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Final Evaluation Report - Summary

Periodical evaluation of the Operational Programme Education

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Introduction

The Operational Programme Education (hereinafter referred to as “OPE”) has been approved by the European Commission (hereinafter referred to as “EC”) on 7 November 2007, with the EU financial contribution for this operational programme at EUR 617, 801, 578. MA OPE”). [Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the SR](#) (hereinafter referred to as “MESRS SR”) is the managing authority for OPE (hereinafter referred MA OPE”), having been charged with its tasks by the Government of the SR. The Managing Authority constitutes the operational level of the system of structural funds management. In this respect, it carries out all the functions following out of provisions of Article 60 of Council Regulation (EC) No. 1083/2006, of 11 July 2006, laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No.1250/1999 (hereinafter referred to as the “general regulation”).

Within the meaning of Article 59 of the general regulation, the managing authority may delegate some or all of its tasks to the intermediate body under the managing authority. Even in the event of delegation, the ultimate responsibility for the management of the operational programme (hereinafter referred to as “OP”) rests with the managing authority. The ministry’s (MESRS SR) Agency for Structural Funds of the EU (hereinafter referred to as “ASFEU”) and the Ministry of Health of the SR (hereinafter referred to as “MH SR”) act as Intermediate Bodies under the Managing Authority (hereinafter referred to as “IBMA”) for OPE. Mutual relations between the MESRS SR, as the managing authority, and the intermediate bodies under the managing authorities are laid down by special agreements, defining their mutual rights and obligations in the area of providing assistance from the European Social Fund.

The global objective of the OPE is to ensure long-term competitiveness of the Slovak Republic by adapting its education system to the needs of the knowledge-based society. OPE, through contributions from the ESF resources financially supports shaping and fostering of human capital to acquire basic skills and key competences required in the knowledge-based society and the labour market. OPE (available at <http://www.minedu.sk/index.php?lang=sk&rootId=957>) covers all levels of the education system – primary, secondary, higher and further education. All levels of education system must be linked to the needs of the labour market and the challenges of the knowledge-based society. Modernisation and support of education and training at all levels of education system is an essential component to develop knowledge-based society in the Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as “SR”). Investments in this area are designed to start up or strengthen the processes that will ensure competitiveness for the Slovak Republic, in both European and global terms, as well as an overall development of education, creativity, competence and freedom of every citizen’s personality.

For a more detailed elaboration of the OPE down to the level of measures, from the aspect of contents and financial planning, see the Programme manual for OPE (available at: <http://www.minedu.sk/index.php?lang=sk&rootId=957>). It includes examples of activities, indicators at the level of measures, eligible expenditure, categorisation of assistance, eligible recipients, target groups and financial plans of measures concerned.

Annual implementation reports of the OPE for 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 (available at: <http://www.minedu.sk/index.php?lang=sk&rootId=2970>) contain the data on the implementation of OPE achieved at the level of priority axes in the monitoring and financial indicators for 2007-2010. The annual reports on the implementation of OPE (hereinafter referred to as "AIR OPE") also contain the information on the contribution that OPE has made to horizontal priorities, as defined in the National Strategic Reference Framework for 2007-2013 (hereinafter referred to as "NSRF").

MESRS SR, as MA OPE, and IBMA (ASFEU and MH SR) are governed by procedures laid down in the Internal Procedures Manual. MA OPE in cooperation with IBMA is giving guidance to applicants and recipients by having produced the Guide for the Applicant and the Guide for the Recipient (available at: <http://www.minedu.sk/index.php?lang=sk&rootId=476>).

Periodical evaluation of the Operational Programme Education

Within the meaning of the Central Coordination Authority's Methodological Guideline No. 5 for the elaboration of the evaluation plan of operational programmes for the Programming Period 2007 – 2013, of 18 September 2008, (hereinafter referred to as "CCA Methodological Guideline No. 5") every managing authority shall have the obligation to carry out periodical evaluation of the whole OP every 2 years, starting from 2009.

