

# EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF EU STRUCTURAL ASSISTANCE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HORIZONTAL PRIORITY “GENDER EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION”

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

10 March 2014

## The object, aim and the main objectives of the evaluation

The aim of the evaluation of the impact of EU structural assistance on the implementation of the horizontal priority "Gender equality and non-discrimination", which took place in 2013 June - 2014 February, was to examine the implementation of the priority in the 2007-2013 programming period and to contribute to the improvement of the implementation of the priority in EU programming period 2014-2020. To achieve this goal the recommendations for decision-makers in the administration system of the EU structural assistance were drafted and material for dissemination of the good practice examples was prepared together with the methodological guidelines for the future applicants.

The object of the evaluation was Lithuania's 2007-2013 National Strategic Reference Framework and Operational Programmes with regards to priority of gender equality and non-discrimination. The evaluation aimed to improve the implementation of the horizontal priority by evaluating the impact of the Operational Programmes and getting recommendations on further measures for the period programming period of 2014-2020. The objectives of the assessment were as follows:

1. To assess the relevance of the horizontal priority "Gender equality and non-discrimination" considering the changes in the social and economic situation and legislation (relevance, compatibility);
2. To assess the implementation of the objectives of gender equality and non-discrimination laid down in Lithuania's 2007-2013 National Strategic Reference Framework and Operations Programmes (effectiveness, impact);
3. To assess the integration of the horizontal priority "Gender equality and non-discrimination" into EU structural funds management system (relevance, efficiency, adequacy).

Consequently, the evaluation was based on the criteria of relevance, compatibility, adequacy, efficiency, effectiveness and impact.

The results of this evaluation are the evaluation report, the methodological guidelines on implementation of the priority of gender equality and non-discrimination, presentation material and video film (6 min) for dissemination purposes. Moreover, on the 30th of January, 2014, the public conference was organised to present the results of the evaluation, which was attended by representatives of Lithuanian authorities, the European Institute for Gender Equality, project managers and the social partners.

## The methodology of the evaluation

In order to avoid the problem of the "scattered" data and adequately interpret the results of the evaluation, this assessment was based on the theory of change. It was useful answering the questions about whether the intervention was one of the reasons for the observed changes. The theory of change consists of a chain of events connecting the resources and

tools with the planned outputs and outcomes. The main elements of the theory of change are: (1) the relation between resources and impact, (2) the assumptions that the outputs, results and impact rely on, (3) the identification of unintended consequences (outcomes and impact), (4) the identification of other explanatory and alternative factors (social and economic factors, and other interventions).

In this evaluation the theory of change has helped to link the results of individual projects with social and economic tendencies. Under the assumptions and risks taken, it explained why the results at the project level did not create impacts in the whole system. The case studies have also contributed to the overall evaluation. Due to the extensive evaluation object the theory of change was differentiated according to the national strategic objectives and specific target groups (persons with children having family and work reconciliation problems, women trying to start a business, the disabled persons, the Romas).

In this assessment the methods used to collect and analyse the data included desk research, statistical comparative analysis, interviews, case studies and an international expert panel. These methods were implemented in the following way :

1. Evaluation questions were operationalised according to the theory of change, basic assumptions and risks were formulated;
2. Primary and secondary resources were used to answer the evaluation questions, the wording of some questions was corrected, the theory of change was tested, the quantitative and qualitative data was collected;
3. Statistical data (academic sources, data from the EU structural assistance information management and supervision system, previous surveys, etc.) was collected and quantitative evidences were analyzed, hypotheses were tested;
4. Qualitative data on implementation of projects as well as the motivation and attitudes of the participants were collected during the interview programme;
5. Case studies were prepared based on the available quantitative and qualitative evidences in selected areas;
6. Based on collected information and analysis conducted conclusions and recommendations were drafted;
7. The results and insights of the evaluation were discussed and revised during the international expert panel.

### Relevance and adequacy

The assessment of relevance showed that gender equality and non-discrimination was usually interpreted as "assistance" for disadvantage groups experiencing some kind of inequality. Based on the information collected during the interviews, from the descriptions of

the projects and analysis of the annual reports, the researchers were able to identify only a few projects that showed efforts to prevent or fight inequality and discrimination on the basis of situation analysis. According to approximate estimation on the perception of discrimination in the society, i.e. perception of the discrimination of elder people in greater than of young people, however, more measures are targeted at young people. Thus, individual projects have been beneficial for some disadvantaged groups, but the EU assistance was not properly targeted to promote gender equality and prevent discrimination in general terms..

