



Final Evaluation Report – Executive Summary

**Evaluation of the Progress Made in the Implementation of
the Operational Programme Education, Focusing on the
Achievement and the Relevance of its Objectives**

Operational Programme Education

IBS SLOVAKIA, s.r.o.

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Basic Information on the OPE Implementation

The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (hereafter referred to as the 'MESRS SR') as the Managing Authority (hereafter referred to as the 'MA') for the Operational Programme 'Education' (hereafter referred to as the 'OPE') is responsible for managing and implementing the operational programme in compliance with EU and Slovak legislation. In order to carry out certain tasks related to programme implementation, two intermediate bodies under the Managing Authority (hereafter referred to as the 'IBMAs') have been created - the Agency for Structural Funds (hereafter referred to as the 'ASFEU') at the Slovak Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports and the Slovak Ministry of Health (hereafter referred to as the 'MH SR').

The scope of powers delegated to both IBMAs include: programming, admission, evaluation and selection of Non-repayable funding (hereafter referred to as the 'NRF') applications; conclusion of contracts with beneficiaries; information and publicity service, financial management, monitoring and evaluation.

The IBMAs are involved in the implementation of priority axes and measures listed in Table no. 1.

Table no. 1:

IBMA	Priority axis / measure
AMESRS	1 Reform of education system and vocational training 1.1 Transforming traditional schools into modern facilities 1.2 Universities and research& development centres as driving forces for the development of a knowledge society
	2 Further education as a tool for developing human capital 2.1 Promoting further education
	3 Promoting education for persons with special educational needs (SEN) 3.1 Bolstering educational levels of members of marginalised Roma communities (MRC) 3.2 Bolstering educational levels of persons with special educational needs (SEN)
	4 Modern education for a knowledge economy in the Bratislava region 4.1 Transforming traditional schools into modern facilities in the Bratislava region 4.2 Increasing the competitiveness of the Bratislava region by the development of higher and further education
MHSR	2 Further education as a tool for developing human capital 2.2 Promoting further education in healthcare

Assistance from the OPE is implemented using two main tools:

- national projects (hereafter referred to as the 'NP');
- demand-driven projects.

National projects are implemented on the state level as part of the education reform. These complex projects are a direct result of the relevant legislation and/or concept papers. They are

commissioned to directly managed organizations at the Ministry or to institutions mandated by the Slovak Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports. The implementation of national projects falls within the powers of the Managing Authority.

National projects that cover the entire area of the Slovak Republic (i.e. both objectives) are submitted **as mirrors**, i.e. separately for the Convergence Objective and the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective. In practice it means that one written call is published (e.g. for Measures 1.1 and 4.1) but two separate NRF applications are submitted and two separate NRF contracts are concluded. They are then implemented in such a way as to avoid overlap of financial resources allocated to both objectives.

Demand-driven projects address the needs of target groups in specific regions. They are implemented through calls for applications for non-repayable funding published for a specific measure, for individual objectives and activities. An application for NRF can be submitted by any eligible applicant. The implementation of demand-driven projects falls within the powers of both IBMAs.

Subject Matter

The aim of the evaluation report is to assess the relevance of the set-up of the OPE objectives as they are today and as they are expected in 2013; to evaluate the fulfilment of the OPE objectives and priority axes; and to evaluate the physical and financial implementation of the OPE.

While drafting the final evaluation report, the evaluators maintained the structure of evaluation questions.

Each answer to the question provides an analysis of a given subject-matter and an answer proper to the evaluation question.

The statistical data and the data collected are presented as part of the text of the report or in tables and charts.

The report complies with the contract for work and is divided into three major topics:

- 1) Assessment of the relevance of the set-up of the OPE objectives given the status quo and the situation by 2013;
- 2) Evaluation of physical and financial implementation of the OPE - Convergence Objective and Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective;
- 3) Evaluation of financial progress made in the implementation of OPE - Convergence Objective and Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective.

Summary of Findings

Relevance of the set-up of the OPE objectives given the status quo and the situation by 2013

The final version of the Operational Programme 'Education' was adopted by the European Commission on November 7, 2007. The intervention logic of the programme was designed in 2006-2007 during the programme preparation, and is based on the analysis of target groups' needs and challenges in education. The challenges that the OPE strives to tackle are mainly of long-term nature and have been, for the most part, known for years (e.g. low social status of teachers, poor attendance of pupils from MRC, etc.). A smaller number of needs and challenges has been identified and defined as part of the education reform that has been implemented in the last few years (e.g. insufficient cognitive abilities of pupils, insufficient teacher trainings in IT and foreign languages, etc.) Given their long-term and systemic nature, it is not likely these could be solved within eight years (2008-2015) during the programme implementation.

Since the OPE was approved four years ago, the education has been undergoing changes due to the legislation adopted in 2008 and 2009 that has been focusing on the school reform. The laws passed recently are mainly related to **regional education** (Act no. 245/2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education, 'the School Act', Act No. 184/2009 Coll. on Vocational Education and Training, and Act no. 317/2009 Coll. on pedagogical staff and specialists) and **further education** (Act no. 568/2009 Coll. on lifelong learning). At the EU level no legislation has been adopted since that would require changes or adjustments of the OPE objectives. Although four strategic laws were adopted later, no discrepancy with the set-up of the OPE has occurred.