In November 2011, MA OPE conducted the periodical evaluation of OPE, in accordance with the CCA Methodological Guideline No. 5, and in accordance with the exception of the Central Coordination Authority (hereinafter referred to as "CCA") from this methodological guideline, to be completed by 1 March 2012.

Evaluation was undertaken as a planned interim internal evaluation. The evaluation was conducted by the OPE manager for evaluation working with the Task Force for Evaluation of OPE, set up at the MA OPE. The evaluation consisted in an overall assessment of the OPE implementation, as of 31 December 2011, and was undertaken without financial claims.

In the preparation of the background materials and evaluation questions, MA OPE considered a number of aspects. The implementation of this evaluation coincided with the implementation and completion of an external strategic evaluation, titled the "Progress evaluation in the implementation of OPE from the aspect of relevance and achievement of the Operational Programme objectives", within which the data was evaluated, as of 30 June 2011. Hence MA OPE decided to evaluate within its periodical evaluation the areas that had not been covered by the strategic evaluation, while striving to avoid duplication of topics within both these evaluations.

The following four areas have been the object of the periodical evaluation of the OPE implementation:

1. Evaluation of the current state of implementation of OPE;
2. Evaluation of the OPE management system;

3. Evaluation of the monitoring system and monitoring indicators;
4. Evaluation of the OPE information and publicity.

Timetable for the implementation of evaluation

The implementation of the OPE periodical evaluation commenced in November 2011 and was concluded in February 2012.

Methodology of evaluation

- Analysis of timetables of calls for submission of applications for non-repayable financial contribution (hereinafter referred to as “NFC”), the analysis of publication of calls for demand-driven projects and for national projects;
- Analysis of the planned, contracted and drawn funding allocated for the OPE;
- Assessment of the contribution of OPE to the Europe 2020 Strategy and to the National Reform Programme 2011-2014;
- Analysis and assessment of the management system of the MA OPE, the assessment of administrative capacities involved in the OPE implementation and the funding for Technical Assistance (hereinafter referred to as “TA”) for administrative support of the OPE implementation;
- Analysis and assessment of the system of monitoring and measurable indicators, based on the experience of MA OPE;
- Analysis in the area of information and publicity, evaluation of the effectiveness of information activities and activities in information and publicity, the appraisal of sufficiency of TA funding allocated to Priority theme 86 for the area of information and publicity.

Information sources

The following information sources have been used for the purposes of evaluation:

- The National Strategic Reference Framework 2007 – 2013;
- Operational Programme Education;
- Programme manual for the OPE, version valid from 17 May 2011;
- Internal Procedures Manual of the MA OPE and the MA OP R&D, version 13.0 (hereinafter referred to as “IMMA”);
- Communication Plan for the OPE and the OP R&D;

- The Financial Management System for the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund for the Programming Period 2007 – 2013, version 6.0, of December 2010 (hereinafter referred to as the “Financial Management System for the SF and the CF”);
- The Management System for the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund for the Programming Period 2007 – 2013, version 4.4 of 31 December 2010 (hereinafter referred to as “the Management System for the SF and the CF”);
- Annual implementation reports for the OPE;
- Semi-annual Monitoring Reports by the IBMA ASFEU and IBMA MH SR;
- Data of MA OPE on contracting and drawing of the OPE;
- Questionnaires designed for MA OPE for the evaluation of the management system;
- Interviews with MA OPE and IBMA staff.

Evaluation conclusions

1. Evaluation of the current state of the OPE implementation

The first part of the evaluation focused on the evaluation of the current state in the publication of the calls for national projects and the calls for demand-driven projects, the evaluation of the current state in the OPE implementation and the evaluation of the OPE contribution to the Europe 2020 strategy goals and to the National Reform Programme 2011 – 2014.

