EVALUATION OF EFFECTIVENESS, EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT OP MEASURE "INTEGRATION OF SOCIALLY EXCLUDED PERSONS AND PERSONS AT SOCIAL RISK INTO THE LABOUR MARKET"

SUMMARY

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OBJECT AND AIM OF THE EVALUATION

In the 2007-2013 programming period, a variety of activities were supported under Measure "Integration of socially excluded persons and persons at social risk into the labour market" (hereinafter referred to as the Measure) co-financed by the European Social Fund. The Measure aimed at reducing social exclusion by facilitating integration of socially excluded persons and persons at social risk into the labour market. LTL 186 million was allocated for 133 projects implemented under the Measure. In addition to the provision of social integration services to the target group and the improvement of competences of social work specialists, the activities included the *development of methodologies, activity models, training programmes and other relevant tools[1]*. It is these tangible or intellectual outputs having a lasting value (hereinafter collectively referred to as products) that are *the object of this evaluation*. *The aim of the evaluation* is to evaluate the relevance, quality, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the products, with a view to prepare adequately for the implementation of similar measures in the 2014-2020 programming period. This summary presents the evaluation results and, based on them, recommends measures to ensure that product development and financing in the 2014-2020 programming period is (even) better tailored to meet the goals of social integration, while the products are of higher quality and used in the provision of social integration services to the highest possible extent.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The key source of data required for the evaluation was information provided by project managers on the products. The data was collected by conducting two online surveys of project managers and in-depth interviews with 22 specialists involved in the development and application of products, representing 12 organisations and 19 projects under the Measure. Initially, the *interviews* were conducted in order to prepare adequately for the surveys of project managers, and later, to correct and interpret the data received from the surveys. *The first survey of project managers* was conducted in February 2014, with the aim of recording all products developed and identifying their main characteristics. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent out to all of the 67 projects implemented under the first two calls launched under the Measure. Responses were received from 53 respondents, 47 of whom indicated that at least one product had been developed by the project they represented. These latter respondents were then invited, in March 2014, to participate in the *second survey of project managers* aimed at collecting information on the quality, usage and dissemination of the products. Responses to this second survey were received from 37 project managers. The evaluation also included an analysis of information from the EU Structural Funds Management Information System (SFMIS) and a review of relevant previous studies. Finally, in June 2014, a *focussed panel discussion* with social work experts-practitioners was held to validate and deepen the evaluation insights.

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[1] The latter was financed as part of the first and the second call for project applications for the Measure. 67 projects were implemented under these two calls.

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PRODUCTS DEVELOPED

Most of the project managers of the projects financed under the first two calls of the Measure have taken the opportunity to develop social integration products. Some products were published in the internet portal esparama.lt[2] already before the launch of this evaluation, but many of them were not. Therefore, the participants of the first survey were asked to provide information on all products developed and supply their electronic versions. As a result, 36 new products were identified in addition to those identified before the survey. In total, information collected during the first survey of project managers concerned 63 products, 47 of which were named by the respondents as primary and 16, as secondary[3]. Some of the products identified (16 out of 63) were composite, i.e. composed of several interrelated products. The database (in *MS Excel* format), which was developed as part of the evaluation, contains 81 products (including the 63 products identified during the survey and another 18 products identified on the basis of data supplied by the European Social Fund Agency (ESFA)). The database also contains and provides links to electronic versions of 54 products. For the remaining products, either their format was not suitable for publishing or project managers were unreachable or refused to supply the products.

> *Recommendation.* It is advisable to set up, by using the electronic database developed as part of this evaluation, a publicly accessible internet platform for the publication of the products (e.g. within the website of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (MoSSL))[4]. This e-space should serve as a single point of access to all of the products developed, and should provide the possibility to filter the products by relevant characteristics and download them. Finally, contact details of the developers or owners of the products should be disclosed so that they can be contacted for more information on the product concerned. Once the database has been set up, it is equally important to inform project managers and other stakeholders on the availability of such a database and to encourage them to familiarise with the products. These measures, i.e. a publicly accessible database and dissemination of information, would help reduce informational barriers to the application of the products or their parts in other organisations, and would be helpful, at a later stage, in improving processes in the 2014-2020 programming period.

