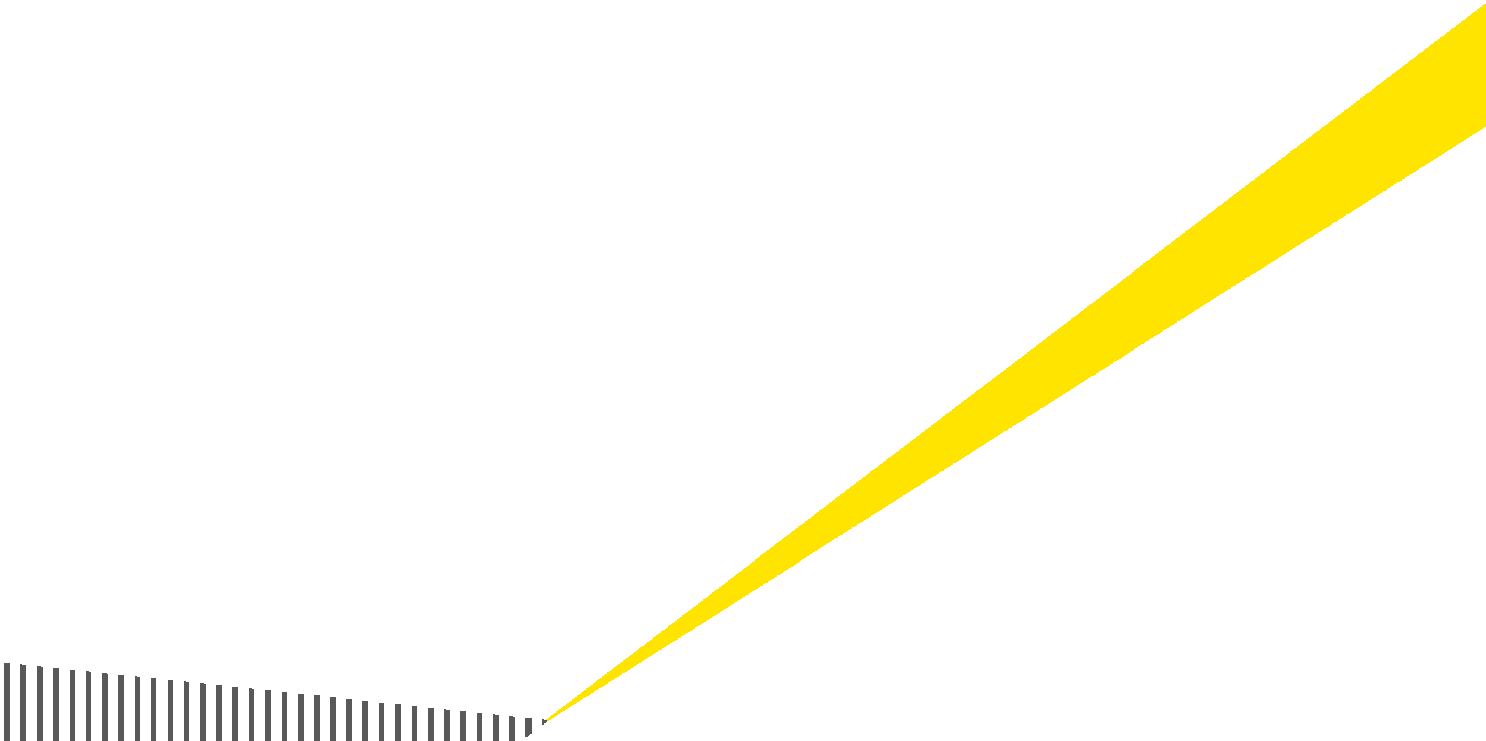


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Európsky sociálny fond



Evaluation of Effectiveness
of the Management System Implemented
in the Operational Programme Education

Final Evaluation Report

Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic

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1 Introduction

1.1 Objective of Final Evaluation Report

On the basis of Contract for Work No. 1165/2009 executed on 18 November 2009 between the Ordering Party – Ministry of Education of the SR (hereinafter MoEd SR) – and the Arranger – Ernst & Young, k.s., the objective of the Arranger is to assess the effectiveness of the activities of the Managing Authority (hereinafter MA) for the Operational Programme: Education (hereinafter OP Education or OPE), Intermediate Bodies under the Managing Authority (hereinafter IB/MA), Monitoring Committee (hereinafter MC) for OPE, analysis of OPE management system set-up and implementation system within the scope of the project *Evaluation of Effectiveness of the Management System Implemented in the Operational Programme: Education* (hereinafter the Evaluation). The Evaluation has been funded from the resources of the European Social Fund (hereinafter ESF), specifically OPE Technical Assistance. As per Article 59 of the General Regulation, the MA may delegate some or all of their tasks to the IB/MA, which, for OPE, is the Agency of the MoEd SR for the Structural Funds of the EU (hereinafter IB/MA ASFEU) and the Ministry of Health of the SR (IB/MA MoH SR).

The Final Evaluation Report assesses the effectiveness of the MA activities for the Operational Programme: Education, the IB/MA, the MC as well as reviews the effectiveness and efficiency of the functioning of the Management System of the Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund (hereinafter MSSFCF). In addition, the Evaluation addresses the coordination & cooperation, as well as the transparency & effectiveness of the implementation system. Simultaneously, it assesses the effectiveness of the cooperation between the MA and the IB/MA, as well as the fulfilment of tasks by the IB/MA as per the Delegation Agreement. The Evaluation reviews the activities of available administrative capacities engaged in implementation of the OP Education.

As per the Terms of Reference, the Evaluation focuses on the period from 7 November 2007 to 30 June 2009. With regard to the Evaluation's objectivity, the report also includes facts which are outside the scope of the specified period; however, the Evaluator's team considered it necessary to refer to them in the report.

The report also includes a description of the activities performed, the work timetable as well as the staffing of individual tasks and a detailed evaluation of OP Education in accordance with the terms of reference.

The Evaluation was performed in compliance with the Ordering Party's assignment and structured on the basis of the evaluation questions listed below. In general, it may be stated that the bodies being assessed, involved in the OPE management and implementation process, have performed their functions adequately and effectively, with, in some instances, certain weaknesses which the report notes in Chapter 5 Evaluation Deliverables.

On the basis of the Evaluation, the report also includes the wording for draft recommendations to increase the effectiveness of activities performed under OP Education. We recommend that the Ordering Party focus on improving the quality of the OPE management system in the immediate future, as well as cooperation between the MA and the IB/MA on OPE implementation, in accordance with the recommendations discussed (refer to Chapter 5 Evaluation Deliverables).

We regard it as a positive signal that this interim ad-hoc evaluation was assigned by the Ordering Party and put into effect, as it is still possible to resolve the weaknesses identified and make the improvements so that the OP Education may be implemented in a responsible and effective manner.

1.2 Abbreviations

CA	Certifying Authority
CCA	Central Coordination Authority
EAD	European Affairs Division
EaSI	Employment and Social Inclusion
EC	European Commission
EM	Expenditure(s) Manager
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
EUSFED	EU Structural Funds Economy Division
FMS	SF and CF Financial Management System
HMR	Half-yearly Monitoring Report
IB/MA	Intermediary Body under Managing Authority
IB/MA ASFEU	Intermediary Body under Managing Authority – Agency of the Ministry of Education for the Structural Funds of the EU
IB/MA IM	IB/MA Internal Manual
IB/MA MoH SR	Intermediary Body under Managing Authority – Ministry of Health of the SR
ITMS	IT Monitoring System
MA	Managing Authority
MA IM	MA Internal Manual
MC	Monitoring Committee
MRC	Marginalized Roma Communities
MoEd SR	Ministry of Education of the SR
MoH SR	Ministry of Health of the SR
MSSFCF	Management System of the Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund
OP	Operational Programme
OPE	Operational Programme Education
PM	Project Manager
PP	Public Procurement
RFP	Request for Payment
RIO	Regional Information Office
SF	Structural Funds

1.3 Summary

Under the terms of the contract between the Ordering Party – MoEd SR – and the Arranger – Ernst & Young, k.s., the Arranger's objective is to assess the effectiveness of the activities of the MA for OPE, IB/MA, MC for OPE, and perform an analysis of the OPE management system set-up and implementation system within the scope of the project *Evaluation of Effectiveness of the Management System Implemented in the Operational Programme: Education*. As per Article 59 of the General Regulation, the MA may delegate some or all of their tasks to the IB/MA which, for OPE, is IB/MA ASFEU and IB/MA MoH SR. In the main, the Evaluation focuses on the period from 7 November 2007 to 30 June 2009; however, to enhance the topicality of the Evaluation, the report includes issues arising after the prescribed period.

Taking the Evaluation's objectives into consideration, the Ordering Party formulated a set of evaluation questions (refer to: Terms of Reference for *Evaluation of Effectiveness of the Management System Implemented in the OP Education*), based on which the Arranger's team prepared a working matrix of questions. This matrix represented the basic tool in preparing the questionnaire survey. The response rate of the questionnaire was 89%, with the questionnaire being completed by a total of 83 employees (MA – 31 employees, IB/MA ASFEU – 36 employees, IB/MA MoH SR – 13 employees and MC – 3 members). The next step in the Evaluation was the arrangement of structured interviews, the selection criteria for which were the answers to the questionnaire survey and the post held in the respective institution. Over a four-week period, the Arranger's team interviewed a total of 26 MA employees (11 employees), IB/MA (ASFEU - 12 and MoH SR – 2 employees) and MC (1 member). When evaluation of the structured interviews was finalized, a meeting with the Ordering Party was held, at which the resulting deliverables were presented followed by a discussion.

Areas evaluated

Below is a brief summary of the deliverables of the Evaluation, following the structure of the evaluation questions (refer to Terms of Reference for *Evaluation of Effectiveness of the Management System Implemented in the OP Education*).

Does the MA for OPE fulfil the tasks effectively and with due quality, in accordance with the OPE Programming document and MA Internal Manual of Procedures? What methods may be used to improve fulfilment of these tasks?

On the whole, it may be stated that the MA implementation has been performed effectively. Initially, we evaluated the performance of tasks within the prescribed period with an optimal use of time and administrative capacities as well as submission of the expected outputs observing the prescribed procedures. Individual procedures within the implementation of OP Education are demanding on time, qualifications and administration; this has a direct impact on the expected outputs and/or results of individual activities. We identified room for improvement in the management system, which has an impact on both divisions. The problems are caused largely by the frequent changes to the MSSFCF, the specific character of ESF compared to the European Regional Development Fund (hereinafter ERDF) and inadequate support for the IT Monitoring System (hereinafter ITMS) (lack of functionality for some applications, system instability, break-down rate). With regard to these questions, we recommend appealing to the Central Coordination Authority (hereinafter CCA) and/or the European Commission (hereinafter EC) in connection with the frequency of changes and considering the ESF specifics compared to ERDF. Similarly, there is a need to appeal to the CCA for greater ITMS functionality, e.g. initiate an independent ITMS audit for the purposes of verifying its functionality and draft recommendations. In all, the initiative for system (procedures) simplification must be based on a coordinated approach with other MAs and joint proposals for simplification of the MSSFCF procedures.

It is also essential to communicate all the relevant information to the partners concerned unambiguously, on a timely basis and in an adequate manner. One possible method is increased use of electronic communication between MA RO – IB/MA, arrangement of regular problem-resolution meetings within the MA at managerial level of the EAD and EUSFED divisions on a weekly basis for *ad-hoc* problem-solving, strengthening of communication by permanent sharing of deliverables between divisions, unambiguous and prompt methodological guidance and guidelines by the MA towards the IB/MA (e.g. expenditures eligibility, half-yearly monitoring reports (hereinafter HMR)), or establishment of a permanent/interim platform between the MA and both the IB/MAs (apart from

regular meetings) for mutual proposals to improve the performance of tasks under the OP Education.