Evaluation questions:	
1.1	Is the current state of publication of calls for national projects and calls for demand-driven projects satisfactory from the aspect of the scheduled timetables for making calls?
1.2	Is the system of the preparation and updating of the timetable of calls for demand-driven projects set adequately and effectively? Would it be adequate and effective to draw up also a timetable for planning and preparation of calls for national projects?
1.3	Is the current state of the OPE implementation - contracting and drawing of funds satisfactory? What is the anticipation regarding full absorption of the planned funding for particular measures by the end of the programming period?
1.4	In view of contracted funds, which measures need to have additional calls for national projects/calls for demand-driven projects launched?
1.5	How does OPE contribute to the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and to the objectives of the National Reform Programme for 2011 to 2014?

The purpose of the first question was to establish the current state of calls for national projects and of calls for demand-driven projects, as of 31 December 2011. In the case of calls for demand-driven projects the intention was also to evaluate the state of calls relative to the scheduled timelines for calls and changes thereto. The objective was to see to what extent the changes in the planned timetables have an effect on the actual state of calls and how these changes affected the original intends regarding the calls, e.g. changes of the OPE Measures for which the calls were made, change of the amount of allocation originally designed for the relevant year of the call's publication, etc.

Linked to Question 1, the purpose of the second evaluation question was to establish to what extent the system of preparation and updating of the scheduled timelines for demand-driven projects is adequately and effectively set. The second part of the question was seeking answer to the question of MA OPE, whether a similar system of preparation of indicative timelines would also impact the effectiveness of calls for national projects.

The purpose of the third and fourth evaluation questions was to evaluate the current state of OPE implementation from the aspect of contracting and drawing of funds, including TA

measures. The evaluation should also reveal if there is a risk of non-compliance with n+3, or n+2 rules. The intention was, based on the current state of OPE implementation and contracting, to identify the measures for which calls for national projects/demand-driven projects are still required.

The fifth question of this area under review focused on the evaluation of the contribution that OPE and the activities implemented under it make to the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy and to the objectives of the National Reform Program 2011-2014. This question was included in the evaluation also in view of the significance of the topic at present and the emphasis laid on the achievement of Europe 2020 strategy targets by the European Commission.

Conclusions:

Frequent changes to the scheduled timelines of calls for demand-driven projects of IBMA ASFEU and the shifting of calls from one year to the other, or complete leaving out of calls from the timetables entail uneven calls under particular measures and slackening of the implementation of some of the OPE measures. Moreover, frequent updating of timetables for calls does not add to the binding nature of these timetables or the assurance of applicants and has negative effects on stability of processes of the OPE implementation. Hence, in the long run, this does not contribute to stability and efficiency of the OPE management itself.

Our recommendation is to consider **lower frequency of modifications of the calls' timetables** and their more precise planning, particularly with regard to the overall contracting of the OPE funds.

From the aspect of publication of calls for national projects (hereinafter referred to as "NP") in 2008-2011, we can note that despite good progress in the publication of calls in 2009 and 2010, the process significantly slowed down in 2010 and 2011, not only in terms of number of calls announced but also in terms of allocated funding for these calls. The allocation for calls for national projects for 2010 and 2011 makes up only **13 %** of that for 2008 and 2009. The reason could be linked to the political change in the country and the review of priorities of supported areas of education.

MESRS SR, as MA OPE, should intensify its communication and work with the organisations directly managed by the Ministry and concentrate more on the development of proposals for NP and calls for national projects. The **existence of a timetable for calls for national projects** would support greater continuity.

As for the idea of publishing the timetable for calls for NP, apart from it being an issue frequently raised at different forums, it seems that it would be practical and efficient both for MA OPE and NFC beneficiaries to have an indicative timetable for planning or preparation of calls for national projects throughout the whole programming period, corresponding to the approved objectives and priorities under OP. A prerequisite for having a timetable of calls for NP is the existence of a concept of planned measures in the area of education that would reflect the current needs and match the planned timetable of calls accordingly.

In contracting we may note insufficient drawing of funds for some measures (with the exception of technical assistance measures).

