

## SUMMARY

This evaluation is meant to help the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania to prepare for the programming of EU structural assistance funds in the period 2014-2020. To ensure that planned interventions are of high relevance and available funds are appropriated and used effectively and consistently, the report draws on lessons of the period 2007-2013 and proposes interventions that are in line with requirements imposed by various documents governing the whole programming process.

The report begins with an overview of the national and European policy context in the area of education and science. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the key goals, priorities and objectives for Lithuania and the EU outlined in various strategic documents. To validate their relevance in the period 2014-2020, the report proceeds with an analysis of current state of play in fields of preschool education, general education, non-formal education, higher education, vocational education and lifelong learning as well as R&D. The analysis is based on results of a desk research, outcomes of discussions in various working groups and findings of interviews with officials in the Ministry of Education and Science and potential beneficiaries of interventions planned in the period 2014-2020. A SWOT analysis in each of the above mentioned fields provide a summary of all these findings. In addition to the analysis of current state of play the report also elaborates on the effectiveness of interventions in the period 2007-2013 in terms of funding take-up and achievement of planned outputs and provides an analysis of similar interventions implemented in the area education and science in Estonia and Slovenia.

The analysis of current state of play in the area of preschool education, general education and non-formal education revealed that for some children preschool education in Lithuania is still inaccessible. It was found that the quality of general education suffers from the lack of new competent staff and poor psychological environment. It is also evident that employment of new technologies in education process is lacking and individual needs of pupils are being poorly met. The uneven dispersity of a network of educational institutions is inefficient (costs per pupil in different schools can vary fivefold) and costly. These resources could be used to improve the quality of education instead.

In the area of vocational education and training the EU structural assistance for the period 2007-2013 was used to address the following issues: improvement of the infrastructure and learning environment, development of the qualifications framework, development of modular training programmes and improvement of their content, development of the quality assurance mechanisms, improvement of the teaching skills, development of a guidance system and development of a system for the recognition of informally acquired competences. However, a majority of these initiatives were too small in terms of scope and thus could not encourage significant qualitative changes in this sector. Therefore it is very important to ensure a smoother transition of learners between different training programmes and educational levels, enhance the creative and technological competences of teachers in the area of vocational education and training as well as adult education, support involvement of social partners in development of the educational content, deal with other factors affecting the quality of vocational education and training.

As for adult education, the evaluators found that despite considerable allocations of EU structural funds in this area in the period 2007-2013, the participation level of adults in lifelong learning activities remains low. It is evident that allocated funds were mainly used for training of highly qualified workers in the public sector, the unemployed and those facing redundancy. Meanwhile attention to the poorly qualified or non-qualified workers, who account for more than a half of the total workforce in Lithuania, was insufficient. They were much less involved in lifelong learning activities in comparison to the aforementioned groups. The level of adult's participation in lifelong learning activities is also influenced

by a belief widespread among adults, especially the older ones, that “It is too late to learn; it is too late to participate in education activities”. This belief is an outcome of a low public awareness of changing educational objectives and benefits of participation in the lifelong learning. A high structural unemployment in Lithuania is a clear signal that a significant share of unemployed persons is lacking required competences and, respectively, the competitiveness in the labour market.

The analysis of current state of play in the area of Lithuania’s higher education suggests that since joining the EU, the financing of a higher education system and its modernisation increased. This resulted in high schools optimising their internal structures, reviewing and upgrading of study programmes, introducing quality management systems. Meanwhile investments in human resources led to improved skills, competences and knowledge of lecturers. A lot of scientific, academic and methodological literature was developed and published, the opportunities for international mobility increased significantly. However, despite positive developments, a number of problems in the area of studies remain unsolved. In terms of content, structure, covered subjects and forms, the quality of studies does not meet the labour market and/or societal needs. The incoherent involvement of social partners in the design of content, the lack of practical skills, the orientation towards process, rather than results and poorly developed career services result in a relatively low employment level of graduates and decreasing attractiveness of studying in Lithuania. As a consequence, more and more students are leaving to study abroad and the relevant needs of those social groups, which are not encompassed by the formal education system, are not being satisfied. It is essential to improve the quality, attractiveness and accessibility of studies in Lithuania, to invest in the improvement of a high schools’ network efficiency and further modernisation of relevant infrastructure as well as improvement of a study environment.

