

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mid term evaluation of the efficiency of the communication measures of EU funds priorities, measures and activities for the 2007 - 2013 programming period is based on quantitative and qualitative analysis of the measures and result indicators planned under the EU funds communication strategy for years 2007 - 2015. Progress made with regard to the achievement of the main objectives of the strategy has been analysed and key factors that influence achievement determined.

The evaluators used already available statistics and reports. In addition, quantitative and qualitative data were acquired specifically for purpose of this evaluation. Extensive survey of EU funds recipients and applicants was implemented as part of this evaluation with 700 respondents participating. Questioners were obtained from all 22 institutions involved in management of the EU funds. Interviews were carried out with 11 selected institutions and seven opinion leaders - journalists. Five regional focus groups were carried out with the representatives of EU projects' recipients, social partners, local authorities and non governmental organisations.

Analysis of the key factors vital for communication on EU funds - achievement of planned indicators; efficiency, effectiveness and quality of communication measures; efficiency of the communication management system, - has been based on relevant factual material.

Overview of communication measures: implementation of measures and achievement of indicators

More than half of the planned EU communication measures show an implementation rate of 40 - 80%, which is acceptable for the mid term stage. These include information events, representation materials, press conferences, studies, conferences, press releases, information materials, TV and radio broadcasts. However, implementation of information campaigns and information boards lag behind.

2,3 million people have been exposed to communication measures during the period 2008 - 2010. Most numbers have been reached through communication in TV, radio and publications in media. Information seminars have also covered substantial number of people. Approximately 119 000 unique users per month have searched the web sites of various institutions.

Six out of eight result indicators of the strategy have been reached at the level planned for 2010. Achievement of indicators regarding information level of society, information level of the target groups, availability of information exceed the planned level. However, indicators regarding public opinion on EU funds implementation process and impact lag behind.

Efficiency and effectiveness of the communication measures

During this period information and communication on EU funds has been provided by approximately 60 employees (staff units). Institutions have assessed their human resources as insufficient. While the salary budget has been reduced in 10 institutions, the overall budget for salaries has been increased. Also, the salary payments from the national budget have been co-financed / or refinanced from the Technical Assistance means.

Available financing for services and supplies under the communication measures has been decreased more than two times. However, by end of 2010 only half of the available (already decreased) budget has been used. Despite the decrease of the budget, the result indicators have remained the same.

Analysis of communication budget of the institutions involved in EU funds management demonstrates that institutions responsible for large number of activities have relatively smaller budgets than institutions involved in administration of smaller number of activities.

Institutions have used most of their budgets for information events (33% of the total budget). Further, there are paid publications in newspapers (13%) and information materials (11%). Smallest amount has been used for press conferences and press releases. This situation is in line with distribution of EU funds' target groups and their priority information channels.

Communication about the EU funds has been aimed at the key target groups determined in the strategy. Communication has used channels relevant for these target groups. Hence, these communication measures should be considered as effective. However, potential of reaching the target groups has been diminished by the fact, that more than 20% of the EU financed projects do not include co-financing for communication.

Efficiency of the communication management system

Institutions involved in the EU funds' management have performed their tasks in line with the approved division of responsibilities for communication. Managing Authority, responsible institutions and cooperation institutions have performed all communication functions determined in the regulative framework. Institutions have made positive assessment of the internal communication, timeliness and speed of the information flow. Evaluation of the Managing Authority's role in coordination and management has been positive, along with cooperation among the institutions.

Institutions involved in the EU funds' management have implemented various communication measures providing possibility for partners to participate in elaboration and commenting on the EU funds' planning documents. In this respect several instruments have been incorporated in EU funds' management system. However, social partners have expressed opinion that there were still barriers for public participation, including deficiencies in the planning process and lack of resources within the partners' organisations.

During this period several amendments have been made to the regulations on EU funds' communication, which involved limiting the expenses for communication measures. These were aimed at elimination of unproductive use of EU financing. As a result, communication activities within the projects had been substantially decreased, and the relevant regulations were further amended in 2011.

It would be necessary to make improvements with regard to planning and monitoring of the communication measures. Analysis shows that the link between the impact, result and activity indicators has been unclear. The strategy also demonstrates lack of clear link between the indicators, budget and time period. Monitoring process of the strategy also needs to be further improved.

Quality of the communication measures

Qualitative assessment of the selected information and communication activities highlighted several factors which contributed significantly to the results of EU funds' communication. Main problems were related to the use of complicated and bureaucratic language, lack of information available to general public on results and impact of the EU funds upon the daily life of people, complicated professional and financial environment of Latvia's media.

Analysis of the selected cases shows that efforts should be made to improve the quality of the financed articles, press releases and internet web sites. On the other hand, analysis of the selected TV broadcasts and information seminars demonstrated high professional standards.

Conclusions and recommendations

Evaluation results demonstrate that overall performance of the institutions involved in EU funds management has been successful. The achievement of strategy's objectives is in line with the mid term stage. There is a progress towards all objectives of the strategy. Good progress is demonstrated regarding involvement of NGO, regional and social partners (2nd objective), provision of information to the project applicants and recipients (3rd objective), two side communication in regions to ensure participation of population in implementation of EU funds (5th objective). However, some areas need additional efforts: communication has been less successful regarding public opinion on EU funds' impact upon the society (1st objective), transparency and accountability of EU funds' implementation (4th objective), cooperation with the intermediates (6th objective).

The evaluation report presents practical recommendation aimed at improvement of the quality of EU funds' communication measures, and at planning and monitoring of the communication process. Recommendations are made to improve cooperation with the journalists, facilitate exchange of lessons learned among the institutions, and diminish the formal and bureaucratic approach of the communication.

Several recommendations are made regarding improvement of the system in order to ensure relationship between the planning, monitoring, assessment and financing of the measures and strategy's objectives. This should contribute to further improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of the EU funds' communication.