The only solution to increase contracting under the OPE is by launching **calls for national projects/demand-driven projects, particularly for measures 3.2 and 1.2.**

As for drawing the contracted funds (excluding TA measures,) the overall state can equally be said to be unsatisfactory with the average drawing per measure at 12.26 %, and the limit of 10% absorption being exceeded only by two measures – 1.1 and 4.1. Thus the main and basic recommendation is to **increase significantly the rate of drawing.**

OPE is, owing to its high quality set-up **capable of significantly supporting the implementation of Europe 2020 strategy goals** (hereinafter referred to as “EU 2020”) and the National Reform Program for 2011-2014 (hereinafter referred to as “NRP 2011-2014”). EU 2020 and the NRF 2011-2014 deriving from it, are at this point in time in their early stages of implementation, hence it is not possible to comprehensively evaluate the contribution of the OPE to the implementation EU 2020 goals and the NRF 2011-2014 (the focal period for the implementation of EU 2020 goals through the Structural Funds will be the next programming period 2014-2020). In the period under review, we can note that the OPE contributes to the set objectives of EU 2020 and NFR 2011-2014 through a range of published calls for national projects and for demand-driven projects, which - directly or indirectly – support the targets in the field of education, as laid out in EU 2020, and three out of four areas defined under Priority “Education, Science and Innovation” in the NRF 2011-2014.

Recommendations:

- Reduce frequency of changes to timetables of calls for demand-driven projects;
- Intensify communication and cooperation of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport SR with its directly managed organisations and increase the number of published calls for national projects;
- Draw up timetables of calls for national projects and post them on the website of the MA OPE;
- Increase the number of opened calls for national and demand-driven projects, particularly for measures with extremely low rate of contracting (particularly for measures 3.2 and 1.2);
- Step up drawing of contracted funds.

2. Evaluation of the OPE management system

The second part of evaluation focused on the assessment of the system of management, including cooperation of MA OPE and IBMA. Early on the MA OPE decided to evaluate the actual state in the management system and compare the changes that occurred in selected areas since the evaluation exercise "Assessment of the Effectiveness of the OPE Management System" (taking place at the turn of 2009/2010).

Evaluation questions:	
2.1	Are the tasks of relevant MA OPE sections clearly separated so as to avoid procedural or administrative duplication? Has there been created an ambience for cooperation and coordination between different levels of management?
2.2	Are there sufficient administrative capacities ensured to carry out particular tasks?
2.3	Are the communication and information flows between MA and IBMA efficient (updating of the status quo from the previous evaluation focused on the management system of the OPE)? What are the main constraints and problems in the cooperation of MA and IBMA?
2.4	Is the amount of TA funding designated for administrative support of the OPE implementation as well as the whole priority theme 85 (Preparation, monitoring, implementation and control of the implementation of assistance from the Structural Funds) adequate?

The first evaluation question sought to identify potential procedural and administrative duplication of work tasks of relevant sections. The purpose of the evaluation of the management system at MA OPE was also to assess cooperation and coordination between particular units of MA OPE, as well as cooperation and coordination within particular MA OPE units. To assess this area, an anonymous questionnaire was developed for MA OPE staff and used as an information source. Its purpose was to find out what are the staff's perceptions of the system's set-up in terms of management, cooperation and coordination.

The second evaluation question focused on the MA OPE administrative capacities in terms of their sufficiency and the ensuing capacity of the MA OPE to successfully implement the OPE.

The third evaluation question was expected to assess the area of cooperation between the MA and the IBMA. Personal interviews with MA OPE and IBMA representatives served as a reference and information source for answering this question. Within this question the MA OPE sought both to evaluate the current state of cooperation of MA and IBMA and the degree to which there was improvement/deterioration of the situation relative to the results of the pervious evaluation "Assessment of the Effectiveness of the OPE Management System".

The purpose of the last question designed to assess the area of the OPE management system was to determine if the amount of funding assigned for administrative support of the

implementation and for priority theme 85 is sufficient, and whether the funds of technical assistance allocated for this area will meet the needs of the MA OPE and of both IBMA.

Conclusions:

The IMMA precisely specifies the tasks of individual units involved in the OPE implementation. In general, we can note that the **distribution of tasks among relevant sections is set up suitably** and there is no duplication in administration or processes.

