

# Summary

## Evaluation of the information and publicity activities of the EU structural

The goal of the evaluation of the information and publicity activities of the EU structural assistance is to improve the system of information and publicity of the EU structural assistance for 2007–2013 (hereinafter referred to as the information and publicity system) and to provide recommendations on the optimal way to organise the process of information and publicity in 2014–2020. The information and publicity system has been evaluated in terms of respective institutional and procedural aspects, including the implementation of publicity and information activities and the supervision of the way the project promoters engage in publicity.

### *Sharing of functions and responsibilities*

Functions and responsibilities are well shared in line with the functions attributed to the bodies that administer the EU assistance. The Ministry of Finance coordinates the whole system and implements large-scale campaigns, while intermediate and implementing bodies submit their suggestions on the overall centralised information and publicity plan and independently engage in the implementation of respective information and publicity measures. There are documents regulating the way the responsibility is shared between the intermediate and the implementing bodies. The intermediate bodies are mainly responsible for *publicity*, while the implementing bodies are responsible for *information*. However, there is a practical risk of failing to observe the said division of functions (e.g. events for the applicants/project promoters are organised by both intermediate and implementing bodies), therefore proper coordination and cooperation become extremely important.

During the programming period of 2007-2013 a lot of positive steps allowing to improve the coordination and purposefulness of activities had been taken. For example, centralised planning is already in place, while the process of planning and activity coordination has been established, and the forms of planning documents have been amended. The information and coordination group (ICG) is actively used for the purpose of coordination and dissemination of information.

The following measures are suggested with the aim to further strengthen cooperation and coordination activities. First, it is suggested to draft one single document defining the process of planning, activity coordination and responsibility, and thus entrench the prevailing practice (as it changed many times during the programming period). Second, to further improve the coordination tool, i.e. the planning documents. By introducing a uniform structure of plans drafted on different levels and by introducing more details, to substantiate the relations between the measures applied on different levels and the strategic goals. Third, it is recommended to strengthen the cooperation in both formal and informal ways (to be explained in more detail in the table of recommendations).

The analysis of the overall management cycle (planning, implementation, control, improvement) shows that there is a rather clear division of functions and responsibilities between different bodies in the planning and implementation stages. However, the control function is only attributed to the leading body. Instead, both intermediate and implementing bodies should also be given some responsibility for the evaluation of the outcomes of the information and publicity activities and their improvement.

### *Involvement of social and economic partners*

At the moment there is no practical involvement of social and economic partners in the activities of the coordinating, intermediate or implementing bodies. The key form of their involvement at the moment is the participation in the Monitoring Committee. The survey of the social and economic partners shows that they could be involved in publicity activities. The following groups of feasible partners have been singled out by taking into consideration the goals of the system:

- suggestions on how to ensure more efficient publicity by making use of the professional experience of partners; PR agencies and media representatives could be the suitable partners to provide suggestions on the suitable information and publicity measures;
- shaping of public opinion and the possibility of making use of the partners' communication channels; it is suggested to more actively cooperate with media representatives, who should be mainly viewed as partners in this particular case rather than feasible publicity channels;
- better understanding of the communication needs of the target groups and the impact of communication; the suggestion is to involve the partners that represent the target groups at which the publicity is targeted; it could be associations of the target groups or the organisations that represent them, etc.

- project promoters should be involved as partners, thus making use of the project results that they managed to achieve in applying system-related publicity measures.

Possible forms and stages of involvement: submission of proposals on the information and publicity measures, participation in their implementation, dissemination of information through the communication channels that the partners have.

#### *Institutional aspect: capacity of the system participants*

Most bodies have envisaged the cooperation between the EU assistance administration units and the communication/PR units, thus covering two types of competencies. However, the evaluation of the staff's competencies shows that only a small number of them have education in the area of communication or public relations. The composition of the ICG shows a rather big turnover of staff, thus making it difficult to accrue the institutional competence in this particular area. Since it has been established that the working arrangements are sufficient (the bodies have detailed publicity procedures in place and a sufficient amount of methodological recommendations), in order to mitigate the consequences of the big turnover of the staff, it is suggested to strengthen the informal cooperation by engaging in a systematic dissemination of good practice and by accruing it somewhere, where it would be widely accessible to all members.

#### *Procedural aspect*

All bodies have highly detailed descriptions of the procedure providing for the drafting of the planning documents, including the implementation of the key information and publicity actions, therefore, there is a sufficient amount of regulation on the institutional level. Nonetheless, the procedure guidelines of most of the bodies do not include the provisions on the drafting of quarterly plans and the related harmonisation procedures, including the principles of evaluation of the achieved outcomes of publicity activities. Therefore, it is not clear whether the final steps of the management cycle are implemented, i.e. whether they engage in the evaluation of the results of the undertaken activities and the subsequent improvement thereof. It is therefore suggested to introduce respective improvements of the said procedures by including respective provisions on the supervision of activities.