In terms of MA administrative capacities, after settlement of projects pertaining to the 2004-2006 programming period, it is necessary to reassess and adjust the personnel capacities at the European Affairs Division (hereinafter EAD), as well as the EU Structural Funds Economy Division (hereinafter EUSFED), as currently required by the 2007-2013 programming period, aiming at determining an optimal number of employees for these two divisions.

As far as support for the professional preparation of employees is concerned, there is a need for the more frequent organization of practical workshops, case studies and leading practice training sessions on similar experience abroad and/or from other OPs. Some questions regarding eligibility at the IB/MA could be clarified by performing an exploratory on-the-spot check of expenditures for IB/MA staff within the framework of experience transfer.

If there is interest on the part of MC members, a specific training session could be arranged focusing on their tasks, in particular in the area of monitoring, evaluation and measurable indicators. An important activity on the part of the MA should also be collecting feedback from MC members in order to ascertain problem areas identified by means of a working meeting/seminar for the MC members.

In general, the performance of MA activities for OP Education could be evaluated as effective; any problems arising within the process of implementation – internal as well as external – the MA divisions seek to resolve on an *ad hoc* basis. In certain instances, the MA is dependent for its decision-making on prompt decisions from the CCA.

Do IB/MAs for OP Education fulfil the tasks resulting from the Delegation Agreement, as well as in accordance with the Programming Manual for OP Education and IB/MA Internal Manual of Procedures effectively and with due quality? What could be done to streamline the OPE implementation process?

On the whole, it may be concluded that the implementation by the IB/MA has been performed effectively. Both the OPE IB/MAs have implemented demand-oriented projects aiming at coverage of specific problems within the SR regions, on the basis of the Delegation Agreement.

Since the IB/MAs were performing this activity for the first time, it is possible to identify weaknesses, in particular in the use of time, human resources and work with ITMS. Subsequently, this leads to prolongation of the performance of some transactions and affects the quality of adherence to the prescribed procedures (e.g. inadequate performance of an on-the-spot check of requests for payments and preparation of half-yearly monitoring reports).

It is important for both the IB/MAs to increase the use of electronic communication between MA – IB/MA, IB/MA – beneficiaries, improve information-flows to employees at lower levels by sharing relevant information from meetings as well as participate in establishing a permanent/interim platform between the MA and both the IB/MAs for mutual proposals to improve the performance of tasks under the OP Education. At the IB/MA ASFEU, it is essential to improve communication between project managers and expenditure(s) managers so that beneficiaries are properly informed (support for one-to-one consultations). In our Evaluation, in connection with the requirements of IB/MA ASFEU at the MA (Methodology, Technical Assistance, State Aid and Reporting Department), we identified a short-fall and non-standard use of communication as regards expenditure(s) eligibility. In the course of our Evaluation, the personnel capacities of the Department were increased, which we regard as a positive step.

Both the IB/MAs should attach importance to feedback from employees regarding the existing problems and their possible solutions. At the IB/MA ASFEU, greater emphasis is required on in-depth comprehension of the MSSFCF and related documentation, internal training activities to increase professional skills and the quality of deliverables, information-sharing and coaching of new employees by more experienced staff. Similarly, consideration should be given to decreasing the workload of expenditure(s) managers and project managers by modifying the organizational set-up of the positions in question, either by merging the positions or by forming so-called coordinated pairs.

To ensure the quality of deliverables, both the IB/MAs should direct attention towards a more thorough review of HMR accuracy and, on the MA's part, there is a need for the prompt and unambiguous

communication of possible uncertainties. At the IB/MA ASFEU, greater emphasis is needed on the more consistent selection and invitation of parties concerned to working groups for the preparation of calls, as well as the prompt submission of draft calls for approval by the MA.

In the area of training and educational activities, it would be appropriate to extend the scope of introductory training for new employees, organize more practical workshops, specific case studies and leading practice training on similar experience abroad and/or from other operational programmes (hereinafter OP). Other areas where education is necessary are: project management, financial management, language skills, working with ITMS, public procurement, communication skills, technical assistance and eligibility of (personnel) expenditures. Enhancing the scope of introductory training for new staff would also be beneficial. The IB/MA ASFEU could also request the CA for mediation of case studies regarding checks of expenditure(s) eligibility.

The high rate of fluctuation in employees is a problem at the IB/MA ASFEU. To perform the delegated tasks effectively, it is necessary to render the fluctuation rate stable (e.g. by enhancing staff motivation), consider changes to work organization (e.g. determination of working hours) and organizational structure and place a greater emphasis on internal training activities.

Does the MC for OPE fulfil its tasks effectively and pursuant to the MC Charter and Rules of Procedure for OP Education?

The MC performs the tasks as defined in Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006 effectively; however; the Evaluation revealed that, in order to achieve a more effective performance of MC tasks, its members could be more active in programming and monitoring the implementation by way of greater participation and closer knowledge of issues. The Evaluation further showed that lack of engagement on the part of members could have had an impact on the reduced effectiveness of OPE implementation and management.

To increase the activities of MC members, it is worth giving consideration to peer-based learning activities for them, focused on the study of other MC practice in the SR (MC for knowledge-based economy, Employment and Social Inclusion (hereinafter EaSL) etc.) or abroad, the arrangement of informal meetings in addition to the planned MC sessions or extension of the scope within current sessions. Notwithstanding this, the realization of peer-based learning or participation in meetings of other MCs does not come within the MA's competence, but within the competence of individual MC members. Where justified, we also propose increasing the number of MC sessions to two per year. As a further activity, we recommend that the MA provide MC members with the option to provide the MA with feedback.

Is cooperation of the MA with the IB/MA on OPE implementation effective? What scope is there to improve cooperation of the MA with the IB/MA?

In terms of cooperation of the MA with both the IB/MAs, certain limitations were identified, for example, the communication problems noted above. However, as a whole, cooperation in this area may be evaluated as relatively effective. In our Evaluation, we observed ongoing efforts to improve the quality of mutual cooperation. There are regular as well as *ad hoc* (problem-resolution) meetings organized with the participation of both the IB/MAs, at which minutes are taken. Problem-resolution meetings are evaluated positively by both the IB/MAs as the Evaluation confirmed that it is prompt and more frequent communication which can help avoid problems.

Are the administrative capacities of the MA and IB/MA adequate and used effectively?

The Evaluation showed that the administrative capacities of the MA and both the IB/MAs are well-prepared for performance of their tasks. Minor weaknesses in IB/MA staff qualifications and knowledge can be remedied by means of training and the acquisition of expertise. Lack of knowledge was identified, in particular, in the areas of law and public procurement (hereinafter PP) where this knowledge is essential for performance of the relevant tasks. Concerning the number of administrative capacities involved in OPE implementation, their mutual cooperation and fluctuation, we observed that, in the majority of cases, the main implementation tasks were fulfilled effectively, in due quality and in line with time constraints. In the case of the MA and the agenda which at present includes projects from the 2004-2006 programming period as well as 2007-2013, we recommend – after settlement of the projects from the previous period – reassessing and adjusting personnel capacities

at the EAD and EUSFED as currently necessary and required by a new programming period.

Is cooperation between implementation bodies (MA, IB/MA) and beneficiaries effective?

Although the Evaluation also noted activities of lesser effect, in general we evaluate the activities of the implementation bodies to support beneficiaries as effective and cooperation between implementation bodies and beneficiaries as effective. The most common forms of supporting activities are information seminars and training courses, daily phone and mail communications and the possibility of personal consultations and project controls prior to their submission, as provided by the MA and both the IB/MAs for applicants and beneficiaries. We evaluate as positive the MA's initiation of meetings with representatives of directly managed organizations of the MoEd SR that implement national projects. Following the initial experience with grant applications of inadequate quality being submitted, the IB/MA provides applicants with the opportunity of a meeting with employees from the Regional Information Offices (hereinafter RIO).

Are the funds from technical assistance used effectively and transparently?

The funds from technical assistance are used within priority axes 85 and 86 as per Annex No. II of Commission Regulation No. 1828/2006. In the case of the OPE, the funds spent are documented as per other projects funded from the EU Structural Funds, i.e. in compliance with national and EU legislation, the MSSFCF and the Structural Fund and Cohesion Fund Financial Management System (hereinafter FMS). As a consequence, use of the funds has been duly documented and recorded in the books as per Act No. 431/2002 Coll. on Accounting and in accordance with the Manual for beneficiaries and budget. During our Evaluation, the Evaluator's team had a list of assets and services acquired at the level of expense groups at their disposal; as a consequence, it is not possible to adopt a firm standpoint and assess whether there were no instances of inefficient spending of the funds from technical assistance. However, on the basis of the documentation provided, it may be concluded that the funds from technical assistance contribute to the effective implementation of OP Education.

Conclusion

The Evaluation which focused on assessing the effectiveness of the management system of OP Education revealed that, on the whole, the system may be evaluated as effective and contributing to the effective implementation of the OP Education. However, certain weaknesses were identified in the course of the Evaluation, resolution of which would contribute to streamlining and improving the management system as well as coordination and cooperation at the level of all implementation bodies. In the time period monitored, as well as during the Evaluation, we noted ongoing efforts on the part of the MA to resolve the problems arising, thereby contributing to overall fulfilment of the Operational Programme's objectives.

1.4 Operational Programme Education

The Operational Programme Education (hereinafter OP Education or OPE) is a reference document on the basis of which support will be provided to human resources development using national and ESF resources. It defines the global objective, priority axes, measures and activities which will be supported in the territories of the *Convergence* and the *Regional Competitiveness and Employment* objectives over the 2007-2013 period. Geographically, it covers the whole territory of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter Slovakia or SR). OP Education implements a specific priority 3.1 *Modern education for a knowledge-based society* under the National Strategic Reference Framework of the Slovak Republic for the 2007-2013 period (hereinafter the NSRF). Under Article 3 of the ESF Regulation which defines the scope of assistance, OP Education supports strengthening labour force adaptability by enhancing the quality and access to life-long learning.¹

Further to the analysis and needs of the Slovak educational system identified under the OPE strategy, the following individual OPE **priority axes and measures** have been defined:

- ▶ Priority axis 1 – Reform of the educational and vocational training system
 - Measure 1.1 Transformation of a traditional school to a modern school;
 - Measure 1.2 Higher education institutions and R&D as the drivers of development of the knowledge-based society;
- ▶ Priority axis 2 – Life-long learning as a tool for human resources development
 - Measure 2.1 Support for life-long learning;
 - Measure 2.2 Support for life-long learning in the healthcare sector;
- ▶ Priority axis 3 – Support for education of persons with special educational needs
 - Measure 3.1 Increasing the level of education of members of the marginalised Roma communities;
 - Measure 3.2 Increasing the level of education of persons with special educational needs;
- ▶ Priority axis 4 – Modern education for a knowledge-based society for the Bratislava region
 - Measure 4.1 Transformation of a traditional school to a modern school for the Bratislava region;
 - Measure 4.2 Increasing the competitiveness of the Bratislava region by developing tertiary education and life-long learning;
 - Measure 4.3 Technical assistance for the *Regional Competitiveness and Employment* objective;
- ▶ Priority axis 5 – Technical assistance for the *Convergence* objective
 - Measure 5.1 Technical assistance for the *Convergence* objective – MA (MoEd SR) and IB/MA (ASFEU);
 - Measure 5.2 Technical assistance for the *Convergence* objective – IB/MA (MoH SR).