The implementation of the priority was even less successful in terms of adequacy: a lot of missed opportunities were identified in terms of integration of gender equality and non-discrimination in every phase of structural funds (situation analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, dissemination). Even where the situation analysis showed the need for further action on gender equality and non-discrimination (e.i., support for researchers), such actions were not taken, and neutral wording was chosen instead. Also the dissemination opportunities were not properly employed.

### Effectiveness

In the areas where the articulated objectives for the priority of gender equality and non-discrimination were set, the relevant targets were generally met or there were outer reasons why they could not have been met. However, the lack of indicators at the ESF hindered evaluators from calculating the actual scope of possible benefits from the EU support. It should be noted that while the indicators for training and employment of people with disabilities were successfully achieved, the goals set at the beginning were not ambitious. Moreover, while the desintegrated approach (sidestreaming) to gender equality and non-discrimination has been generally beneficial, the integrated way (mainstreaming) was not used enough. The differences between these approaches are presented in the following table.

#### Different approaches to implementation of the horizontal priority „gender equality and non-discrimination“

Mainstreaming	Sidestreaming
The horizontal priorities are integrated into all EU structural funds' programs, priorities and measures; they are applied to the project level. It is assumed that all the programs or parts of the horizontal priorities are similarly relevant. It requires less effort during the phases of programming and implementation, but it is less likely to be effective if other conditions remain unchanged.	The objectives and targets of horizontal priorities are set and EU structural assistance is allocated separately. It allows to formulate separate priorities and measures to achieve certain goals. It is assumed that the relevance of the horizontal priorities varies depending on the field of intervention of the programme.

Source: PPMI, „Evaluation of implementation of horizontal themes in absorbing the 2004-2006 EU Structural Funds in Lithuania“, commissioned by the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania, 2008.

According to the available data, there is no evidence that could link the EU structural support to the strategic context indicators set in the Operational Programmes. The gap between the strategic context indicators and the expected results of the projects was evident even at the

planning stage, since only a few projects were able to achieve the scale which is needed to change the strategic context. Some of the practise examples include projects implemented by Lithuanian Labour Exchange, which showed great sensitivity towards gender equality and non-discrimination. Since the aspect of gender equality and non-discrimination has not been directly integrated in any of the financially largest measures the effects were also highly limited. Those activities that demonstrated "blindness" towards the aspects of gender equality and discrimination rather created the negative effect: i.e., the increase in the infrastructure, products and services which are inaccessible for disadvantaged groups, deepened the divide, although the neutral effect was officially declared.

## Impact

The impact of the implementation of the priority of gender equality and non-discrimination was fragmented and indirect, partly because of the lack of consistent intervention logic and strategic approach. According to the theory of change and the available data, the change in the strategic context indicators was mainly determined by the changes in the economic cycle rather than successful use of EU financial support. Some exceptions may be considered regarding the measures implemented by Lithuanian Labour Exchange (because the scale was enough to make an impact) and those projects that had a specific target group. Operational Programme for the Development of Human Resources has also appropriately contributed and helped the groups facing discrimination due to lack of their competitiveness in the workplace (1st priority); education of persons with disabilities (2nd priority); some fragmented aspects of gender equality and non-discrimination were identified on project level in 3rd and 4th priorities as well. Although investments in infrastructure under Operational Programme for Promotion of CohesionOPPC contributed to improving the accessibility for people with disabilities, they were mostly carried out in accordance with requirements of national legislation, rather than specific commitment to the implementation of the horizontal priority.

Sustainable impact can be expected in mainstreaming measures which involved experienced managers or situation analysis, especially regarding the impact on the infrastructure and institutions, which indirectly created changes relevant for the target groups as well. However, those activities, which relied solely on the target groups by increasing their competences may not be as effective, because their impact can be reduced by changing economic situation and other external factors. In the future period it is advisable to invest in more systemic change.