The question if an ambience has been created for cooperation and coordination between different levels of management needs to be answered from several aspects. From the aspect of the overall environment of the MA OPE, we can say that the **system of management, information sharing and communication and cooperation between relevant sections of MA OPE is adequately set**. On the other hand, we also need to note that the working environment does require some modification and improvement.

Based on the overall evaluation, the demands for improvement of the environment for cooperation and coordination at the level of MA OPE can be summarised as follows: increase information of the staff on affairs within the MA OPE, consult the staff, on a regular basis, on the progress in the OPE implementation, personnel issues concerning the staff, increase the amount of information shared by different units of MA OPE on the implementation of tasks of relevant units, provide the staff promptly and in full with the important information necessary for the discharge of work activities (e.g. updating of IMMA, updating of manuals for the applicant and the recipient), inform the staff, on a regular basis, on the issues and problems that are being addressed by particular sections.

The same applies to the level of the relevant sections of MA OPE: there is a need to increase information of the staff on what is going on within units, consult the staff, on a regular basis, on the tasks, problems, changes and provisions regarding the performance of their work activities, put in place regular briefings of the whole section, consider modifying the distribution of work assignments of individual members of the staff.

Motivation is a crucial prerequisite for an efficient work performance. On the whole, the staff most frequently lacks motivation owing to low remuneration, frequent changes of instructions made at short notice. They respond in the same way to the absence of feedback from superiors, with regard to their task, which they had carried out or are carrying out, and to a poor working atmosphere.

Our recommendation is to **put in place regular and adequately set financial remuneration, improve the working atmosphere, intensify communication on the part of superiors and ensure timely and focused staff training**.

Deficit in administrative capacities is seen as one of the major problems in view of the management and implementation of the OPE. In the light of the tasks to be carried out by MA OPE and IBMA, this status quo can be maintained only on short term; **from a long-term perspective the situation is untenable**. Overall, there is a request to increase administrative capacities by 23 employees for the authorities implementing OPE.

The currently contracted TA funds cover the funding of activities relating to the implementation of the OPE by the end of 2012, hence for the activities implemented in 2013 – 2015 contracting of additional TA funds will be necessary, or in case of inadequate allocation, new sources of funding for these activities will have to be sought. We **can also identify a risk of deficit in TA OPE funds for wages** of the staff involved in the implementation of the OPE.

Of all the disposable TA resources under the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective, as much as 87.87 % of funds for the measure had already been used, as of 31 December 2011. Of the measure's allocation designed for priority theme 85, around 97.03 % had been drawn for refunds of wage costs, as of 31 December 2011, with all the remaining expenses necessary for the provision for effective OPE implementation remaining non-refunded under this objective. From the start of 2011, the IBMA ASFEU has been reimbursing all expenditure related to the project implementation under RCE objective from the state budget resources.

In the case of Convergence objective under OPE, the use-up of the allocation through refunds of eligible expenditure incurred is anticipated in the course of 2014.

It follows from the above, that the wage costs of the staff of MESRS SR and IBMA involved in the implementation of the OPE, as a well as other costs relating to the OP implementation, will have to be financed from the state budget resources of the education chapter.

The most frequent request reported by all parties concerned emerging from the evaluation of cooperation between MA OPE and IBMA was the need to hold regular official meetings of MA OPE with both IBMA present and meetings of MA OPE with one IBMA. Communication between MA OPE and IBMA is in most areas of work intense, in previously less communicated areas an increase in intensity of communication can be seen and the work issues are addressed continually (either in writing or by personal meetings).

Holding of periodical meetings of MA OPE and IBMA should be considered as essential recommendation. After assessing requests, official meetings with MA OPE and both IBMA representations are recommended to hold every 2 months, on a regular basis. In addition to these "trilateral" meetings we equally recommend to put in place bilateral meetings of MA OPE and respective IBMA, on a regular basis. Both types of meetings will improve communication in all areas, help clarify and specify more precisely the issues and problems of all parties concerned and enable to speak with one voice in work-related matters.