¹ http://www.minedu.sk/data/USERDATA/StrukturalneFondy/ESF/PO2007-13/PDOC/OP_Vzdelavanie_publikacia.pdf

1.5 Findings Resulting from the Evaluation

The OPE implementation is in progress, the objectives of the programme are being fulfilled on an ongoing basis and the programme as a whole functions within substantial aspects. The omissions and weaknesses identified by the Evaluator's team have resulted from the current agenda as well as the level of difficulty of the given tasks. The MA strives to resolve the problems on an ad hoc basis in favour of all the entities concerned; however, some of the problems have been caused by factors beyond the MA's control and thus their resolution is not dependent on the MA's activities.

We evaluate as positive the communications (written as well as electronic) on the part of the MA with the grant beneficiaries and the quality of materials and information submitted within the MC's sessions. In the interest of more effective communication, the IB/MA ASFEU was provided with the facility to use e-mail communication in respect of monitoring reports and applications for a change in grant contracts. To reduce the administrative workload of PMs at the IB/MA, temporary workers were used to perform administrative activities.

This Chapter includes a brief overview of the weaknesses identified in the area of OPE management and implementation. A more detailed description by evaluation question is provided in Chapter 5.

Findings relevant for the MA:

- ▶ MANAGEMENT SYSTEM SPECIFICS
 - Frequent changes to the MSSFCF have the effect of prolonging administration and emburdening administrative capacities; the specific character of ESF compared to ERDF; system complexity; insufficient support for ITMS in the process of providing for SF implementation;
- ▶ COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION FLOWS
 - Promptness, definiteness and communication methods within the scope and between the MA, IB/MA, MC, beneficiaries;
- ▶ IMPLEMENTATION TIME PERSPECTIVE
 - Distribution of information beforehand and standpoints on time; relates, in particular, to cooperation of MA and both IB/MAs;
- ▶ SUPPORT FOR QUALITY OF DELIVERABLES OF ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES BY WAY OF TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:
 - Shortage of practical workshops, case studies and leading practice training sessions on similar experience abroad and/or from other OPs;
- ▶ ITMS SUPPORT
 - Lower ITMS functionality;
 - Partial lack of functionality with respect to several applications, system instability, break-down rate, OLAP cubes – insufficient database modulability which in turn affects time-ineffectiveness of data collection, processing and input to ITMS;

Findings relevant for IB/MA ASFEU:

- ▶ COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION FLOWS
 - Promptness, definiteness and communication methods within the scope and between the MA, IB/MA, MC, beneficiaries;
- ▶ ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES
 - Limitations to staff qualification and knowledge (legal sphere, PP);
 - Workload of expenditure(s) managers and project managers;

- ▶ **IMPLEMENTATION TIME PERSPECTIVE**
 - Distribution of information beforehand and standpoints on time; relates, in particular, to cooperation of MA and both IB/MAs;
- ▶ **QUALITY OF ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY DELIVERABLES**
 - HMR – incorrectly completed tables in monitoring reports;
 - Calls – underestimated member selection (absence of some of the parties concerned) in working groups for preparation of calls (concerning calls which repeated in terms of their character, the entire process failed to be repeated in its full scope); draft calls submitted to the MA for approval within a very short time period prior to their issue;
- ▶ **SUPPORT FOR QUALITY OF DELIVERABLES OF ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES BY WAY OF TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:**
 - Shortage of practical workshops, case studies and leading practice training sessions on similar experience abroad and/or from other OPs;
 - Lower level of training in the areas of project management, financial management, language skills, work with ITMS, public procurement and communication skills, technical assistance, eligibility of (personnel) expenditures and complex introductory training;
- ▶ **STAFF FLUCTUATION**
- ▶ **ITMS SUPPORT**
 - Lower ITMS functionality;
 - Partial lack of functionality with respect to several applications, system instability, break-down rate, OLAP cubes – insufficient database modulability which in turn affects time-ineffectiveness of data collection, processing and input to ITMS;

Findings relevant for IB/MA MoH SR:

- ▶ **COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION FLOWS**
 - Promptness, definiteness and communication methods within the scope and between the MA, IB/MA, MC, beneficiaries;
- ▶ **IMPLEMENTATION TIME PERSPECTIVE**
 - Distribution of information beforehand and standpoints on time; relates, in particular, to cooperation of MA and both IB/MAs;
- ▶ **QUALITY OF ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY DELIVERABLES**
 - HMR – incorrectly completed tables in monitoring reports;
- ▶ **SUPPORT FOR QUALITY OF DELIVERABLES OF ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES BY WAY OF TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:**
 - Less practical workshops, case studies and leading practice training sessions on similar experience abroad and/or from other OPs;
- ▶ **ITMS SUPPORT**
 - Lower ITMS functionality;
 - Partial lack of functionality with respect to several applications, system instability, break-down rate, OLAP cubes – insufficient database modulability which in turn affects time-ineffectiveness of data collection, processing and input to ITMS;

Findings relevant for the MC:

- ▶ COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION FLOWS
 - Promptness, definiteness and communication methods within the scope and between the MA, IB/MA, MC;

- ▶ INVOLVEMENT OF MONITORING COMMITTEE
 - Lower rate of active participation of the MC in programming and interim monitoring of deliverables and OPE objective fulfilment;
 - Low frequency of MC meetings and inadequate timeframe.

1.6 Recommendations

In this Chapter, we list an overview of the measures which we recommend for implementation to mitigate and/or overcome the weaknesses noted above. A more detailed description of the recommendations by evaluation question is provided in Chapter 5.

Recommendations relevant for the MA:

- ▶ **MANAGEMENT SYSTEM SPECIFICS**
 - Appeal to the CCA and/or the EC with reference to the frequency of changes and consideration of the specifics of ESF compared to ERDF;
 - Appeal to the CCA in order to increase ITMS functionality – initiate an independent ITMS audit to verify its functionality and recommended improvements;
 - Aim for system (processes) simplification – proceed in a coordinated manner along with other MAs, jointly propose methods of simplifying the MSSFCF procedures;

- ▶ **COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION FLOWS**
 - Increased use of electronic communications between MA – IB/MA;
 - Arrangement of regular weekly meetings at the EAD and EUSFED management level to resolve problems on an *ad-hoc* basis;
 - Communication and/or transfer of information between EAD and EUSFED (strengthening of communication by permanent sharing of deliverables among divisions);
 - Communication between IB/MA ASFEU and MA (Methodology, Technical Assistance, State Aid and Reporting Department) – refer to Chapter 5.4.2;
 - Clear and prompt methodological policies and guidelines from the MA (HMR Expenditures eligibility);
 - Establishment of permanent/interim platform between the MA and both the IB/MAs for mutual proposals to improve the performance of tasks under the OP Education;

- ▶ **ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES**
 - A more consistent use of one's own administrative capacities focused on receiving feedback re. problems and finding solutions;
 - Reassess the allocation of capacities between EAD and EUSFED as currently necessary and required by the 2007-2013 programming period, i.e. following settlement of projects from the 2004-2006 programming period to determine an optimal number of employees at these two divisions, refer to Chapter 5.5.3;

- ▶ **IMPLEMENTATION TIME-FRAME**
 - Prompt provision of information on changes and requirements;
 - Information provided promptly to parties concerned if problem areas are identified by the Managing Authority;
 - Regular communication of weaknesses and deviations via electronic form as well as in meetings, thereby mitigating the impacts of late or incomprehensible solutions;

- ▶ **SUPPORT FOR QUALITY OF DELIVERABLES OF ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES BY TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:**
 - More frequent arrangement of practical workshops, actual case studies to enhance specific knowledge and leading practice training sessions re. similar experience abroad and/or from other OPs;
 - Performance of exploratory on-the-spot checks of expenditures for IB/MA employees as part of experience-transfer ;

- ▶ **ITMS SUPPORT STRENGTHENING**

- Regularly communicate problems relating to ITMS functionality to responsible employees and actively monitor their solutions;
- Initiate an independent ITMS audit to verify its functionality and recommended improvements;
- Proceed in a coordinated manner with other MAs, jointly propose methods of simplifying the MSSFCF procedures;

▶ **MONITORING BODY INVOLVEMENT**

- Arrangement of specific training for MC members instructing them about their tasks, particularly in the area of monitoring, evaluation and measurable indicators;
- Collecting feedback from MC members (MA) to verify problem areas identified at a meeting / seminar organised for MC members;

Recommendations relevant for IB/MA ASFEU:

▶ **COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION FLOWS**

- Increased use of electronic communications between MA – IB/MA, IB/MA – beneficiaries;
- More frequent communication between project managers and expenditure(s) managers, which has a direct impact on the adequacy of information provided to beneficiaries (support of one-to-one consultations);
- Communication between IB/MA ASFEU and MA (Methodology, Technical Assistance, State Aid and Reporting Department);
- Enhanced flow of information down to the lowest levels of IB/MA employees by management (in particular IB/MA ASFEU); greater emphasis placed on the transfer of information available to lower positions up to officials;
- Establishment of permanent/interim platform between the MA and both the IB/MAs for mutual proposals to improve the performance of tasks under the OP Education;

▶ **ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES**

- Place greater emphasis on in-depth comprehension of the MSSFCF and related documentation, internal training activities to increase professional skills and quality of deliverables, information-sharing and coaching of new employees by more experienced staff;
- Resolve the workload of expenditure(s) managers and project managers by modifying the organisational setup of the given positions, either by merging the positions or forming so-called coordinated pairs;
- A more consistent use of one's own administrative capacities focused on receiving feedback re. problems and finding solutions;

▶ **IMPLEMENTATION TIME-FRAME**

- Closer adherence to deadlines when performing tasks, prompt provision of information on changes and requirements;

▶ **QUALITY OF ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY DELIVERABLES**

- More consistent selection and invitation of parties concerned to working groups when preparing calls; prompt submission of draft calls to be approved by the MA (refer to Implementation Timeframe above);
- A more thorough check of HMR accuracy; prompt and unambiguous communication of potential uncertainties to the MA;

▶ **SUPPORT FOR QUALITY OF DELIVERABLES OF ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES BY TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:**

- Arrangement of practical workshops, actual case studies to enhance specific knowledge and leading practice training sessions re. similar experience abroad and/or from other OPs;
 - Increase the rate of training in the area of project management, financial management, language skills, work with ITMS, public procurement and communication skills, technical assistance, eligibility of (personnel) expenditures;
 - Enhance the complexity of introductory training for new employees;
 - Place greater emphasis on internal training activities to increase professional skills, information-sharing and coaching of new employees by more experienced staff;
 - Ask the CA for mediation of case studies re. expenditure(s) eligibility for IB/MA ASFEU;
- ▶ **IB/MA ASFEU STAFF FLUCTUATION**
 - Render the fluctuation rate stable, e.g. by enhancing staff motivation;
 - Consider changes to organization of work (e.g. determination of working hours);
 - Place greater emphasis on internal training activities;
 - ▶ **ITMS SUPPORT STRENGTHENING**
 - Regularly communicate problems relating to ITMS functionality to responsible employees and actively monitor their solutions;

Findings relevant for IB/MA MoH SR:

- ▶ **COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION FLOWS**
 - Information flow using minutes from meetings;
 - Increased use of electronic communications between MA – IB/MA, IB/MA – beneficiaries;
 - Establishment of permanent/interim platform between the MA and both the IB/MAs for mutual proposals to improve the performance of tasks under the OP Education;
- ▶ **ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES**
 - A more consistent use of one's own administrative capacities focused on receiving feedback re. problems and finding solutions;
- ▶ **IMPLEMENTATION TIME-FRAME**
 - Closer adherence to deadlines when performing tasks, prompt provision of information on changes and requirements;
- ▶ **QUALITY OF ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY DELIVERABLES**
 - A more thorough check of HMR accuracy; prompt and unambiguous communication of potential uncertainties to the MA;
- ▶ **SUPPORT FOR QUALITY OF DELIVERABLES OF ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES BY TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:**
 - Arrangement of practical workshops, actual case studies to enhance specific knowledge and leading practice training sessions re. similar experience abroad and/or from other OPs;
 - Increase the rate of training in the area of project management, financial management, language skills, work with ITMS, public procurement and communication skills, technical assistance, eligibility of (personnel) expenditures;
 - Enhance the complexity of introductory training for new employees;
- ▶ **ITMS SUPPORT STRENGTHENING**
 - Regularly communicate problems relating to ITMS functionality to responsible employees and actively monitor their solutions;

Recommendations relevant for the MC:

- ▶ COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION FLOWS
 - Establishment of permanent/interim platform for mutual proposals to improve the performance of tasks under the OP Education;

- ▶ INVOLVEMENT OF MONITORING COMMITTEE MEMBERS
 - A more active approach of MC members to programming and monitoring the implementation by way of greater involvement and more thorough knowledge of the issues, e.g. in the form of *peer-learning* activity aimed at studying the practice of other Monitoring Committees in the SR (MC for knowledge-based economy, ESI, etc.) or abroad;
 - Where justified, increase the number of MC meetings to two per year;
 - Consider the arrangement of informal meetings in addition the planned MC sessions or extension of the scope within current sessions;
 - Provision of feedback from the MC members for the MA by means of questionnaires or a discussion.