Currently, the school reform is being implemented as a result of the new legislation. Therefore, no further major changes are expected in the education system in Slovakia by 2013. On the one hand, some time is still needed to do a reality check and a review of the on-going education reform; on the other hand, a new government that will be formed after the pre-elections in 2012 will not be able to prepare and adopt significant changes to the legislation by 2013. The evaluators believe that the objectives of the OPE will remain up-to-date and relevant to the situation in education as it is now and as it will be by the end of the 2007 - 2013 programming period. Thus, no changes or amendments are necessary to the OPE objectives.

In terms of programme settings, it can be concluded that the OPE intervention logic, including the structure of priority axes and measures, is transparent and comprehensible. It covers the

needs and challenges of target groups identified in the OP strategy in a logical and well-structured way, and combines these needs and challenges into relevant thematic units. No analysis carried out as part of an answer to evaluation questions indicated the need to update the structure of the priority axes, their measures and objectives. Similarly, all interviewed persons (representatives of Regional Education Department, Higher Education Department and Further Education Department at the MESRS SR, as well as final beneficiaries) agreed that the OPE is programmed well, and its objectives and priorities are structured in a comprehensive and future-proof manner.

The key task for the Managing Authority and the two IBMAs face is to achieve the best possible fulfilment of the objectives. From the perspective of the calls published, the achievement of the objectives can be evaluated as follows:

Measure 1.1: The objectives are being fulfilled, with the exception of the specific objective titled, 'to improve the administration and management of schools and to motivate them to be more open to the needs of local communities', the implementation of which is, however, still not sufficient enough.

Measure 1.2: The objectives are still only partially being fulfilled.

Measure 2.1: The fulfilment of objectives in further education is not sufficient, yet. National projects are focused on further education of selected target groups (teachers and workers with the youth). The number of demand-driven projects is very limited.

Measure 2.2: The objectives are, for the moment, being fulfilled.

Measure 3.1: There are two specific objectives defined as part of this measure. The specific objective titled, 'to promote social inclusion of MRC members by facilitating their access to formal education and by helping them acquire skills for the labour market' is partly being fulfilled through demand-driven projects approved under the call launched in 2009. The specific objective titled, 'to further educate MRC members, as well as persons working on their integration into society' is not yet being fulfilled. Nevertheless, a written call for a national project titled 'Training teachers for the inclusion of marginalized Roma communities', was announced on May 23, 2011 for this specific objective. Moreover, a call with the code OPV-2011/3.1/02-SORO was launched on April 15, 2011 and a call with the code OPV-2011/3.1/03-SORO was launched on May 20, 2011 that cover both specific objectives. Although the results of the reviewing process are not yet known, it is likely that the fulfilment of both specific objectives of Measure 3.1 will soon be reinforced by new demand-driven projects.

Measure 3.2: For the moment, the objectives are only partially being fulfilled through demand-driven projects that were approved under the call launched in 2009.

Measure 4.1: The objectives are being fulfilled well.

Measure 4.2: The objectives are being fulfilled in a limited manner.

Physical progress made in the OPE implementation

Physical progress in the OPE implementation is monitored by six context indicators, 14 indicators of Priority Axis 1, eight indicators of Priority Axis 2, seven indicators of Priority Axis 3 and eleven indicators of Priority Axis 4. Only limited progress has been made for these indicators as of June 30, 2011. It should be pointed out, nevertheless, that the values of output and result indicators at priority axes are calculated from the values of result and impact indicators at project level, and therefore most of the data on the indicators will be available only when projects are completed.

From the total number of output and result indicators only those that track the number of new educational programmes and trainings for teachers have exceeded their planned values at the end of the monitoring period. The indicators the values of which are not expected to be reached unless new calls are launched, are mainly the ones that track the following: partnerships, research and innovation networks; research and development employees; healthcare professionals pursuing further education; networks created as part of Learning Regions; and Priority Axis 3 indicators that cover persons with special educational needs. The following indicators are not expected to reach their target values (targets are listed in parentheses):

- share of population participating in lifelong learning in 100 inhabitants, aged 25 – 64 (12.5% of population participating in lifelong learning that exceeded 4 hours at the time of the survey, aged 25-64) (EU benchmark)
- graduates of tertiary university level - (12 PhD graduates) in 1000 inhabitants aged 20-29)
- share of employment in total (63.4% of population employed, aged 15-64)
- share of research and development (R&D) employees involved in international research projects (20% of R&D employees)
- number of partnerships and research and innovation networks funded by the OPE (to support 45 partnerships in Slovakia)
- number of teachers who pursued further education (57,000 teachers in Slovakia)

The difficulty in achieving these target results is mainly due to the overly ambitious target values set in contrast to the current social situation. The first three of these indicators are of context nature, and so their achievement is affected by the OPE implementation only in an indirect way.