In the area of R&D the progress made by Lithuania during past several years was acknowledged. A clear sign of this progress is Lithuania’s improved position in the ranking of EU Member States in the Innovation Union Scoreboard. The evaluators found that despite delays to implement interventions which sought to improve the capacity of researchers, the overall number of researchers in Lithuania is increasing and their competitiveness at the international level is improving as well as their capacity to produce scientific outputs of the highest quality. Investments of a large scale in the development and modernisation of the research and innovation infrastructure in the period 2007-2013 significantly improved the capacity of researchers in the public sector to pursue high-level R&D activities and intensify the collaboration with enterprises. However, the scale and scope of industry-academia collaboration remains a key challenge for Lithuania: the R&D expenditure in the business sector is very low, the potential of a knowledge transfer is untapped, the number of jointly implemented R&D activities is low and thus the commercialisation results are poor. It was also found that further internationalisation efforts, in terms of incoming and outgoing mobility of researchers, reintegration of Lithuanian researchers and jointly implemented R&D activities, are necessary in Lithuania.

All evaluation findings served as a basis for recommendations regarding interventions in the period 2014-2020. In addition, a list of proposed specific objectives and output and result indicators as well as reasoning behind actions and operations under each objective – all proposals presented in the report were discussed in the working groups in the Ministry of Education and Science, coordinated with the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Culture, introduced to the Ministry of Finance and representatives of the European Commission.

In the area of preschool education, general education and non-formal education it is proposed to concentrate investments of the European Social Fund on reducing the number of early school leavers and on improving pupils’ achievements by addressing disparities between urban and rural areas and reducing disparities between boys and girls. This can be achieved through the application of individualised educational programmes, development of the assessment and monitoring system aimed at tracking pupils’ achievements, improvement of teaching competences, employment of talented professionals, improvement of cooperation between educational institutions and parents of the pupils.

Also, the aforementioned challenges could be addressed through the early career training and improvement of the diversity and accessibility of non-formal education, aiming to boost the number of young people who choose vocational training. Meanwhile investments of the European Regional Development Fund could be channelled to the creation of a better educational environment and improvement of the educational institutions network and its effectiveness.

Interventions in the area of higher education should focus on issues of a higher attractiveness, quality and accessibility of studies. A higher attractiveness could be ensured by upgrading the content of studies and improving the study environment. The increase in quality and compliance of studies with the labour market and societal needs could be achieved if social partners were more actively involved in the process of a study content development; if professional competences and practical skills of lecturers' were higher; if internationalisation of a study process was promoted even more actively. Meanwhile accessibility issues could be reduced if closer links between studies and initiatives for life-long learning were established and various social and financial incentives for students from poorly represented social groups were promoted.

The promotion of academia-industry collaboration, jointly implemented projects and commercialisation of their results as well as support to strengthening of the research capacity should be at the core of interventions in the area of R&D. Thus investments of the European Regional Development Fund should be used to support the implementation of joint projects that are in line with priorities of the national Smart Specialisation Strategy, promote active commercialisation of R&D results in public research organisations, encourage initiatives leading to the establishment of centres of competence, promote integration of national and European research infrastructures. Investments of the European Social Fund should complement these interventions by supporting the interinstitutional, cross-sectoral and international mobility of experienced researchers and strengthening of their skills and competences, training of young researchers, promotion/popularisation of science in general.

Interventions in the area of vocational education and training should concentrate on factors affecting the quality of vocational education and training. There is a need to improve the infrastructure and learning environment; invest in the development of qualifications of a pedagogical staff; proceed with development of the Lithuanian qualifications framework; update the content and teaching methods; refine the procedures of quality management and assurance. Thus it is recommended to build on interventions in the period 2007-2013 by extending their scope. A particular emphasis, however, should be placed on development of the system for acknowledgement of competences acquired non-formally and promotion of the active involvement of social partners in the educational process.

Investments in the area of adult education should create more favourable conditions for adults from vulnerable groups to participate in lifelong learning activities. Interventions should promote the notion of lifelong learning to the population and ensure the availability of high quality career guidance services. It is also very important to allocate a share of funds to finance training of public service servants, managers of educational institutions, administrative staff and educational leaders.