2 Evaluation Phases Undertaken

2.1 Evaluation Objective, Evaluation Questions and Target Groups

As required by the Ordering Party, the Evaluation focused on the effectiveness of the OPE management system. The Evaluation aimed at analysing the set-up of the OPE management system and implementation system and assessing activities as performed by the OPE MA, IB/MA and MC for OPE.

Within the framework of the Evaluation, we initially focused on **target groups** as specified in cooperation with MA / IB/MA. Subsequently, respondents were determined within a questionnaire survey. Selected employees were then interviewed. A sample of respondents was formed on the basis of nomination by the MA, as well as on the results of the questionnaire survey. Preference was given to employees with the most considerable experience and relevant agenda. According to the bodies participating in the Evaluation, the following positions were selected in the group of respondents:

- ▶ **MA (European Affairs Division) management**
 - ▶ General Director;
 - ▶ Director of Department for OP Education;
- ▶ **MA (European Affairs Division) officers**
 - ▶ Programming Manager (Department for OP Education);
 - ▶ Project Manager (Department for OP Education);
 - ▶ Monitoring Manager (Department for OP Education);
 - ▶ Evaluation Manager (Department for OP Education);
 - ▶ Information and Publicity Manager (Department for OP Education);
 - ▶ Technical Assistance Manager (Department for OP Education);
- ▶ **MA (EU Structural Funds Economy Division) management**
 - ▶ General Director;
 - ▶ Director of EU Structural Funds Eligible Expenses Department;
 - ▶ Director of Methodology, Technical Assistance, State Aid and Reporting Department;
- ▶ **MA (EU Structural Funds Economy Division) officers**
 - ▶ Financial Manager (Eligible Expenses Department);
 - ▶ Financial Manager (Methodology, Technical Assistance, State Aid and Reporting Department);
- ▶ **IB/MA Agency of MoEd SR for EU SFs (OPE Implementation Division)**
 - ▶ General Manager;
 - ▶ Administration Department
 - ▶ Head of Administration Department / lead manager;
 - ▶ Administration Manager;
 - ▶ Information and Publicity Department
 - ▶ Head of Information and Publicity Department / lead manager;
 - ▶ Publicity Manager;
 - ▶ Project Management and Monitoring Department
 - ▶ Head of Project Management and Monitoring Department / lead manager;
 - ▶ Project Manager;
 - ▶ Monitoring Manager;
 - ▶ Expenditures Department
 - ▶ Head of Expenditures Department / lead manager;
 - ▶ Manager of RFP Administration;
 - ▶ Expenditure(s) Manager;
 - ▶ Head of Expenditures Unit - OPV1/OPV2;

- ▶ Financing and Administration Department
 - ▶ Head of Financing and Administration Department;
 - ▶ Head of Technical Assistance Unit;
 - ▶ Technical Assistance Manager;

- ▶ **IB/MA MoH SR (European Programmes and Projects Division)**
 - ▶ General Manager;

 - ▶ EUPD – EU Programmes Department
 - ▶ Department Director;

 - ▶ EUPD – Programming Unit
 - ▶ Coordinating Manager – head of unit;
 - ▶ Programming and Evaluation Manager;
 - ▶ Programming and Technical Assistance Manager;

 - ▶ EUPD – Monitoring Unit
 - ▶ Coordinating Manager – head of unit;
 - ▶ Information and Publicity Manager;
 - ▶ Monitoring Manager;

 - ▶ PAD – Project Assessment Department
 - ▶ Chief Manager – Department Director;
 - ▶ Coordinating Manager – head of unit;
 - ▶ Project Manager;

 - ▶ PID - Project Implementation Department
 - ▶ Chief Manager – Department Director;
 - ▶ Coordinating Manager – head of unit;
 - ▶ Project Manager;

- ▶ **OPE Monitoring Committee**
 - ▶ MC Deputy Chairman;
 - ▶ Selected members of MC.

A total of 83 employees (MA – 31 employees, IB/MA ASFEU – 36 employees, IB/MA MoH SR – 13 employees and MC – 3 members) took part in the questionnaire survey, i.e. completed the questionnaire. Subsequently, the Arranger's team held structured interviews with 26 selected employees (MA – 11 employees, IB/MA ASFEU – 12 employees, IB/MA MoH SR – 2 employees and MC – 1 member).

Taking the Evaluation's objectives into consideration, the Ordering Party formulated a set of evaluation questions (refer to: Terms of Reference for *Evaluation of Effectiveness of the Management System Implemented in the OP Education*) that we attempted to answer over the duration of the project. The basic series of evaluation questions is as follows:

- ▶ Does the MA responsible for OPE fulfil the tasks effectively and with due quality, in accordance with the OPE Programming document and MA Internal Manual of Procedures? What methods may be used to improve fulfilment of these tasks?
- ▶ Do IB/MAs for OP Education fulfil tasks resulting from the Delegation Agreement, as well as in accordance with the Programming Manual for OP Education and IB/MA Internal Manual of Procedures effectively and with due quality? What method could be used to streamline the OPE implementation process?
- ▶ Does the MC for OPE fulfil its tasks effectively and pursuant to the MC Charter and Rules of Procedure for OP Education?
- ▶ Is cooperation of the MA with the IB/MA on OPE implementation effective? What scope is there to improve cooperation of the MA with the IB/MA?
- ▶ Are the administrative capacities of the MA and IB/MA adequate and used effectively?

- ▶ Is cooperation between implementation bodies (MA, IB/MA) and beneficiaries effective?
- ▶ Are the funds from technical assistance used effectively and transparently?

2.2 Project Solution Development

In compliance with the proposal submitted, project work was divided into several logically interconnected and follow-up phases. Individual steps in the project realisation were performed in the following phases:

- I. Preparation phase;
- II. Evaluation phase;
- III. Finalization of the Final Evaluation Report.

The deliverable of the Preparation phase was a working matrix of questions, on which the Evaluation was performed in the framework of the questionnaire survey, structured interviews and focus group.

At the introductory meeting with the Ordering Party held on 10 December 2009, the Arranger's team presented the proposed approach to the Evaluation and projected work plan. At the same time, the Ordering Party and the Arranger agreed on ongoing meetings cc. 1x/3 weeks over the duration of the Evaluation, thereby providing the information required in the Evaluation. In addition, at a meeting, the Ordering Party specified the key areas which the Arranger's team should have focused on in evaluating.

Standard methods were used to collect the data required for preparation of the Evaluation. The Evaluation is based largely on processed data compiled by means of a questionnaire survey, structured interviews, consultations with the Ordering Party, e-mail communication (in order to specify and supplement data), desk-research and analysis of data from resources available to public.

QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

A questionnaire survey and structured interviews were included in the Evaluation phase. The survey addressed the Managing Authority, both the IB/MAs and MC. The questionnaire went to a total of 93 respondents, of whom 83 replied (i.e. response rate of 89%). For the purposes of the Evaluation, the questionnaire was completed by a total of 31 MA employees, 36 IB/MA ASFEU employees, 13 IB/MA MoH SR employees and 3 MC members. The questionnaire survey aimed at compiling the information which was to serve as a basis for structured interviews and finalization of the Evaluation report. Taking into consideration the high response rate of the questionnaire and the quality of responses, this phase of the Evaluation provided extensive (in some cases – wholly satisfactory) information on the structure of the management system and the activities of the bodies involved in the implementation.

STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The responses provided by the respondents and their job titles in the institution formed the criteria in the questionnaire survey for selecting employees and inviting them to a structured interview. During the Evaluation – over a four-week period – the Arranger's team interviewed a total of 26 employees of MA (11 employees), IB/MA (ASFEU – 12 and MoH SR – 2 employees) and MC (1 member). Their objective was to confirm the data collected from the questionnaire survey, add or clarify facts which had not been covered in the questionnaire, and/or acquire more detailed information on areas selected by the evaluator as to where there is room for improvement. The Evaluation phase also included an analytical sub-phase and a subsequent formulation of conclusions. This sub-phase aimed at processing all the acquired data to databases in order to evaluate the results of the questionnaire and interviews, additional documentation and the subsequent answers to the defined evaluation questions.

MEETING WITH THE ORDERING PARTY

After evaluating the structured interviews, a meeting with the Ordering Party was held on 23 March 2010, at which the Evaluation deliverables were presented followed by a discussion.

3 Timetable and Staffing in Respect of Tasks

3.1 Timetable

WEEK after execution of Contract																					
ACTIVITIES	1.	2.	3.	4.	5. 8.1.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17. 31.3.	18.	19.	20.	21. 25.4.
Execution of Contract	x																				
Acceptance of documentation		x																			
Preparation phase		x	x	x	x																
Submission of preliminary report					x																
Commenting on preliminary report						x															
Questionnaire survey							x	x													
Evaluation of questionnaire survey									x	x											
Conducting structured interviews										x	x	x	x								
Documentation analysis					x	x	x	x						x							
Evaluation of structured interviews												x	x	x	x						
Establishment of focus groups																x					
Evaluation phase												x	x	x	x						
Presentation of results																x					
Submission of draft Evaluation Report for comments																	x				
Commenting procedure																	x	x	x	x	
Finalization of the Final Evaluation Report and termination of the project																					x
Project management		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

As per the contract, the date for submission of the draft Final Evaluation Report is 31 March 2010. Should the Ordering Party comment on the Final Evaluation Report, it will be revised and submitted not later than by 25 April 2010.

3.2 Staffing

The Ernst & Young team consists of professionals who combine all the appropriate knowledge, skills and experience necessary for realization of the project. Ing. Tomáš Osuský is the Executive Director of Ernst & Young responsible for realization of the engagement and Ing. Radim Konečný is the Project Manager. Other team members are Ing. Michaela Havlát (Senior Consultant for Public Administration and EU Structural Funds) as well as Mgr. Tomáš Mihóčík and Mgr. Peter Miklánek (Assistants 2). The members of the processing team have not been allocated to specific evaluation activities; all members of the processing team take part in the activities.