Recommendations:

MA OPE

- Increase the information of the staff of the affairs within the MA OPE, inform the staff, on a regular basis, of the progress made in the implementation of the OPE, personnel matters regarding the staff;
- Increase the volume of information shared by relevant MA OPE units of the implementation of tasks on the part of units, provide employees with prompt and full important information necessary for the performance of their work activities;

- Put in place regular whole-section briefings, increase the information of the staff of the state of affairs within units;
- Consider modifying distribution of work assignments of particular employees;
- Put in place regular information meetings/briefings/training at the level of entire MA OPE;
- Put in place regular and adequately set financial remuneration of staff and ensure up-to-date and focused staff training;

RA OPE and IBMA

- Increase administrative capacities involved in the implementation of the OPE;
- Identify the financial coverage for effective provision for the OPE implementation in cooperation with the CCA and the Ministry of finance of the SR;
- Hold regular official meetings of MA OPE and IBMA – meetings with the participation of both IBMA, and bilateral meetings with one IBMA.

3. Evaluation of the monitoring system and monitoring indicators

The third part of the evaluation focused on the assessment of the monitoring system and its indicators. In this area, an external thematic evaluation was carried out from September 2010 to February 2011 - the "Evaluation of Accuracy of the Set-up of Measurable Indicators and the Functioning of the Monitoring System". In view of this, MA OPE concentrated particularly on the evaluation of the experience and the identification of the most serious problems from the aspect of previous MA OPE practice. Recommendations for the preparation of indicators for the next programming period 2014-2020 were also part of it.

Evaluation questions:	
3.1	Are there any problems of reporting the project-level values of indicators achieved, on the programme-level indicators?
3.2	Based on the hitherto experience of MA OPE, what are the most serious problems of monitoring and the system of measurable indicators? Which indicators are missing for effective monitoring?
3.3	What are the recommendations for the preparation of indicators for the next programming period 2014-2020?

The purpose of the first evaluation question for the assessment of the monitoring system and its indicators was to consider the experience of MA OPE in working with the project indicators and their subsequent programme-level evaluation, as well as the way project-level or programme level reporting on indicators is done.

The second question built on the first one and was aimed to identify, based on experience to date, the most important problems in the area of monitoring. At the same time it sought to see what monitoring indicators, if any, are missing for the assistance under the OPE.

In view of the new programming period pending and its preparation, the third question focused on the identification of recommendations for the preparation of indicators and for the set-up of the monitoring system for the new programming period 2014-2020. The purpose of recommendations is to help MA OPE prepare more effectively for the new programming period and avoid the weaknesses identified in the current programming period.

Conclusions:

Based on lessons learned by the MA OPE we may note that the **monitoring system and its indicators are adequately set**. Currently when the programming period 2007-2013 is in its latter part of implementation it is difficult to talk about any fundamental changes of the system. Most of the problems and lessons identified should therefore be used in the preparation of the next programming period 2014-2020.

As for recommendations for the selection or definition of programme specific indicators, based on the experience of the shortened programming period 2004-2006, and the programming period 2007-2013, we **see no added value in further use of context indicators**.

Context indicators are indicators monitored at country level (e.g. rate of employment, or the percentage of population involved in life-long education). Several factors contribute to the resulting value of the indicator, from which the contribution of a particular OP cannot be unequivocally selected and quantified. Other solution would be to change the methodology of computing the indicators. At present the values attained are received from the Eurostat statistics. In evaluating a context indicator it would be necessary to include in questionnaires used by Eurostat surveys questions about participation in ESF programmes/projects, which is unrealistic.

Monitoring of indicators expressed as a percentage has also proved **problematic** (e.g. percentage of employees enrolment in further education). MA OPE currently set about breaking this indicator into result and impact indicator (both expressed in number) and the percentage ratio was subsequently calculated based on the result/impact indicator ratio.