In the 2007-2013 programming period, products were defined in relatively wide terms. Project financing conditions (PFC) of the first and the second call under the Measure specified support for the development and implementation of activity models, tools and social work methodologies. Most projects focussed on developing social work methodologies for specialists and training programmes for the improvement of competences of the target group or specialists. They also produced several

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[2] See http://www.esparama.lt/esf-produktai?kategorija=&sritis=&metai=&programa=VP1&prioritetas=VP1-1&priemone=VP1-1.3-SADM-02-K&vykdytojas=&fraze=

[3] A primary product was considered to be a product that required more financial input compared to other products in the same project. Where two or more products required the same amount of financial input, the product that required more time to be developed was considered to be primary.

[4] A possible alternative option is to update/upgrade the current section of the internet portal esparama.lt dedicated for the publication of products; in this case, the portal would need to be better tailored for products developed under different measures and project managers would need to be informed on this point of access to the products.

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social advertising video clips and computer games. The products were highly diverse in terms of content and form, ranging from a mere translation of a methodology applied abroad into the Lithuanian language to the development and description of an innovative model of social integration, and from hard-copy publications to promote a project to computer games. Despite this high diversity, all products had some common characteristics of a social integration methodology, i.e. they combined methods and tools necessary for the integration of socially excluded persons and persons at social risk.

> *Recommendation.* Products to be financed in the 2014-2020 programming period should be defined as methodologies (primary products) and methodological tools required for the application of the methodologies (secondary products). Descriptions of the methodologies should be more standardised and structured as follows: 1) goals and objectives of the methodology and its distinction from other, already existing methodologies; 2) description of the methodology and its implementation plan; 3) practical tools for the implementation of the methodology; 4) analysis of the results of application of the methodology (efficacy assessment, success and failure stories, estimation of the costs of application of the methodology). It is advisable to finance tools of implementation of the methodologies, not only their descriptions. These tools could be classified into the following categories: 1) training programmes and related material; 3) audio-visual items and radio broadcasts; 3) software; 4) databases; 5) research; 6) other (e.g. table games).

RELEVANCE OF THE PRODUCTS

In principle, the products met the goal of the Measure, which was to facilitate integration of socially excluded persons and persons at social risk into the labour market so as to prevent their social exclusion. It should be noted that the products were most often aimed at such aspects of social integration as personal recovery and socialization and, less often, at vocational guidance and enhancement of professional skills, which showed that project managers sought to match their products to the real needs of the target group. Moreover, the products were also reasonably well adapted to the needs of the specialists applying them. According to the results of the survey, over 80 per cent of the respondents evaluated this match as good or very good. Finally, the products well-matched the needs of the organisations that had developed them. The development of products encouraged these organisations to learn and improve their activities: to review social integration theories and social integration methods applied abroad as well as assess their own methods applied internally. On the other hand, the goal of product development was not defined very clearly; therefore, some products addressed social integration only indirectly, e.g. by publicising social integration projects or reviewing and summarising theoretical literature on social integration.

In terms of future needs, most of the specialists said there was no need for new products as the existing ones were sufficient. However, they acknowledged that new products might be needed for new types of services and tools (especially in the light of the growing role of electronic means in social integration processes) or services for less visible target groups. In other words, the development of new products might foster social innovation. To sum up the results of the evaluation, three potential needs on the part of specialists could be singled out in relation to products: (1) renewal, (2) adaptation of the existing products and (3) development of new ones.

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Product renewal is relevant to organisations which developed products in the 2007-2013 period. With time, even high-quality and much-used products become outdated and less applicable in the context of the changing social reality, changing technologies and, last but not least, growing competences of the specialists stimulating them to improve their activities. It should be noted that in the current programming period too, a number of products were renewed. Some organisations acknowledged they had renewed EQUAL programme products but did not mention that in their project documentation as the PFC focussed on the development of new products (they were prioritised in the scoring system). Other organisations renewed the products developed under the Measure on their own initiative as part of later projects or simply in the course of the provision of social integration services.

> *Recommendation.* In the 2014-2020 period, renewal of products should be included among eligible activities. If this is the case, PFCs should set a requirement that a project manager may renew (update) only products developed by the organisation itself under the Measure in the 2007-2013 period. Together with the project application, a project manager should supply evidence of the efficacy of the product concerned (e.g. length of application of the product, progress of the target group); this requirement would increase the likelihood that investment will be made in the renewal of efficacious products and that support will be provided to organisations which monitored their products (progressive and learning organisations). They should also be required to provide a justification and a plan of the renewal. Product renewal costs should be relatively low compared to product adaptation or development costs, bearing in mind that only a part of the product would be modified and, in addition, the product would most likely be applied by the same organisation and to the same target group. Still, given high diversity of products, it would be recommended to establish a certain link, for the purpose of financing, between renewal costs and development costs, e.g. to limit renewal costs to 10 to 30 per cent of development costs.