Name	Company	Task in preparing the Evaluation
Ing. Tomáš Osuský	Ernst & Young, k.s. (Slovakia)	Executive Director, Responsible for realisation of the project
Ing. Radim Konečný, MBA	Ernst & Young, k.s. (Slovakia)	Project manager and Contractor (communication with the Ordering Party)
Ing. Michaela Havlát	Ernst & Young, k.s. (Slovakia)	Team member and Contractor
Mgr. Tomáš Mihóčík	Ernst & Young, k.s. (Slovakia)	Team assistant and Contractor
Mgr. Peter Miklánek	Ernst & Young, k.s. (Slovakia)	Team assistant and Contractor

4 Project Background

4.1 Data Sources

The source documents based on which the Evaluation was prepared are largely as follows:

- ▶ Operational Programme: Education, Programming Manual for OP Education, MA Internal manual, IB/MA Internal manuals;
- ▶ Delegation agreements;
- ▶ MA organizational structure;
- ▶ IB/MA half-yearly monitoring reports;
- ▶ Charter and Rules of Procedure of the MC for OPE;
- ▶ Minutes from meetings of the MC for OPE and *per rollam* approval procedures of the MC for OPE;
- ▶ Manuals for applicants;
- ▶ Manuals for beneficiaries;
- ▶ OPE annual reports;
- ▶ Documentation supporting draw-down of technical assistance for OP Education;
- ▶ Action plan for education of MA employees;
- ▶ Information on Implementation of Operational Programme: Education from 1 January 2008 to 28 September 2009;
- ▶ Reports from on-the-spot checks of IB/MA – ASFEU and MoH SR;
- ▶ Action plan for education and overview of training organized for employees of IB/MA ASFEU for 2008 and 2009;

4.2 Methodology

We consider the methodology applied in performing the Evaluation to be an effective tool to fulfil the Evaluation's objective – i.e. to provide the MA with objective information for further decision-making based on an evaluation of the effectiveness of the activities of the MA for OPE, IB/MA as well as based on the analysis of the set-up of the OPE MSSFCF and implementation system.

For the above reasons, it is our belief that the appropriate evaluation tools and information sources considering the evaluation question types in the case of this project are as follows:

- ▶ Analyses of inputs and relevant documentation;
- ▶ Questionnaire survey (using questions in the working matrix of questions);
- ▶ Structured interviews;

These evaluation tools also represent the individual steps of the project solution (refer to Chapter 2.2). The working matrix of questions represents the key evaluation tool on the basis of which information linked to the evaluation questions was identified. In terms of the Evaluation, we attach the greatest weight to the questionnaire survey and/or the subsequent structured interviews. The inputs and findings of the evaluation team were also reflected in the matrix. The working matrix of questions enabled us to structure the areas reviewed into smaller parts and focus on each individual area in greater detail. Within the working matrix and in terms of each area reviewed, we also proposed the evaluation questions and the body whose employees took part in the discussions.

5 Evaluation Results

5.1 Evaluation Question 1:

Does the MA for OPE fulfil the tasks effectively and with due quality, in accordance with the OPE Programming document and MA Internal Manual of Procedures? What methods may be used to improve fulfilment of these tasks?

5.1.1 Does the MA contribute with their activities to the effective implementation of OP Education?

On the whole, it may be stated that the MA implementation has been performed effectively. Initially, we evaluated the performance of tasks within the pre-determined time period with an optimal use of time and administrative capacities as well as the submission of expected outputs observing the prescribed procedures.

Individual procedures within the implementation of OP Education are demanding on time, qualifications and administration; this has a direct impact on the expected outputs and/or results of individual activities. We have identified room for improvement in the areas as described in Chapter 1.5.

It is necessary to mention the importance of the MA role in coordinating and directing both the IB/MAs sufficiently far in advance and with an appropriate level of detail. Guidelines which are specific are essential to avoid vague or general guidelines and possible ineffective communication with the beneficiaries. The time aspect is affected by the frequent changes to the MSSFCF. These changes have the effect of prolonging administration and emburdening administrative capacities as – following a change to the MSSFCF – it is always necessary to update the wider management (e.g. Manual for applicants, Internal manuals, etc.) and project documentation. In this context, it is necessary to mention the areas of call announcements, evaluation of grant applications and follow-up contracting of successful projects, where, in some cases, the related procedures are very lengthy.

We consider the programming phase to be an important aspect in terms of increasing the effectiveness of OPE implementation, in particular the development of a long-term vision / strategy in planning national projects.

However, in general, the performance of activities of both the MA divisions for OPE may be evaluated as effective; the MA tries to solve internal as well as external problems arising in the process of implementation on an *ad-hoc* basis. In some cases, the MA depends for its decision-making process on prompt decisions made by the CCA.

5.1.2 Does the management system react to all the needs and specifics of the MA?

The main particularity of the MSSFCF is the character of ESF which, compared to ERDF, is more demanding in terms of time and human resources in order to supply implementation. ESF contains a greater number of smaller projects, i.e. a higher number of smaller expenditures and wider target groups. Consequently, in relation to the MS, the MA needs to reflect the specific character of ESF.

The MA follows procedures which are determined in the MSSFCF for the 2007-2013 programming period. The needs and specifics are subsequently defined by the MA directly in the Internal Manual of Procedures, which contains the specifics in detail.

To implement OP Education effectively, a set of rules is required over the entire implementation

period. Updates to the MSSFCF should reflect any changes to European Community Regulations; however, it is also essential to secure the due extent of revisions to rules over the implementation period by the CCA. Changes introduced too frequently could have a counter-productive effect. A uniform construction of guidelines by the CCA (always in writing) may also be considered necessary.

We perceive the following MSSFCF areas as problematic:

- ▶ MSSFCF is too complicated (e.g. checklists, reports). The MSSFCF does not specify how the MA should proceed in certain specific cases. The system was developed by the CCA after the European Commission had approved the OP Education and at a time when the majority of MAs had already prepared programming manuals and defined evaluation and selection criteria, which results in ex-post reactions to methodological needs and specifics;
- ▶ The system has not been prepared and updated in cooperation with all MAs, i.e. some MAs cannot influence changes;
- ▶ Frequent updates to the MSSFCF result in the managing documentation (e.g. Manuals for applicants, Internal manuals) requiring updates following the new version of the MSSFCF;
- ▶ Insufficient support of ITMS in the SF implementation process is primarily caused by ITMS inadequate functionality. The Evaluation report also reveals the need to equip the ITMS with an advanced application capable of aggregating the monitoring data of the indicators from the project level to a higher level. Therefore, the requirement of ITMS functionality must be made so that the system – on the basis of input parameters – provides the aggregated values of the requisite parameters and ensures support for effective management of monitoring and evaluation processes. We recommend closer communication by the CCA with individual MAs and regular supervision of the MS technical support by the CCA;
- ▶ Supplemented specification of labelling assets purchased using the EC funds;
- ▶ Ambiguity of the MSSFCF in the areas identified (refer to Chapter 5.1.4).

5.1.3 Have the security of public finances, transparency and principles of partnership been provided for in the performance of individual tasks?

In general, it may be stated that the security of public finances has been provided for by way of on-the-spot checks (in the case of ITMS – the 4-eyes principle); all transactions within the outflow of public finances are checked at several stages (direct superior, on-the-spot check by the Control Department and certifying authority). An on-the-spot check is also performed by the MA.

The partnership principles in fulfilling tasks e.g. in the IB/MA relation to the MA have been anchored in the Delegation Agreement from the MA to IB/MA; the role and position of the MC has been anchored in the MSSFCF. The MA applies the partnership principles, for example, so that, when developing direct engagements, the relevant sections of the MoEd SR are addressed/invited to cooperate. Partnership with social partners, regions and the tertiary school system is secured within the MC which, *inter alia*, approves the annual reports and, at its meetings, is provided with regular information on progress in implementing OP Education by the MA and IB/MA (refer to Chapter 5.3).

With regard to transparency, the system of sharing information within the MA and their sections functions to standard and information flows are currently adequate. In principle, there is a transfer of information by managing employees. The extent and structure of shared information is not specifically defined; information is shared on the basis of individual requirements. We identified room for improvement within both the divisions in the area of information provision by means of minutes from meetings, as they are not always made available to the departments and divisions.

5.1.4 Is the management and implementation system coherent?

Unclear areas were identified in the MSSFCF. They include as follows:

- ▶ Changes to the MSSFCF, their subsequent incorporation into IB/MA documentation (handbooks, manuals) and their application lead to inconsistent procedures (e.g. deadlines) in

the case of individual calls. The lack of uniformity in deadlines for the same procedures may confuse recipients submitting an application in a number of calls;

- ▶ It is not clear how the MA should proceed in the following cases:
 - Accounting for an interim payment in connection with sanctions against beneficiaries in cases when the MSSFCF is in contravention of the legislation of the Slovak Republic or the Financial Management System. This may give rise to a situation wherein individual MAs proceed at their own discretion or they address the CCA and request clarification / guidance. However, in some cases, the CCA only provides guidance to the MA concerned and not to all MAs;
- ▶ In the case of ITMS – partial lack of functionality with respect to some applications, system instability, break-down rate, OLAP cubes – inadequate database modulability (follow-up time ineffectiveness of data collection);
- ▶ Lack of uniformity between the checklist for an administrative verification of RFP and the checklist in ITMS.

5.1.5 Are information flows within the MA adequate, in respect of their performance of tasks?

The Evaluation of effective implementation of the OP Education and adequacy of information-flows within the MA may be divided into internal flows within the MA and flows to the IB/MA.

The Evaluation revealed that, in most cases, employees at all MA levels have the necessary information at their disposal. We evaluate positively the information-flows between the participating MA sections (EAD and EUSFED), i.e. in direct/personal communication at the lowest levels of officials, heads of departments, directors and general directors as well as in writing – official letters, e-mail communication or within a working group working on an individual problem. Regular meetings of departments, divisions are organized with the participation of both the IB/MAs, at which minutes are taken. We recommend sharing the minutes as well as other deliverables between divisions to their full extent. Employees receive the necessary information by e-mail or they share it via the Intranet.

Communication aspects which we perceive as being decisive in improving the implementation of OP Education by the MA:

- ▶ Promptness (it is necessary to move information to both the IB/MAs in advance; delayed opinions have a direct impact on the beneficiaries and the project draw-down);
- ▶ Openness (support to and initiation of direct and open communication at all communication levels of project implementation);
- ▶ Forthrightness (in some cases, MA communication is general, i.e. emphasis placed on clear definition and justification of opinions);
- ▶ Flexibility (support for flexibility in communication procedures with regard to reviewing and approving deliverables; greater use of e-mail communication in the procedures mentioned).

We identified the following information-flow areas where there is room for improvement:

- ▶ We recommend organizing regular problem-resolution meetings at the EAD and EUSFED managerial level on a weekly basis for *ad-hoc* problem-solving;
- ▶ Communication and/or transfer of information between EAD and EUSFED (strengthening communication by sharing deliverables between divisions);

5.1.6 Does the MA provide their IB/MAs with methodological guidance needed for effective implementation of OP Education?

In our Evaluation, we found that the MA provided their IB/MAs with adequate methodological guidance for the preparation of deliverables. Each month the MA organizes a regular meeting of MA – IB/MA attended by the management. Considering the frequency of meetings and lack of room for

resolving individual problems, the IB/MA proposed to assemble a MA – IB/MA working group to discuss the specific problems of recipients. Further meetings will be held on the problem-resolution basis of *ad hoc* requirements.

The IB/MA views the lack of clarity of some specific policies as problematic, e.g. the policy for preparation of HMRs, in particular, the form for the preparation of a half-yearly monitoring report. The IB/MA usually prepares the HMR as per a methodological order of the CCA, or from a HMR form prepared by the MA; however, the opacity of the requirements in the form often leads to erroneous completion on the part of HMRs and the need to comment on the report by the MA. The process of HMR preparation is thereby prolonged by the time needed for face-to-face or phone consultations to resolve ambiguities..

Recommendations to improve the quality of IB/MA deliverables:

- ▶ Unambiguous methodological guidance and guidelines by both the MA divisions and/or CCA;
- ▶ Prompt information provided by the MA, more comprehensible and clearly designed tables which are included in the HMRs, formation of a permanent working group to resolve issues related to eligibility of expenditures;
- ▶ Where justified, increase the rate of training provided by the MA for both the IB/MAs in the areas of project management, financial management, language skills, work with ITMS, public procurement and communication skills, technical assistance, eligibility of (personnel) expenditures
- ▶ Strengthen the complexity of introductory training for new employees;
- ▶ Greater emphasis placed on internal training activities to increase professional skills, information-sharing and coaching of new employees by more experienced staff (refer to Chapter 5.5).