Another problem area is **reporting on indicators broken down by gender**, or age. In the form, the information on the participants' data is monitored in accordance with Annex XXIII of the implementation regulation, i.e. the number of men and women, their age structure, etc. at the level of priority axis. However we are unable to align this data with the indicators showing the number of pedagogic employees or the number of employees in research and development (how many of them were men and women, of what age structure). This would require the

beneficiaries to monitor for every indicator monitoring the number of people (pedagogic employees, research and development employees) also related sub-groups or ancillary indicators showing gender, or age. That would result in a large number of indicators within a project, which could lead to lack of transparency or to "overshadowing" of indicators that are more significant for the measurement of progress accomplished under a project.

As not the most optimal turned out to be the **monitoring of indicators only at the level of result and impact** (without the capacity to monitor "immediate" result of interventions taking the form of output indicators). This causes a problem, for example, when we report progress within the annual reports, in which we note a certain rate of contracting and drawing of project funds, but cannot link the financial data immediately with the indicator values. The nature of result indicators often permits to ascertain the values attained only at the end of the project, as that has been accommodated in the current monitoring form for the report, as well as the ITMS system serving to collect the data. Not all beneficiaries are willing and/or able to provide ongoing values attained of result indicators. This entails the risk of revealing inadequate attainment of indicator ex-post, after the winding up of the project.

In view of the fact that an indicator should also serve to express cost-efficiency and effectiveness, the practice showed as **problematic quantifying the average cost per certain output** expressed by an indicator (e.g. cost of creating a training course). Linking a unique indicator to every activity would be an ideal solution.

Indicators for the area of horizontal priorities (currently including sustainable development, information society, marginalized Roma communities and equal opportunities) are a separate and specific area, which also involves the issues of indicators. Here, reporting on direct and indirect impact or the contribution to horizontal priorities proves problematic. As a result, paradoxical situations occur, particularly in relation to the marginalized Roma communities, when on account of indicating indirect impact or contribution to the horizontal priority of marginalized Roma communities the Bratislava Region reports greatest number of projects supporting MRC. We recommend taking account of only direct contribution to horizontal priority for reasons of its definitiveness.

Last but not least, **only a limited number of project indicators have been found to contribute to the attainment of the programme indicators**. Hence, a general recommendation for the next period would be to monitor fewer indicators but those having direct links to the programme level. This would allow monitoring of OP results in a more targeted way.

The ITMS functionality is a technical obstacle in the system of monitoring, in view of the fact that ITMS does not fully meet its role in gathering the data. The present ITMS does not contain a functionality that would be capable of generating sets of measurable indicators and their statistics, selections, values attained. Equally the ITMS lacks a functionality that would simplify work in entering the data on project participants into the ITMS. At present this data has to be entered in the ITMS manually. From the aspect of administrative simplification it would be appropriate if this information could be uploaded in the ITMS directly by beneficiaries, as is the case for monitoring reports.

Recommendations:

For the preparation of the next programming period:

- Reconsider the selection and use of context indicators;
- Consider resuming the use of project-level output indicator;
- Reconsider the use and methodology of calculating the rate indicators expressed in %;
- Use fewer project indicators, use the project indicators with direct link to the level of programme;
- Within the IT monitoring system put in place a number of new functionalities allowing for effective monitoring of the measurable indicators used and their values attained, both at project and programme levels.

4. Evaluation of the OPE information and publicity

The last area selected for this evaluation was that of information and publicity. It is an area which had not been previously dealt with in any of the OPE evaluations and that was also the main reason for an assessment of the area in terms of its efficiency.

Evaluation questions:	
4.1	Do MA OPE /IBMA discharge their tasks in the area of information and publicity, as defined and scheduled in the programming documents? Are the tools selected for giving publicity sufficient and appropriate?
4.2	Are the financial resources of the MA OPE/IBMA allocated for information and publicity used effectively?
4.3	Is the amount of Technical Assistance funds allocated for the priority theme 86 (Evaluation and studies, information and publicity) adequate?

The object of the first evaluation question was to assess the current state in the area of information and publicity, as of 31 December 2011. The answer to this question should provide information on the implementation of tasks laid down for this area, as well as the assessment of effectiveness and adequacy of tools through which the objectives in the area of information and publicity are being pursued.

