

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ex-post evaluation of the communication measures is based on analysis of quantitative and qualitative indicators defined in the Communication Strategy of EU funds 2007 - 2015 in accordance with the National Strategic Framework document for 2007 – 2013. The evaluation report examines achievement of the overall objectives defined in the strategy and factors that influence the achievement. The evaluation used already available statistics and reports along with new quantitative and qualitative data. E.g., there was a survey of the EU funds' beneficiaries carried out with more than 370 respondents for the purpose of the evaluation. Another survey was carried out with all institutions involved in the implementation of the communication of EU funds. Evaluators carried out interviews with five institutions involved, beneficiaries and five leading representatives from the media experts/ journalists. Two focus groups were organised with the EU funds' communication Steering Group representatives in order to determine positive and negative factors that influence the EU funds communication and actions were identified in order to diminish the disadvantages. The evaluation report presents an overview of crucial aspects of the EU funds communication – achievement of planned indicators, efficiency of communication measures, utility, quality and efficiency of the communication management system. Also, comparison with the results of the mid-term evaluation (2007 – 2010) has been made.

Overview of the communication measures: achievement of results indicators and measures

Since the implementation of the communication strategy still continues in 2015, it should be premature to discuss achievement of results of the communication strategy. However, by the end of 2014 most of the results planned under the EU funds communication strategy have been achieved and exceeded, except for the paid publications in press and press conferences organised by the institutions involved in implementation of the EU funds. The results indicators planned under the strategy have been achieved and exceeded, none is lagging behind. Due to the efforts made by the institutions, assessment of the EU funds and their impact upon the economy has been improved during several years.

Efficiency and utility of the communication measures

During the whole implementation period of the EU funds communication strategy for 2007-2015, there has been lack of financial planning and discipline noted. Discrepancies between the communication indicators and budget have been observed – either the indicators have been set too low, or the communication budget has been set too high. The institutions postpone implementation of the Technical Assistance funds from one year to another. Since the TA budget is planned according to institutions, this has hindered efficient implementation of funding. Those institutions that had limited financing had to refuse implementation of communication measures, while other institutions had substantial funds remaining available in 2015. Summary shows that the planned budget 2.3 times exceeds the used financing for 2012 – 2014. Additional monitoring and management instruments that were introduced during the period (development of annual communication plan, link with the planning of financing, requirements for the institutions involved in EU funds communication management to submit information for preparation of annual reports for the operational programmes) have not improved the situation.

From the perspective of achievement of the outcome and result indicators, used financing and target audience, efficiency of the implemented EU funds communication measures is considered very high.

Most efforts have been made by the EU funds managing institutions towards providing information for the potential EU funds applicants and beneficiaries about availability of funds, calls for proposals and implementation modalities. Regional Structural Funds Info Centres have successfully implemented these functions in the regions. Achievement of the **third** (*provide timely, clear and comprehensible information to the potential EU funds applicants and beneficiaries*) and the **fifth** (*ensure availability of information and reverse communication in the planning regions, thus contributing to the active involvement of regions' population in implementation of EU funds*) objective of the communication strategy is considered high. Although the beneficiaries and media experts consider communication about the achieved results and impact as formal, and efficiency of resources used by the institutions for implementation of the formal publicity requirements are diminished by the high publicity of the negative examples, achievement of the **first** (*improve public awareness and comprehension about the contribution of the EU funds towards socio economic development of Latvia and public good*) and the **fourth** (*improve transparency about the EU funds implementation, in order to ensure transparency and accountability of the EU funds implementation*) objectives is considered as high.

Achievement of the **second** objective (*facilitate participation of non governmental, regional and social partners in elaboration of the planning documents and implementation modalities of EU funds*) is assessed as low, because no activities were targeted at this objective during the reporting period, since the Monitoring Committee of the EU funds ensured this function. Achievement of the **sixth** objective (*facilitate cooperation between the institutions involved in management of EU funds and information intermediaries*) was hindered by different interests and mutual competition between the institutions, frequent change of personnel, tight eligibility criteria, which did not allow developing joint information activities for different funds.

Efficiency of the communication management system

In general efficiency of the management system of the EU funds is considered positive. During the reporting period the system has become more efficient, which is demonstrated by significant decrease of employees during the reporting period in comparison with the mid-term data. This leads to the conclusion that more resources are needed for communication measures, which involve preparation of information and communication during preparatory and implementation stages of programmes, than during monitoring and final stages of programme implementation. Quality of the communication system is considered as high – the beneficiaries positively assessed clarity and comprehensibility of the information. There is a clear division of functions, responsibilities and competences in the management system of EU funds communication, while some difficulties were experienced during the beginning of the period due to the overall division of functions between the Intermediate Bodies for the 2007 – 2013 EU funds implementation system.

The communication steering group has become a significant support instrument. While the overall assessment of the role of the Managing Authority in development and implementation of EU funds communication system is positive, the methodical leadership has diminished during the reporting period.

Quality of the communication measures

All direct communication measures for specific target groups are considered successful. The positive factors that contributed towards communication is availability of the Regional Structural Funds Info Centres as important information channels in regions, Technical Assistance financing, clear system and precise regulation, new communication instruments and www.esfinanses.lv. The negative factors that affected communication include insufficient communication and cooperation, delayed approval of the annual communication plan for EU funds, eligibility of

Technical Assistance, intangible results of the ESF's projects and difficult relationship with media.

Conclusions and recommendations

The evaluation findings lead to the conclusion that activities implemented by the institutions involved in management of the EU funds have been successful. In 2007 - 2013 period there were three different communication streams in the EU funds communication, which had different objectives, content and target groups.

The first communication stream was aimed at the implementation process of the EU funds, which provided information about the implementation process – the objectives, application conditions, responsible institutions, implementation conditions, outcomes and results. Intermediate Bodies and Regional Structural Funds Info Centres were primarily involved in this process. This information stream was targeted at achievement of the third and fifth communication objectives. This was the most intensive communication stream with high utility as evidenced by the beneficiaries, media experts and public opinion polls.

The second communication stream aimed to provide information about efficiency of the implementation system – involved institutions and their responsibilities, involvement of regional and social partners in planning of the EU funds, implementation and payment indicators, transparency of the process. This communication stream was targeted at achievement of the second, fourth and sixth communication objectives. Information about the financial absorption rates form the main part of this communication stream.

The third communication stream was aimed at the benefits of the EU funds. It provided information about the benefits provided by the EU funds – what the funds planned to achieved, what has been achieved and what has changed. The primary target group of this communication stream was society in general. This communication stream was targeted at achievement of the first communication objective. While the general opinion about the positive impact of EU funds upon the economy has improved, which provided an evidence of the achievement of the first objective of the communication strategy, this has been the least intensive communication stream. Problems to provide comprehensible content, eligibility conditions of the TA were the main problems encountered.

The evaluation report provides practical recommendations aimed at improvement of the quality of the EU funds communication, planning and monitoring of the communication process. Several recommendations have been made at the system level in order to improve formulation of the objectives and indicators, decrease the administrative burden for the institutions in relation to management and monitoring, and facilitate efficient cooperation. In order to improve the quality there have been recommendations made to review the eligibility conditions in order to improve cooperation with journalists and cooperation and exchange of information between the institutions involved in EU funds management.