5.2 Evaluation Question 2:

Do IB/MAs for OP Education fulfil tasks resulting from the Delegation Agreement, as well as in accordance with the Programming Manual for OP Education and IB/MA Internal Manual of Procedures effectively and with due quality? What method could be used to streamline the OPE implementation process?

5.2.1 Do the IB/MAs contribute with their activities to effective implementation of OP Education?

On the whole, it may be concluded that the implementation by the IB/MA has been performed effectively. Primarily, we evaluated the performance of tasks within the time period with an optimal use of time and administrative capacities as well as submission of the expected outputs observing the prescribed procedures.

Both the OPE IB/MAs have implemented demand-oriented projects aiming at coverage of specific problems within the SR regions, on the basis of the Delegation Agreement.

Owing to the fact that both the IB/MAs were performing this activity for the first time, it is possible to identify minor weaknesses, in particular in the use of time, human resources and work with ITMS. Subsequently, this leads to prolongation of the performance of some transactions and affects the quality of adherence to the prescribed procedures (e.g. inadequate performance of an on-the-spot check of requests for payments and preparation of half-yearly monitoring reports).

In the case of the IB/MA ASFEU, a certain inadequacy was identified in terms of time, e.g. in preparing calls. In some instances, the lack of consideration given to the selection of members for working groups engaged in preparing calls (where it was a question of calls which, in terms of their character, were repeated, the entire process was not repeated in its full scope), i.e. the absence of some of the parties concerned, has had an impact on the quality of draft calls; the draft calls are subsequently submitted to a managing authority to be approved within a very short period of time prior to their issue, which may have a direct impact on the draft call quality assessment by a managing authority. Similarly, the Evaluator views it as best practice to convene a working group in the case of repeated call announcements, as defined by the MA Internal Manual (hereinafter MA IM). As the MA IM is not binding on the IB/MA and this obligation is not defined in the IB/MA Internal Manual (hereinafter IB/MA IM), this divergence needs to be communicated in the manuals and the approach to call announcements harmonized.

An equally important fact is an ongoing greater fluctuation in IB/MA ASFEU staff, directly affecting continuity and the smooth-running of internal procedures, awareness and professional preparedness of IB/MA staff, rate of error at work and observance of deadlines. The probable main causes include lack of motivation on the part of employees, demanding job description, work organization, extent of appraisal and determination of working hours. A decisive aspect is also the training of new staff with sufficient time to become familiar with the specifics of individual projects. A higher rate of error in deliverables is inherent in new employees.

We also monitored an increased workload of expenditure(s) managers (hereinafter EM). Work was partially streamlined at the Expenditures Department of the IB/MA ASFEU, where personnel capacities were strengthened in the form of temporary jobs to perform day-to-day transactions. The IB/MA ASFEU utilised the external advisory services of an audit organization aiming at identifying weaknesses, thereby streamlining the procedure related to verification of requests for payment, which we evaluate as a positive step.

Due to the above, we recommend placing a greater emphasis in the future on work organization, as it is not at present possible to increase the status of administrative capacities or propose their organizational re-allocation. In this respect, it is essential to support internal training and educational

activities at both the IB/MAs. The above recommendation will secure the adequate, maximum qualitative level of professional preparedness for administrative capacities, as well as the standardisation of basic knowledge for the performance of delegated duties.

5.2.2 Does the Management System respond to all the needs and specifics of IB/MA?

The Evaluation revealed that the MSSFCF covers all the needs and specifics required, considering the individual processes of IB/MA implementation. Currently, the IB/MA does not record any needs relating to the MSSFCF which would call for its significant changes. Nevertheless, each simplification of processes and procedures may be beneficial for applicants / beneficiaries as well as for the IB/MA.

5.2.3 Have the security of public finances, transparency and principles of partnership been provided for in the performance of individual tasks?

The IB/MA IM governs the legal and methodological framework of financial control at the IB/MA level. On the whole, we may conclude that security as well as the transparency of public finances is secured by means of the control mechanism whereby operations within the flow of public finances are checked at several stages: – direct superior, Control Department of the MoEd SR and certifying authority. An on-the-sport check is also performed by the MA.

Partnership principles in fulfilling tasks, e.g. in the relation of the IB/MA to the MA have been anchored in the Delegation Agreement and delegation of duties from the MA to the IB/MA; the role and position of the MC have been anchored in the MSSFCF. This principle was, for instance, applied in developing an operational programme, at present in the form of participation of partners in the selection committee approving grant applications.

5.2.4 Are information-flows within the IB/MA adequate, in respect of their performance of tasks?

We evaluate the overall adequacy of information-flows positively. In general, the IB/MA employees have the information needed for the performance of work at their disposal. Information-flows take place at various levels, e.g. regular work meetings of representatives of individual departments, meetings of employees of individual departments with heads of departments or MA representatives, announcements of individual departments released on the intranet as well as in the form of e-mail communication or communication in the form of an official letter.

In general, we evaluate the communication within both the IB/MAs as adequate; however, it must be emphasized that there is room for improvement in the following areas:

- ▶ Better flow of information to the lowest levels of IB/MA employees by the management (in particular, IB/MA ASFEU);
- ▶ A more consistent use of one's own administrative capacities with the object of receiving feedback re. problems and finding solutions;
- ▶ More intense communication and information-sharing between project and expenditure(s) managers, which consequently has a direct impact on the adequacy of information provided to beneficiaries (support of *one-to-one* consultations).
- ▶ Shortage of specific information at both the IB/MAs may also result from incomplete knowledge of the project's financial agenda on the part of the project manager (hereinafter PM) and vice versa. We see the solution to be in targeted internal training sessions or more clearly defined positions;
- ▶ Less use of e-mail communication, e.g. in assessing grant applications, in favour of official letter communication, which has a direct impact on work and time efficiency

5.2.5 Do the IB/MAs submit the deliverables to the Managing Authority as per the Delegation Agreement in the required amount and due quality?

On the whole, it may be concluded that the IB/MAs submit their deliverables (in particular HMR and AR) in the required quantity; however, their quality is not always satisfactory. As problem issues, we mainly see the preparation of calls (refer to Chapter 5.2.1) and HMRs. The HMRs for the MA represent the basis for preparation of the Annual Report on performance of OP Education. The lower quality is largely caused by a greater fluctuation in staff, in particular in the case of IB/MA ASFEU, lack of information at lower levels (refer to Chapter 5.2.1) and administratively demanding processing of data for HMR (refer to Chapters 5.1.2 and 5.5.4).

In the majority of cases, the IB/MA obtains feedback on the quality of their deliverables from the MA in the form of oral or written communication, comments or audits. The deliverables of the IB/MA (reports, draft calls) are commented on by the MA and the comments are submitted by letter or e-mail to the General Director as well as communicated at regular meetings of MA-IB/MA.

5.2.6 Do the IB/MAs fulfil their tasks in due quality and in accordance with the IB/MA Internal Manual of Procedures? What possibilities are there to improve the performance of delegated tasks and responsibilities?

An on-the-spot check of procedures delegated by the MA to IB/MA was performed at IB/MA ASFEU from May to June as well as at IB/MA MoH SR from October to November. The on-the-spot checks resulted in a list of findings and recommendations by the MA. A report from these checks had not been signed by the IB/MA ASFEU at the time of processing this Evaluation. A possible cause may be, *inter alia*, a different view of the above findings. On the basis of the report, the IB/MA is obliged to make good the findings. The MA will verify how the findings included in the report have been remedied in the course of the upcoming IB/MA on-the-spot check.

In general, it may be stated that the IB/MAs perform their tasks in accordance with the IB/MA IM, albeit the deliverables are not always at an adequate qualitative level and on time. As far as the qualitative level is concerned, this largely represents a possible improvement of quality in the area of on-the-spot verification, project implementation, preparation of half-yearly monitoring reports, draft calls and preparation of supporting documentation to annual reports.

We recommend providing for due quality in performing the following specific tasks:

- ▶ Prompt input of compulsory data to ITMS;
- ▶ Preparation of calls;
- ▶ Preparation of an IB/MA HMR;
- ▶ Improvement of performance of interim financial control in respect of grant applications (in formal and factual terms).

Variances at the IB/MA ASFEU were demonstrated in the administrative verification of requests for payment. Deadlines were not met due to frequent ITMS disruptions, workload of EMs and administration. The IB/MA ASFEU adopted several measures (external advisory services of an audit organization, temporary posts, training of employees from IB/MA TA, training of beneficiaries, direct visits to beneficiaries and on-the-spot consultations) so that effective implementation of projects could continue.

To improve performance of the above tasks, we recommend placing a greater emphasis on in-depth comprehension of the MSSFCF and the related documentation, internal training activities to increase professional skills, information-sharing and coaching of new employees by more experienced staff. At the same time, we recommend that weaknesses and deviations be regularly communicated in

electronic form as well as at meetings, thereby mitigating the impacts of delays or failure to comprehend their solutions.

In the case of fulfilment and monitoring of delegated tasks, a permanent/interim platform is required for reciprocal proposals as to how to improve their performance. Where the MA – IB/MA relationship is concerned, we evaluate positively the arrangement of regular monthly meetings of MA and IB/MA management. Current issues raised by one of the parties concerned are addressed at these meetings. To accomplish a higher level of delegated tasks performed, we regard it as appropriate to improve information-flows of the IB/MA towards the MA, within the IB/MA ASFEU from management to lower levels and among individual managers participating in implementation of the same project (refer to recommendations in Chapter 5.2.4).

5.3 Evaluation Question 3:

Does the MC for OPE fulfil its tasks effectively and pursuant to the MC Charter and Rules of Procedure for OP Education?

5.3.1 Are the tasks of the MC for OPE defined so that they contribute to successful implementation of OP Education?

The MC performs tasks as defined in Council Regulation No. 1083/2006. Nonetheless, the Evaluation revealed that, to increase the effectiveness of performance of the MC tasks, the MC members could be more active in programming and monitoring the implementation by means of greater participation and closer knowledge of the issues. The Evaluation further revealed that insufficient engagement on the part of members could have had an impact on the lower effectiveness of OPE implementation and management.

As a consequence, it is necessary, in particular, to monitor the national projects more closely and place an emphasis on inviting the beneficiaries to meetings. In view of the fact that the MC members are the representatives of various social partners and non-governmental organizations, comments on documents are sometimes of a technical rather than a professional character. We believe that the steps outlined here would contribute to increased efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of (national) OPE projects.

5.3.2 Does the management system react to all the needs and specifics of the MC for OPE?

The Evaluation revealed that the MSSFCF reacts adequately to the MC needs. Therefore, no significant changes to the MSSFCF towards the MC for OPE are needed.

From experience gained in the previous 2004-2006 programming period of, it seems to be appropriate to undertake steps to avoid the reallocation of unused sources. In this context, interim monitoring with the participation of the MC is required, largely as a supplement to interim monitoring of the MA and IB/MA. The MC, as an active entity, should engage more fully in the interim monitoring and check progress in addressing projects as well as the quality of fulfilment of partial and ongoing objectives.

5.3.3 Are members of the MC for OPE adequately prepared for the fulfilment of tasks entailed by their membership in the MC for OPE? If not, what scope is there to improve the situation?