Product adaptation is understood as a process when a product applied in one Lithuanian or foreign organisation is taken over and applied in another Lithuanian organisation. Product adaptation is relevant not only to mature learning organisations that seek to improve their activities, but also to less mature organisations that aim to expand the scope of their services. During the survey, only one-fifth of the respondents indicated that their products were adapted, but the interviews revealed that adaptation practices were applied much more frequently. Project managers often borrowed ideas from other organisations, especially foreign ones, and used them in developing their own products.

> *Recommendation*. In the 2014-2020 period, product adaptation should be included among eligible activities. To improve quality and transparency of this process, the PFCs should set a requirement that applications for financing of product adaptation should clearly specify the organisation that will provide the product to be transferred, the organisation that will take over the product, and the form of cooperation between the two organisations. The requirement concerning the obligation to cooperate should be applicable both to Lithuanian and foreign organisations. As in the case of product renewal, applications should be accompanied with a justification of the purpose of product adaptation, the rationale behind the selection of the particular product, and the expected benefit. The quality of adaptation would benefit from

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direct communication between the transferring and recipient organisations (exchange of experience through consultations, trainings, etc.). Special allocations could be provided for this purpose.

Product development is a process whereby a new product is created by the project manager without having a similar existing product. In the 2007-2013 period, the development of authentic products often relied on the project manager's experience, which was systemised and converted into a methodology for conducting social work with a specific target group. At the same time, non-standard methodological tools such as computer games were developed. In principle, the development of new products is important for "keeping the window of possibilities open" for social innovations, which are often difficult to define in advance. It also means that any new products to be developed should introduce new ways of satisfying social needs and providing more efficient response to social problems than any existing tools can offer. An innovation-producing project should challenge existing practices: set higher targets than similar previous projects (e.g. higher percentage of persons offered an employment, allow for shorter implementation times, serve higher number of beneficiaries at a lower cost).

Recommendation. In the 2014-2020 period, the development of new products should be made an exception rather than a rule. Applications for financing the development of new products should be accompanied by a thorough justification, explaining why none of the existing products meet the needs. Here, a database of the products developed in the 2007-2013 period (as recommended above) would be beneficial, e.g. project applicants could be required to analyse it and indicate how their proposed product differs from the existing ones. As the development of new products is a process, which requires relatively largest share of funds, it is advisable to introduce additional controls, e.g. requirements for the experience of the developing organisation, mandatory external evaluation of the quality of the product, higher publicity and dissemination requirements.

To sum up, all of the three activities discussed – product renewal, adaptation and development – could be financed in the 2014-2020 period but at different financing rates and conditionally on different requirements. Relatively lowest financing and lowest requirements should be applicable to the renewal of existing products, and relatively highest, to the development of new ones. The requirements should be differentiated quite significantly so as to incentivise product renewal and adaptation rather than development.

QUALITY OF THE PRODUCTS

The quality of about one-third of the products evaluated by project managers can be considered as very good, meaning that they are functional, usable, useful and successful. The main strengths of the products in terms of *functionality* lie in the fact that the products (i) matched the needs of the specialists who used them, (ii) helped achieve project goals, and (iii) were developed, in most of the cases, in cooperation with external experts. Their main weaknesses with regards functionality were the lack of detail in the descriptions of the products and insufficient publicity efforts. Only half of the methodologies covered by the evaluation were described in sufficient detail to be readily applied by other organisations, and only two-fifths of the products were freely accessible to other users. The main strength of the products in terms of *usability* was enhanced competences of social workers,

while the main weakness lies in the fact that only one-third of the products were used in cooperation with employers. The main strength of the products in terms of *usefulness* was very good quality of the products. As much as 72 per cent of the respondents rated the products with the highest score (5 out of 5), and the remaining project managers gave 4 out of 5 scores. However, certain products are not efficacious enough. Almost one-third of the respondents rated the efficacy of the products in terms of their potential to facilitate integration into the labour market or the system of education as good or satisfactory (or did not have an opinion). The main strength of the products in terms of *success* was that the most products (81 per cent) were regularly or frequently used by the organisation even after the completion of the project. Moreover, as many as half of the products were applied in another project supported by the EU Structural Funds, and one-third, in another organisation.