The second evaluation question was closely linked to the first one and was designed to evaluate the use of funds allocated for the tasks of information and publicity, namely whether the funds are used effectively with regards to results.

The third evaluation question, as in the case of evaluating the system of management of the OPE, was to establish whether the amount of funds allocated for the administrative support of the implementation and for the priority theme 86 is adequate and whether the funds of technical assistance for information and publicity will suffice to cover the needs of the MA OPE and the IBMA.

Conclusions:

The tasks of the MA OPE and IBMA are being attained along the lines defined in the programming documents. The activity of the MA OPE and IBMA continued to be aimed at achieving the objectives specified in the Communication plan (CoP) and the measures are implemented in accordance with the adopted communication strategy. The activity of the MA OPE and IBMA produced positive results and successfully implemented the information and publicity actions, which was reflected also in the results of the public opinion survey conducted. **All available tools and instruments** for the implementation of the campaign, as identified in the CoP were found to be **used efficiently**, which is confirmed by the satisfactory values of measurable indicators, i.e., evaluation criteria. Activities that the relevant entities set to implement were correct and were targeting the intended target groups.

The MA OPE should now aim **at giving increased separate visibility to the MA OPE and the NP**. Based on the assessment of activities implemented by the MA OPE, the recommendation is to intensify the implementation of measures in the area of information and publicity, specifically aimed at the presentation of the Structural Funds, results achieved in implementing the OPE and good practice of the NP, and the activity of the MA OPE.

Cost-efficiency of using funds was also confirmed by **positive results of the public opinion survey**, which was seen in the adequate public information regarding the OPE. Likewise, the funds that have been allocated for priority theme 86 (Evaluation and studies, information and publicity) can be considered adequate, based on the actually drawn funds and also in terms of the plans laid down in the Annual Operative Plan for Information and Publicity (AOP IP).

In the ensuing years the MA OPE and IBMA should focus on **increasing the number of information and communication activities** aimed at the campaign reminding the public of the support and fostering good visibility of the Structural Funds of the EU and disseminating examples of successfully implemented OPE projects. A closer cooperation in implementing particular MA OPE and IBMA measures would be appropriate to ensure a comprehensive perspective (demand driven + NP) of the OPE.

Recommendations:

- Increasing the number of information and communication activities of the MA OPE;
- Increasing the number of information and communication activities of the MA OPE and IBMA aimed at the campaign fostering the good image of the Structural Funds of the EU and disseminating examples of successfully implemented OPE projects;

- Closer cooperation in implementing measures by the MA OPE and IBMA to ensure comprehensive perspective of (demand-driven + NP) the OPE.

List of acronyms

ASFEU	Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the SR for the
	Structural Funds of the EU
C objective	Convergence objective
RCE objective	Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective
CCA	Central Coordination Authority
EC	European Commission
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
EU 2020	Europe 2020 strategy
IMRO	Internal Manual of Procedure of the MA OPE and MA OP R&D
ITMS	IT Monitoring system
CF	Cohesion Fund
CoP	Communication Plan for the OPE and OP R&D
MRC	Marginalized Roma communities
MESRS SR	Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic
MH SR	Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic
NFC	Non-repayable financial contribution
NP	National Project
NRP	National Reform Program
NSRF	National Strategic Reference Framework of the Slovak Republic for 2007-2013
PICS	Project Implementation and Control Section
PPIRS	Public Procurement and Irregularities Review Section
MTAS	Methodology and Technical Assistance Section

OPED	Operational Programme Education Department
OP	Operational Programme
OPE	Operational Programme Education
OP R&D	Operational Programme Research and Development
WGP	Working Group for Publicity
MA OPE	Managing Authority for the Operational Programme Education
AOP IP	Annual Operative Plan for Information and Publicity
IBMA	Intermediate body under the Managing Authority
SR	The Slovak Republic
SF	Structural Funds
TA	Technical assistance
PP	Public procurement
AFNFC	Application for a non-repayable financial contribution