which the need of training is determined according to the results of previous trainings (especially at the instance of continuing training).
- 2) Introducing a balance between general type and specific type of trainings:
 - In order to have a balance, a proportional limitation of general type of trainings could be introduced.
- 3) Encourage to perform economy of scale generating projects:
 - At the next programming period to put emphasis on economy of scale generating projects (e.g. by determining respective selection criteria). Horizontal training can be performed for the public sector (the evaluation which training programs can be performed horizontally is needed);
 - The self learning methods, distance courses that are becoming more and more popular in the world could be applied (the evaluation which training programs can be performed horizontally and the economic effect valuations are needed).

General recommendations:

- 1) Increase public procurement competencies because the public purchases are seen one of the most challenging parts of project implementation:
 - The preparation of guidelines on public tender documentation (e.g. methodical recommendations, examples of documentation, introduction to good and bad practices examples);
 - Arrangement of timely trainings for project group regarding the public tenders. To strengthen the practices sharing between the project executors, organize the practice sharing events, etc.;
 - Apply economic benefit criteria;
 - Requirement to provide recommendations about successfully implemented projects from the customers;
- 2) Strengthen the capabilities of training quality evaluation and to encourage to apply it for to the project implementation:
 - Issue guidelines of training efficiency evaluation
 - Increase the involvement and responsibility of project executors in the process of training quality and effectiveness evaluation, e.g., define a requirement to perform training evaluation or set related selection criteria.
 - When continuous training projects are financed to set the requirement to provide the effectiveness results of previous trainings.
- 3) Improve the collection of information that is needed for the monitoring of results:
 - Collect emails of participants and confirmations that personal details could be used for the purpose of training quality evaluation.