Products' evaluation in a focussed panel discussion revealed that certain products (especially methodologies) were not sufficiently focussed on the improvement of the quality of services as they contained too much theoretical and too little practical information for them to be applied. Another frequent weakness identified in the methodology was lack of efficacy assessments and estimations of their application costs. One of the causes of this lack of information is the fact that some products have never been applied in practice. Finally, the evaluation showed that products that were tested in real situations and applied in the process of social integration of the target group were of a higher quality and were used more frequently. There were several cases when a product was improved after it had been tested in practice.

> *Recommendation*. In the 2014-2020 period, every product should be required to be tested in the provision of real social integration services, and its efficacy should be assessed by analysing the situation before and after it has been applied (by seeking feedback from the target group of the specific methodology or a methodological tool, their representatives or families, teachers, social workers, employers and other persons who are in the position to assess the progress of the target group). For the purpose of this analysis, it is recommended to encourage project managers to initiate and plan additional indicators to demonstrate the benefit of the product (project) for the target group, e.g. the change in the psychological status of the target group (e.g. motivation, confidence), situation in the labour market (e.g. individual indicators for the number of persons employed, engaged in education or apprenticeship) and situation in private life (e.g. persons who have acquired a housing or changed their hygiene habits). The assessment of the efficacy of the product would serve two important goals: firstly, it would enable to collect and systemise information (which is currently lacking) on product efficacy and secondly, it would encourage project managers to make more efforts towards better quality of products. To ensure comparability of information from such assessments of efficacy, project managers may be offered/provided with product assessment templates or at least main questions to be answered for the purpose of the assessment.

PRODUCT EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

In the 2007-2013 period, product development and application was closely interrelated to project-based provision of social integration services and their costs were not always clearly separated. For this reason, it is very difficult to evaluate product effectiveness and efficiency separately from the

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services provided. Therefore, in order to understand whether product development had any effect on the effectiveness and efficiency of the projects, projects that developed new products were compared with projects that did not include this type of activity. The comparison revealed that projects, which developed new products, were slightly more effective. This suggests a conclusion that higher effectiveness may potentially be associated with the development of new products. As the evaluation revealed, products can be also beneficial to the organisations, which develop them: they enable them to organise projects more smoothly, improve their staff competences, and introduce advanced working methods. However, not all of the organisations benefited from these advantages, as they did not use the products, which they have developed, in the provision of services to the target group. With regards to efficiency of product development, the average cost of participation per person in a project did not differ much between product-developing projects and projects that did not develop new products, as demonstrated by the SFMIS data. On the Measure level, product development efficiency was limited, first, by subjective pricing of the products, leading to great and not well-founded differences in the prices of the same type of products, and second, by the fact that a number of projects developed quite similar products.

> *Recommendation*. In the 2014-2020 period, it is advisable to make, for the purpose of financing, a clearer distinction between product-related activities (renewal/adaptation/development, testing, assessment, publicity) and the provision of social integration services. In other words, a project manager intending to not only provide social integration services but also to develop new (renew or adapt existing) products should be required to explicitly substantiate the need for such activities. This could be arranged by launching either a two-lot call for applications: one for services and the other for products, or two separate calls (but necessarily simultaneously so that financing for the services and the products can be coordinated). The requirement to provide a detailed substantiation of product development and plan activities would minimise the risk of project managers asking to develop new (and not really needed) products. Moreover, the separation of product-related activities would allow more clear identification of the resources allocated specifically for that purpose, which was not the case in the current programming period. At a later stage, this would facilitate the evaluation of cost-efficiency or effectiveness of the products.

PRODUCT SUSTAINABILITY

As indicated by project managers, most of the products were used, in one way or another, in their activities even after completion of the project. One-third of product-developing organisations indicated they acquired an important working tool and applied it after project completion. About one-third of the products were also used in other organisations upon completion. Although most of the products, according to project managers, had a lasting value, their usage was often dependent on external financing (e.g. under EU Structural Funds projects). For as many as half of the products, the post-completion usage was financed under another project. The evaluation revealed that post-completion usage of the products could be fostered by integrating them into regularly provided social integration services, by intensified publicity measures and by incentivising product adaptation.