#### *Supervision of project publicity activities*

The implementing institutions consider the efficiency of the publicity activities undertaken by project promoters to be their weakness, although the project promoters themselves are rather optimistic about the efficiency of their activities. One of the reasons for that is that project promoters lack competencies necessary to plan efficient activities and implement them properly. In addition, when evaluating the applications it is not assessed whether the publicity activities planned by the applicants are suitable, sufficient and whether they are not redundant.

First of all it is suggested to strengthen the capacities of the project promoters. One of the suggestions is to develop and publish on a website respective guidelines/recommendations to be used by both the applicants when drafting their applications and the project evaluators when evaluating the suitability of publicity activities. Yet another measure would be to develop requirements for publicity activities to be observed in the application evaluation process. It would be worth strengthening the application evaluation stage by including one additional question into the project eligibility evaluation form on whether the planned measures are not redundant, whether they are sufficient and suitable.

Second, it is suggested to strengthen the motivation of the project promoters to ensure more efficient project publicity activities. It is worth considering the evaluation of the efficiency of the project publicity activities already at the stage when the benefit and the quality of the project are assessed (in case of the measures in the implementation of which publicity is extremely important in terms of successful implementation thereof or for the final beneficiaries).

#### *Implementation of publicity and information activities*

The key documents reflecting the publicity activities that different bodies engage in are the plans developed and implemented by the said bodies. However, the plans are not detailed enough to ensure proper relations between the goals, objectives, measures, channels and the planned results (the strategy is not reflected on all levels). Therefore, one of the key suggestions of this particular evaluation process with the aim to improve the results achieved by the system as a whole and to facilitate the coordination process is to introduce a uniform system of quarterly/annual plans, including the supplementing of the plans with some thematic pathways, more detailed descriptions of the target groups, implementation deadlines, and planned and achieved results. Yet another suggestion would be to develop guidelines on how to develop a plan that would serve as an instruction when developing planning documents and would help introduce a uniform practice in all bodies that currently engage in different practices.

It is suggested to focus more on the result when developing the measuring system. Currently the Ministry of Finance performs surveys encompassing all levels of the system, which do not allow assessing the efficiency of the activities undertaken by individual bodies. The suggestion is therefore for both intermediate and implementing bodies to establish their own activity measurement indicators and use them to measure the efficiency of their own activities. It is recommended to introduce indicators to measure both the result and the impact of activities, by decentralising part of the research and by including them as an activity implementation element and a task for the agencies that implement campaigns.

The efficiency of the information and publicity activities is determined by the choice of measures, channels and target groups in line with the communication goals. Both the Ministry of Finance and intermediate and implementing bodies were mainly raising awareness, but were not doing enough to emphasise the transparency of activities and the benefit of the assistance. It has also been established that all the bodies failed to sufficiently relate the goals of the application of publicity measures with the goals of the system. This might have been the reason why the EU assistance is rather poorly viewed by the society.

The strategy applied when striving for some publicity goals was not efficient at any level, including the leading body and the intermediate as well as the implementing body. Three main shortcomings have been established. First, the addressee of the communication was not well defined. Most of the publicity measures and channels foreseen in the plans are addressing the mass audience. It is recommended to define the target audience in more detail and more specifically when drafting the plans, and in cases when mass audience is the target group, respective subgroups thereof should be singled out. The suggestion is to use the publicity surveys and the results of communication from the previous years to select the target groups.

Second, there is a disproportional quantity of communication with different target groups, with the society at large being informed in a most efficient way, but measures targeted at the social and economic partners, media and other public opinion leaders are lacking.

Third, there is a need to introduce corrections to the very publicity strategy. Since there is a clear transition from the goal of informing and raising awareness to the goal of public opinion making (benefit and transparency of the EU assistance) it is suggested to use more purposive means that require the direct involvement of the audience, including the integrated publicity measures (encompassing several measures and channels), and to apply them periodically.

#### *Centralised vs. decentralised system*

Having considered all the advantages and disadvantages, it would be expedient to continue in the same direction and further combine the centralised and the decentralised models. The suggestions provided in the report are aimed at further development of the current system with the aim to improve its stability. The level of decentralisation depends on the programming stage. During the initial programming period it is expedient to use the centralised model, because it helps reduce the risk that the provision of the information will be delayed. Later, when the need to be more flexible and better adapt to a specific target group becomes greater, it is advisable to apply the model that includes the delegation of more responsibility and authority to the intermediate and implementing bodies.