From our Evaluation, we may conclude that the members are relatively well prepared for fulfilment of the tasks entailed by membership of the MC. However, in comparison with the 2004-2006 programming period, we evaluated the frequency of MC meetings as low (once per year) as the lack of time does not afford sufficient room to cover the wide agenda, the more detailed presentation of results achieved in national projects, interim monitoring of objectives' fulfilment as well as the commenting and approval procedures relating to annual reports. The MC should also create more appropriate conditions and promote a clear definition of objectives so that they may be controlled and evaluated in terms of their fulfilment. Where justified, we propose increasing the number of MC sessions to two per year and/or arranging informal meetings in addition to the planned MC sessions or extending the scope within current sessions. The MA may also request feedback from MC members as to their views on the MC's activities, in the form of a formal/informal discussion.

As far as the MC members are concerned and their having the information needed for performance of the MC roles, we recommend that the members also be made familiar with information other than that relating to the agenda of the given meeting, e.g. information about future plans (indication of development relating to coherence of ESF and priorities of national politics, initiative programming

and information about programme fulfilment).

We evaluate as positive an initiative on the part of the MC members to enhance performance and improve fulfilment of the tasks entailed by the MC Charter by way of *peer-learning* activity focused on study of the practice of other Monitoring Committees in the SR (MC for knowledge-based economy, EaSI, etc.) or abroad. An alternative may also be the direct participation of members in the sessions of other MCs. Notwithstanding this, the provision of peer-based learning or participation in the meetings of other MCs does not come within the MA's competence, but within the competence of individual MC members.

5.3.4 Does the MC for OPE have enough representatives of social partners and non-governmental organizations (e.g. representatives of Roma organizations)? If not, what gave rise to the given situation?

The MA compiled the members of the MC from representatives of social partners and non-governmental organizations pursuant to the partnership rules as defined in a separate OP. The current number of representatives of social partners and non-governmental groups in the MC is satisfactory and balanced.

We may briefly allude to the fact that there was not a permanent representative member of the Marginalized Roma Communities (hereinafter MRC) in the MC. As the OPE task in solving MRC problems is regarded as important, the above fact was resolved by inviting a representative from the Office of the Slovak Government Commissioner for Roma Communities as a new member and her active involvement in the MC activities (first participation in 2009 at the 3rd regular meeting of the MC for OPE).

5.3.5 How effective is cooperation of the MA, IB/MA and partners within the MC for OPE?

From our Evaluation, we identified weaknesses in the cooperation among MA, IB/MA and partners within the MC for OPE, in particular in their communication.

With reference to MC meetings and commenting procedures, it seems to be necessary that members enter the process with more considerable involvement and are more interested in the OPE implementation progress (refer to Chapter 5.3.3).

We evaluate positively the efforts of the MA to improve the cooperation of entities involved in OPE management and implementation. The MA plans to prepare specific training for the MC members dealing with its tasks, in particular in the area of monitoring, evaluation and measurable indicators. To receive feedback or clarification of the problem areas identified, the MA is planning to organize a meeting/seminar with MC members.

5.4 Evaluation Question 4:

Is cooperation of the MA with the IB/MA on OPE implementation effective? What scope is there to improve cooperation of the MA with the IB/MA?

5.4.1 What are the main limitations and problems associated with cooperation of the MA with the IB/MA?

One of the limitations identified in the Evaluation is communication of the MA with the IB/MA. We noted information from the MA towards the IB/MA that was unclear and not always communicated on time. This limitation may result from the requirement not being clearly assigned by the IB/MA, the burden of processing a given guidance, unclear and delayed guidance of the MA from the CCA or the method of sharing information from managerial employees towards subordinate staff within individual units.

We witnessed a similar limitation in the case of IB/MA ASFEU when, in the past, the IB/MA ASFEU employees communicated with both the MA divisions exclusively through their superiors which, in the light of the existing IB/MA ASFEU activities, was acceptable. We evaluate this issue to be a major limitation to OPE implementation as communication is a basic prerequisite for the effective cooperation of individual bodies. The development of this situation increased in intensity in mid-2009 when actual implementation of projects commenced and the rate of consultations at the lower positions also increased. As other causes of the limitations, we may also consider the lower level of communication among project managers and expenditure(s) managers (mainly at IB/MA ASFEU), inconsistent use of one's own administrative capacities to the objective of acquiring feedback re. problems and solution-finding.

In the past, some methodological guidance by the MA was slow in resolution, taking into consideration the workload of employees of the Methodology, Technical Assistance, State Aid and Reporting Department at the EUSFED. The MA evaluated this issue to be of a personnel nature and resolved it by strengthening this department, which we evaluate as a positive measure.

As a lingering problem, we consider (in addition to ITMS described in par. 5.5.4) the results of an on-the-spot check of the verification of procedures delegated onto IB/MA ASFEU (refer to Chapter 5.2.6).

5.4.2 Are communication and information-flows between the MA and IB/MA effective?

In terms of communication and information-flows functioning between the MA and IB/MA, the cooperation may be evaluated as relatively effective. There are regular as well as *ad hoc* (problem-resolution) meetings organized with the participation of both the IB/MAs, at which minutes are taken. Problem-resolution meetings are evaluated positively by both the IB/MAs as the Evaluation confirmed that it is prompt and more frequent communication which can help avoid problems. However, it is essential to highlight the areas for possible improvement identified:

- ▶ Decreased use of e-mail communication by the IB/MA with beneficiaries as well as the MA, e.g. in assessing applications for a change in a respective grant contract in favour of official letter communication, which has a direct impact on work and time efficiency;
- ▶ Irregular meetings at the level of monitoring and publicity managers of the MA and both the IB/MAs;
- ▶ Communication between the IB/MA ASFEU and MA - Methodology, Technical Assistance, State Aid and Reporting Department (in particular, its promptness and explicitness).

In terms of communication between the IB/MA ASFEU and MA – Methodology, Technical Assistance, State Aid and Reporting Department – we observed several weaknesses. The questionnaire survey,

as well as the discussions, revealed certain inconsistencies in perceiving the eligibility of expenditures(s). In the view of the MA, it is not possible to express one's definite opinion on each project since that requires detailed knowledge of the respective project, which is specific to each project and the expenditures related therewith. It would be more appropriate for both the IB/MAs (not solely IB/MA ASFEU) to contact the MA, especially if there are more doubtful expenditures. In the course of the Evaluation, the personnel capacities of the Department were increased, which we evaluate as a positive step.

Considering the frequency of meetings and lack of room for the resolution of specific problems, we regard it as appropriate to establish permanent/interim platform for mutual proposals to improve the performance of tasks under the OP Education (e.g. to discuss specific problems of beneficiaries, problems with ITMS, etc.).

5.4.3 Is the organizational set-up satisfactory for all parties concerned?

We evaluate the organizational set-up of the implementation bodies as satisfactory. However, concerning the overlapping job descriptions of PM and EM posts, we recommend considering a modification of the organizational set-up of the given posts, either by merging the positions or by forming so-called coordinated pairs. These pairs would then have the conditions for close cooperation, coordination and information on progress in the assigned project. This synergic effect would go a considerable way towards eliminating inconsistency in PM and EM deliverables and then towards beneficiaries as well.

5.4.4 Do the authorities of individual institutions overlap?

The authority of the MA and IB/MA is clearly defined in regulations and guidelines enshrined in domestic as well as European legislation. The authority of the IB/MA is clearly defined in the Delegation Agreement.

In the course of the Evaluation, we did not identify any areas wherein the authorities of the MA and IB/MA might overlap.

5.4.5 How can cooperation of the MA with the IB/MA be improved?

In our Evaluation, we observed sustained efforts to streamline the cooperation of the MA with the IB/MA. Major room for improvement lies in mutual communication, distribution of information at lower levels and the acceptance of solutions proposed by the Managing Authority.

The cooperation can be improved by respecting the MA and IB/MA relationship (in particular, IB/MA ASFEU), closer cooperation and more open communication, more frequent use of direct e-mail or phone contact, distribution of relevant information from management meetings to lower levels.

5.4.6 What methods could be used to improve the management and control functions of the MA in relation to the IB/MA?

The management and control functions of the MA in relation to the IB/MA are defined in the Delegation Agreement.

In order to improve the performance of the MA management and control functions, there is a need for a permanent/interim platform for mutual proposals as to how to achieve the improvement of the above. In the case of the MA and IB/MA relationship, we evaluate positively the arrangement of regular monthly meetings of the MA and IB/MA management. Current issues presented by one of the parties concerned are resolved at these meetings. Concerning the frequency of these meetings and the lack of room for the resolution of specific problems, we regard it as appropriate to establish a problem-resolution MA – IB/MA working group to discuss the specific problems of beneficiaries.

We also recommend that weaknesses and deviations be regularly communicated in electronic form as well as at meetings, thereby mitigating the consequences of delays or non-comprehension of their solutions.

To improve the performance of the above tasks, we recommend placing greater emphasis on internal training activities to increase professional skills, information-sharing and coaching of new employees by more experienced staff. Another possible way is to provide the IB/MA with prompt guidance and training in problem areas.

5.5 Evaluation Question 5:

Are the administrative capacities of the MA and IB/MA satisfactory and used effectively?

5.5.1 Have the administrative capacities been adequately prepared for performance of their tasks?

The Evaluation revealed that the administrative capacities of the MA and both the IB/MAs are well-prepared for performance of their tasks. Minor weaknesses in the area of staff qualification and skills of both the IB/MAs can be remedied by means of training and acquisition of expertise. Lack of knowledge was identified, in particular, in the areas of law and PP, where this knowledge is essential for performance of the relevant tasks.

The criteria for selection of the administrative capacities of both the MA divisions and both the IB/MAs are stipulated in the Act on State Service and are observed when filling posts. Applicants have to undergo a selection procedure (written and oral) which serves to verify their knowledge and expertise. A problem in recruiting MA and IB/MA employees is posed by the shortage of applicants with the requisite qualification (e.g. employees with experience from the 2004-2006 programming period) on the labour market. As a consequence, the respective institution needs to train its staff. In addition, the qualified workforce tends to circulate between the CCA, CA, MA and IB/MA.

The MA avoids these obstacles by way of coaching and staff training (refer to Chapter 5.5.2). New employees of the MA and both the IB/MAs commonly have a senior employee assigned to them who trains them in a selected agenda and provides his/her time as necessary. Employees of the MA and both the IB/MAs take part in various training courses on an ongoing basis, organized by MoEd SR, Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the SR, Ministry of Finance of the SR, the European Institute of Public Administration; ITMS training courses are compulsory.

Essentially, there is no coherent set of training courses for individual positions of the MA and both the IB/MAs; there are only occasional training courses which are not in alignment with the date of employees entering their post. This is resolved by an introduction to work on an individual basis during the probation period under the leadership of experienced staff, which inevitably creates negative demands on the time of the trainer and poses the risk of a higher rate of error on the part of the trainee.

5.5.2 To what extent do support programmes strengthen staff knowledge and experience?

From information derived from the Evaluation, we may conclude that, despite some limitations, support programmes *do* improve knowledge and expertise of the employees of the MA and both the IB/MAs. Employees utilise the knowledge acquired in practice and they also expressed the need for further training.

Education of all employees is an ongoing process. In the main, employees lack practical skills in project implementation, knowledge of and expertise in law and economics. This is due to the fact that the EU Structural Funds represent a new and broad theme, requiring employees to possess knowledge of many areas.

The MA organizes training focusing on PP, monitoring and publicity for projects. To date, the CCA runs monthly seminars on work with ITMS for smaller groups. In addition, the CCA organizes training on updates of the MSSFCF and FMS. Each IB/MA has its own budget for training activities, i.e. an opportunity to organize educational activities in accordance with internal needs.

We may conclude that the training activities are satisfactory in terms of coverage of basic knowledge and skills; however, there is a need for programmes to support practical experience. In particular, there are no activities such as workshops or case studies. Training activities abroad led by

professionals from countries that have more extensive experience in EU SFs were evaluated positively.