As revealed by the evaluation, one of the conditions for a more intensive post-completion usage of the products was integration of the methodologies and methodological tools into work practices of

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specialists regularly dealing with persons at social risk. The most frequent pattern of post-completion usage of the products was their application in the daily activities of the in the provision of social integration services. Another good practice was when the project manager (very often, a non-governmental organisation) developed a product (a methodology) and trained the staff of (public) institutions providing social services, e.g. municipal social workers, staff of child care institutions, to use it. In this case, the non-governmental sector can act as a disseminator of new ideas and ensure, at the same time, that the usage of finished products is not limited by fragmentation that is so much common to project-based activities. Moreover, this approach contributes to a stronger public sector and better social services provided by the state.

> *Recommendation*. In the 2014-2020 period, project managers should be incentivised to transfer (through trainings, etc.) the products developed by them to their own or other organisations' staff who work daily with the target group. In addition, organisations should be encouraged to form partnerships for common development and application of the products. All this would allow maximising the number of organisations using the products both during and after project implementation period.

The evaluation revealed that a large share of products were not publically available, e.g. published on the internet. In many cases, the products could be accessed only by contacting the project manager directly. Moreover, some of the products that were publicly available were not described, or their application results insufficiently documented, which affected the possibility to apply these products in other organisations.

> *Recommendation*. To promote the development of quality products, publicity efforts should be strengthened. We recommend publish all information on products and their development in a single location on a freely accessible internet space (e.g. website of the MoSSL). All project managers should be required to deliver the products for publication. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure that they are not required to do that more than once. The products should be delivered together with (a summary of) product efficacy assessment results. This publicity requirement and the delivery procedure, as well as the planned location of the products, should be communicated to projects managers in advance. To make sure that product descriptions are suitable for publication, a standard template could be prepared and should be composed of the following structural elements: 1) description of the problem addressed by the product; 2) description of the product; 3) assessment of product application results (first, assessment of the original status of the participants; second, assessment of the status of the participants after participation in the project; and third, description of the progress); 4) success and failure stories. A clearly defined obligation to publicise the products and their application results and a possibility to compare the products should lead to a higher quality of products to be developed. Still, as the survey has revealed, product publicity efforts alone do not necessarily imply that the product will be applied in a quality manner; often, training will be required to teach specialists to apply a specific methodology. Therefore, if product adaptation is to be promoted, it should be combined with training of specialists.

Although most of the products developed in the 2007-2013 period were directly targeted at people with disabilities, persons in imprisonment, women and people with addictions, and, more specifically, at their integration into the labour market, many of them could be adapted to facilitate social

integration of other socially vulnerable groups. The information collected as a part of the evaluation suggests that in order to promote adaptation of the existing products in other organisations, it is crucial to ensure availability of sufficient and quality information about the products and their efficacy. Not all of the project managers were aware of the products that could potentially be of interest to them. Moreover, even if they were aware they did not have information on their quality, efficacy, advantages and disadvantages. A mandatory assessment of the efficacy of the products and a standardised template for the description of the products as discussed above would likely serve to narrow this information asymmetry gap. In the future, it would be advisable to consider a possibility of introducing external expert reviews or certifications of new products so that organisations wishing to adapt existing products can have objective information on their quality and can choose the best ones. In general, it would be wise to form, in the 2014-2020 period, a standing working group of internal and external experts for the evaluation of products and/or applications for their development, tasked with preventing duplication and providing methodological guidance regarding preparation of product descriptions.

> *Recommendation*. In order to systemically promote product adaptation, it is advisable to consider a possibility of splitting product development (renewal or adaptation) financing into two parts/calls: one for the first half of the 2014-2020 programming period, the other, for the second half. This second call could specifically concern adaptation in other organisations of those products only that were developed under the first call. As discussed above, the product adaptation process should actively involve both the organisation that transfers the product and the organisation that takes it over (and both should be entitled to certain financing). If project managers were aware of this possibility in advance (before the first call), product developers financed under the first call would be motivated to focus more on the quality of the products being developed, to disseminate information of the products among other organisations, and to look for potential recipients of their experience. To facilitate this process and ensure sufficiently wide dissemination of information, a mid-term (before the second call) "product fair" could be organised to provide an opportunity for product developers to present their products to other organisations.