The measures administered by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour contributed to the priority of gender equality and non-discrimination to the highest degree. The former experience of the institution, high reliance on academic researches, good knowledge and expertise in the field enabled the Ministry to adequately plan measures, and select the projects. The measures funded by Operational Programme for the Economic Growth contributed to the priority the least. They lacked relevant objectives, the "owner" of the gender equality and non-discrimination priority and expertise in implementation.

## Efficiency

In the programming period of 2007-2013 actions to better integrate the horizontal priority of gender equality and non-discrimination in the interventions funded from the EU's structural funds were taken. The evaluation revealed that the activities of the Working Group on implementation and monitoring of the Horizontal priorities, stakeholders' participation in the Monitoring committee and methodological guidelines contributed to better implementation of the horizontal priority. However, the general project selection criteria which had to ensure the integration of gender equality and non-discrimination priority into all funded projects was not applied properly nor to relevant extent. The analysis showed that the administration of EU structural support system still lacked productive discussion of gender equality and non-discrimination topics. In addition, both the authorities, project managers and applicants did not have sufficient methodological leadership and even the good practice examples of the integration of the priority of gender equality and non-discrimination lacked proper dissemination.

## Conclusions and recommendations

To summarize the results of the evaluation, it should be noted that in spite of the cases where the priority of gender equality and non-discrimination achieved and exceeded its goals (e.i. indicators of the employment of the disabled persons), the evaluation discovered the overall lack of a consistent intervention logic which could connect the strategic context, objectives and results of the projects. The low effectiveness rate of the priority could also be explained by the fact that all successful activities were concentrated in the relatively small projects (usually ESF activities), which were not sufficient to foster the systemic changes at national level.

In cases when the mainstreaming approach for gender equality and non-discrimination was adopted the analysis showed the absence of situation analysis and lack of clearly formulated objectives. Also, although the results of the evaluation suggest that the sidestreaming approach created actual benefits for disadvantaged groups, this approach was not supported by the analysis of the reasons for discrimination. This limited the sustainability of the results.

The findings of this evaluation suggest that there are numerous missed opportunities for better implementation of the priority of gender equality and non-discrimination using EU structural assistance. Taking into account the good practices of the neighbouring countries, the directions of possible improvements were identified in the area of gender equality and non-discrimination. These activities include the development of the concrete guidelines for the priority implementation, paying more attention to the specific areas of inequality, better dissemination, consolidation of achievements and concentration on the higher-level structural changes.

The evaluation provided these recommendations for the Ministry of Finance and other bodies under areas of competence:

- To better integrate the priority of gender equality and non-discrimination into all areas of investments of the EU Structural Funds and stages of the operational

programme (especially, the national and regional planning measures) through the trainings for relevant institutional staff, learning from other countries' experience, partnerships, inter-institutional co-operation, co-ordination and other appropriate measures.

- To differentiate measures investing into the employment and education regarding by target groups (e.i. support for unmotivated group and trainings for motivated groups) and activities; to pay more attention to gender equality in education.
- To identify the needs of disadvantaged groups and areas with a high inequality and define relevant objectives and action for integrating the gender equality and non-discrimination priorities into OP's measures and their specifications for implementation of the ERDF/CoF funded projects.
- To pay more attention to the project activities that are focused on creating organizational and systemic changes; apply other forms of assistance (e.i., prizes to equal opportunity workplaces or bussiness women).
- To formulate clear requirements for the projects and provide project managers with methodological assistance (guidance, counseling and other forms), so that they could properly manage gender equality and non-discrimination issues throughout the project cycle.
- To promote the good practise examples of gender equality and non-discrimination in the use of EU structural assistance and to exploit the dissemination possibilities in order to change the public perceptions; to portray the groups facing discrimination in non-stereotypical ways.
- It is advisable to create a separate subgroups of the Working Group on implementation and monitoring of the Horizontal priorities or call for separate meetings of the Working group regarding the questions of gender equality and non-discrimination; to ensure the active role of the Working group during all stages of the OP implementation.
- To identify a mandatory project selection criteria for the projects funded from the Lithuanian Operational Programme for EU Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020 to be assessed regarding the principle of gender equality and non-discrimination; to clarify the ways for the implementation of the requirement.
- To integrate the monitoring indicators for gender equality and non-discrimination (e.i., bussinesses established by women and men) in all appropriate economic growth action measures and identify both individual and the organization level indicators, which would facilitate further monitoring and evaluation of the impact of EU structural assistance.