In our Evaluation, we referred to certain deficiencies in the support programmes. The opportunity to take part in programmes is often restricted by the number of employees and their workload. In some cases, the content of programmes is too general and fails to reflect the differing entry levels of staff knowledge. An example is ITMS training which, in the past, was delivered without a practical computer component, which essentially reduced its effectiveness. Nevertheless, employees confirmed that they made use of new insights gained in training in practice.

From our Evaluation, we propose that training be strengthened in the areas of project and financial management, language skills, work with ITMS, PP, communication skills, technical assistance and expenditure(s) eligibility. The Evaluation revealed a need to organize support introductory training courses and expansion of knowledge by means of specific case studies. In the area of eligibility of expenditure(s), we recommend that performing an exploratory on-the-spot check of expenditures would serve to clarify the existing ambiguities.

5.5.3 Is the work of administrative capacities performed effectively, in due quality and in line with time limitations?

Concerning the number of administrative capacities involved in OPE implementation, their mutual cooperation and fluctuation, we observed that, in the majority of cases, the main implementation tasks are fulfilled effectively, in due quality and in line with time limitations.

MA

We evaluate the overall use of the administrative capacities as effective; however, use of the administrative capacities for OPE is affected by the fact that employees of both the divisions have also been working on projects from the previous programming period. Due to the limited personnel capacity, greater efforts (it is necessary to work overtime) are required for effective and high-quality performance of work within the existing time limitations.

Individual performance of tasks has a direct impact on the segregation of duties within the MA, which may be evaluated as effective. Compared to other divisions of MoEd SR, the two divisions cooperate closely – they consult on common problems at regular meetings and there is an effort to overcome and resolve these within a short time period. Considering the agenda, which at present includes projects from the 2004-2006 as well as 2007-2013 programming periods, we recommend – after settlement of projects from the previous time period – reassessing and adjusting personnel capacities at the EAD and EUSFED as necessary and required by the new programming period.

IB/MA ASFEU

In the course of our Evaluation, we noted the workload of EMs and PMs. There are approximately twenty projects falling to the responsibility of one manager. Effective, high-quality work performance in line with the time constraints is possible only if they put in more considerable effort (overtime work). As in the case of the MA, when facing a heavy workload and tight deadlines, employees fail to complete everything within the set time and to due quality. This goes hand in hand with an increased rate of error.

From the findings from an on-the-spot check at the IB/MA in 2009, (refer to Chapter 5.2.6) there were deficiencies in cooperation between individual entities within the IB/MA. The on-the-spot-check, *inter alia*, highlighted the over-complex structure of the IB/MA and poor information-flow. Within the IB/MA, evaluators noted defective communication between employees – officials (cooperation between PMs and EMs) and in some instances also between employees and management. There is a shortage of legal and PP professionals who would effectively verify expenditures on RFP – at present, the IB/MA uses the services of an external PP professional.

Another important aspect is the high rate of fluctuation, in particular at the Expenditures Department

and Project Management and Monitoring Department (further specifics are referred to in Chapter 5.2.1).

IB/MA MoH SR

We observed that the administrative capacity at the IB/MA is at the optimal number; albeit, in the event of an increase in the number of grant applications, the quality of work could be put at risk. Cooperation between individual branches under the IB/MA is adequate and overall fluctuation is relatively low.

The MA always strives to provide the IB/MAs with feedback with regard to the quality and effectiveness of their work. Comments on IB/MA deliverables are the most common form of feedback.

In addition to the above activities, aimed at utilizing the administrative capacities really effectively, in order to prevent problems as well as to motivate employees, it seems appropriate to collect feedback from employees regarding their working conditions, need for training, etc. A suitable form would be a short questionnaire distributed in electronic or paper form.

5.5.4 What is the opinion of MA and IB/MA employees on the Management System of Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund and implementation system?

In most cases, MA and IB/MA employees are familiar with the MSSFCF parts relating to performance of their work activities.

The MSSFCF is regarded as extensive, complex and, in specific areas, as too general. There is a uniform set-up for all funds and operational programmes, which means that it does not reflect the specifics of ESF projects (compared to ERDF projects). Concerning the solutions to some specific cases with the CCA, not all the MAs are informed of the respective findings. The MSSFCF reacts to some new insights ex-post, which in turn leads to problems when implementing projects.

Another problem is posed by too frequent updates to the MSSFCF and low ITMS functionality. More attention also needs to be paid to project selection and approval as these phases have a direct impact on all other implementation phases.

Despite the above weaknesses in the system, it is the opinion of the Evaluator that significant changes to the MSSFCF would not be appropriate, as they would lead to a further burden on the administrative capacities. However, any proposals for MSSFCF simplification contributing to process acceleration and greater effectiveness would be welcome. Where minor changes are concerned, the MSSFCF is updated as necessary and the MA has the opportunity to comment on the prepared material. Nevertheless, it would be suitable if the MS updates were prepared in closer cooperation with the MAs, which would thus have the opportunity to comment on them and/or contribute to their greater effectiveness.

ITMS

According to MA and IB/MA employees, the ITMS system fails to meet the requirements of effective work with information technologies in the long-term. The system is not very reliable (when pages are uploaded it falls over or seizes up, does not save data on an ongoing basis) and/or it is impossible to log on. The system does not enable the preparation of necessary reports and deliverables; many supporting materials (e.g. for monitoring reports) must be prepared manually on the basis of data from ITMS. If erroneous data is inserted, it is not possible to delete it from the system. Problems are also caused by an ITMS advanced application – the public portal used by the beneficiaries. With effect from 1 January 2010, the public portal was expected to offer beneficiaries with an electronic recording of RFPs. This was delayed up to April due to problems lingering within the system.

5.6 Evaluation Question 6:

Is cooperation between implementation bodies (MA, IB/MA) and beneficiaries effective?

5.6.1 How effective are the activities of implementation bodies focused on support for beneficiaries?

Although the Evaluation also identified activities with a lower effect, we generally evaluate the activities of the implementation bodies to support the beneficiaries as effective.

The most common forms of supporting activities are information seminars and training courses, work meetings, daily phone and mail communications and the possibility of personal consultations and project controls prior to their submission, as provided by the MA and both the IB/MAs for applicants and beneficiaries.

We evaluate as positive the MA's initiation of meetings with representatives of directly managed organizations of the MoEd SR that implement national projects. The meetings aimed at avoiding the mutual overlapping of projects as well as ensuring a combination of activities of individual projects so as to ensure that the reform in the education system would be complex, interlinked and synergic.

Following the initial experience with grant applications of inadequate quality, the IB/MA provides applicants with the opportunity of a meeting with employees from the Regional Information Offices (RIO). Prior to submission of a grant application, these employees check their completeness. The following were also effective: on-site checks and verification of managers, personal consultations, FAQ on IB/MA website and Information Days organized re. specific calls. Last but not least, the Manuals for beneficiaries (informing beneficiaries as to procedures) and applicants are also an effective tool.

It may be stated that in our Evaluation we also identified activities that were less effective. The beneficiaries of national projects too often rely on MA assistance in solving problems within their competence. Moreover, the beneficiaries are often not familiarized with necessary information although it is included in the manuals, Programming Manual or the FMS.

5.6.2 What are examples of good practice?

Examples of activities positively received by the beneficiaries include an informative meeting of all successful grant applicants under a specific call prior to execution of a contract at the IB/MA, where the beneficiaries have the opportunity to obtain the necessary information prior to execution of a grant contract.

Training and information seminars provided by the MA and both the IB/MAs, manuals, "RIO" – regional information offices – and, in particular, personal consultations of PMs of both the IB/MAs with beneficiaries on specific problems in their projects and methods for avoiding them do a great deal to help beneficiaries cope with the demanding process of project preparation and follow-up project implementation.

Another example of good practice of both the IB/MAs is the arrangement of events where beneficiaries may present their projects or lead discussions with other beneficiaries. Similarly, the provision of sample completed forms necessary for settlement of RFPs also ensures a lower error-rate for beneficiaries and more rapid processing of the settlement.

The main information activity at the IB/MA MoH SR was *Deň štruktúrálnych fondov na zdravotníctve* (Day of Structural Funds in Healthcare). Considering the specifics of OPE, individual work of project managers with Higher Territorial Units as well as grant beneficiaries and training of beneficiaries (management) also proved beneficial in the health system.

5.6.3 What are the major problems in this area?

In terms of national projects, many beneficiaries are the same as the beneficiaries from the 2004-2006 programming period. Despite this, a certain rate of error was revealed. When solving problems, the beneficiaries of national projects often place too much reliance on assistance from the MA. This may result from a lower qualitative professional level (experience in implementing projects from Structural Funds) of the beneficiary's employees in the project or a lower level of familiarity with the Manual for beneficiaries, Programming Manual or the MSSFCF.

There are weaknesses in communication, familiarity with the Manual for beneficiaries on the part of PMs of both the IB/MAs, failure to observe regulations in approving expenditures and failure to respect reservations on the part of the financial managers. All these lead to a reduction in eligible expenditures and, thereby also, the overall draw-down of OP Education.

Complaints registered during the implementation are resolved within a set time-period as per Act No. 9/2010 Coll. on Complaints. Complaints which fail to meet the official particulars are resolved by personal consultation for problems faced and/or in writing or by phone. The result is always sent to a claimant in writing by mail.

5.7 Evaluation Question 7:

Are the funds from technical assistance used effectively and transparently?

5.7.1 How and to what extent do the funds from technical assistance contribute to effective implementation of OP Education?

The funds from technical assistance are used within two priority themes: 85 and 86 pursuant to Annex No. II of European Commission Regulation No. 1828/2006 (Categorization of Assistance from the Funds for 2007 – 2013). The first priority theme is a separate priority theme 5: Technical Assistance for Objective: Convergence, the purpose of which is to support the realization of priority axes 1, 2 and 3 of OP Education. The second priority theme represents a separate measure No. 4.3: Technical Assistance for Objective: Regional Competitiveness and Employment, the purpose of which is to support the realization of priority axis 4 of OP Education.

Under priority axis 85 the funds are used for the following:

- ▶ Staffing relating to the preparation, management and control of programmes, projects including activities of established committees and commissions & personnel for educational activities;
- ▶ Technical support required for management and control of assistance from ESF;
- ▶ Arrangement of services (documentation) relating to preparation, management and control of programmes and projects.

Under priority axis 86 the funds are used for the following:

- ▶ Provision of information, publicity;
- ▶ Preparation and implementation of a communication plan;
- ▶ Arrangement of individual evaluations of OPE realization;
- ▶ Processing of expert opinions, methodologies, studies, evaluations, analyses;
- ▶ Arrangement of training, seminars, etc.

In the case of the OPE, the funds spent are documented in the same manner as with other projects funded from the EU Structural Funds, i.e. in compliance with national and EU legislation, the MSSFCF and FMS. As a consequence, use of the funds has been duly documented and recorded in the books as per Act No. 431/2002 Coll. on Accounting and in accordance with the Manual for beneficiaries and budget.

More detailed documentation of how the funds were spent is included in RFP. In the case of inventory assets, a NTA number is assigned to each item and labelled with OP logo at the Economics Department. In accordance with the OPE rules, there is a list of assets acquired (asset records, accounting vouchers).

The system of approving expenditures for technical assistance functions in compliance with the MSSFCF and has been defined in the MA Internal Manual. Expenditures are claimed by means of a request for payment (refund), or a request for accounting for an advance payment. All applications are submitted to the MA Methodology, Technical Assistance, State Aid and Reporting Department where they are checked in formal and factual terms.

As the Evaluator's team had a list of assets acquired and services at the level of expense groups at their disposal in our Evaluation, it is not possible to adopt a firm standpoint and assess whether there were no instances of inefficient spending of the funds from technical assistance. However, on the basis of the documentation provided, it may be concluded that the funds from technical assistance contribute to the effective implementation of OP Education.

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