All except for three of the OPE indicators are evaluated as relevant (i.e. the actual need in Slovakia corresponds to the target value set). One indicator, namely, 'the number of graduates of tertiary university level' with the expected value of 12 PhD graduates per 1000 inhabitants, aged 20-29, has been evaluated as irrelevant. This value highly exceeds the European average. The relevance of two indicators, namely 'number of new networks created as part of Learning Regions' and 'number of trainers who pursued further education', was not possible to be evaluated, since Slovakia has had very limited experience in the area of further education. The

data and information necessary for future evaluation will, however, be provided from the current implementation of the projects supported through the OPE.

One significant novelty that the current school reform has introduced is to allow schools to teach students according to their own educational programmes (curricula). These changes are reflected in the indicator titled, 'new educational programmes' as part of NP and demand-driven projects. It is evident that OPE activities help carry out the reforms by demand-driven projects, and so the value of this indicator has been exceeded several times as of June 30, 2011. Calls that are being published and announced reflect the need for a school reform, while the target values of the indicators monitoring the number of new educational programmes have, with the exception of two NP, been already fulfilled.

An important part of successful completion of the OPE implementation is also sufficient absorption capacity of prospective applicants for NRF. Comparison of the number of prospective applicants and an expected number of projects (calculated from the share of planned investment and an average sum per project) shows that absorption is difficult in Measure 1.2 and 3.1 where more projects need to be implemented than there are applicants available.

In the evaluation of efficiency the evaluator used a sample of 10 selected demand-driven projects for each measure (the exception being Measure 4.2 where only two projects are being implemented) and two mirror national projects (one per non-Bratislava regions and one per Bratislava region). The following facts have been detected in the evaluation of management efficiency:

- It is more cost-effective to manage and monitor projects using internal employees; their average hourly pay is approx. 2 EUR less than that of external employees;
- the costs of one external employee are twice as high compared to the cost of one internal employee;
- the average number of employees shows that the beneficiaries have behaved efficiently, since most activities associated with project management and monitoring were done by internal employees.

Comparison of the ratio between the average expenditure for equipment, publicity, management, and direct activities on the one hand, and total eligible expenditure on the other, has provided the following data:

- 72% of all eligible expenditure is used for direct project activities;
- 2% of all eligible expenditure is used for advertising and publicity;
- 13% of all eligible expenditure is used for equipment;
- 13% of all eligible expenditure is used for project management;

Overall, it can be concluded that the principle of efficiency has been respected, while the individual costs are reasonable compared to the overall eligible expenditure.

When comparing the efficiency between the Convergence Objective and the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective for Measures 1.1 and 4.1, the following can be concluded:

- The Bratislava region reports a higher number of employees and their average hourly pay is higher than in non-Bratislava regions. For external employees, the trend is the opposite.
- Non-Bratislava regions report a much higher workload of internal employees in project management. The number of hours worked is 2308.64 for Measure 1.1 and 1365.53 for Measure 4.1. Internal employees work approx. 1000 hours more in project management and monitoring in Measure 1.1 than in projects in Measure 4.1. Therefore, average costs per one internal employee in Measure 1.1 is almost twice as much. Average costs per one external employee are roughly the same (the difference is only 9%).
- The ratio of publicity and equipment costs to all eligible expenditure is roughly the same for both measures. In Measure 4.1, about 8% of costs are spent on project activities, while in Measure 1.1 about the same amount is spent on project management.

When comparing the efficiency between the Convergence Objective and the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective for Measures 1.2, 2.1 and 4.2, the following can be concluded:

- The Bratislava region reports a lower number of employees and their average hourly pay being lower than in non-Bratislava regions.
- Workload of internal managers is higher in projects in Measure 4.2. The number of hours worked in Measure 1.2 and 2.1 is 5778.03, while for Measure 4.2 it represents 7344.73 hours. Internal employees work approx. 1500 hours more in project management and monitoring in Measure 4.2 than in projects in Measure 1.2 and 2.1.
- Distribution of total eligible expenditure for each type of cost is almost identical between the projects implemented in the Bratislava region and outside the Bratislava region.

The efficiency of the individual projects under the Convergence Objective and the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective is not the same. However, no violations of the principle of efficiency have been found.

Financial progress made in the OPE implementation

The total amount of funds allocated during the 2007-2013 programming period for the implementation of interventions in education in the OPE is 726,825,389 EUR, of which 617,801,578 EUR come from the EU funds and 109,023,811 EUR from the Slovak state budget. The allocated resources cover both, the Convergence Objective and the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective.

According to the internal records of the MESRS SR, contracts were concluded for the total sum of 267,886,407.62 EUR coming from the EU funds as of June 30, 2011. It represents 43,36% of the total EU budget allocated to the 2007-2013 programming period. The actual amount of the EU funds spent as of June 30, 2011 reached 63,664,630.41 EUR, which represents 10.31% of the funds allocated.

Priority axes 2 and 3 report the lowest share of actual spending. As of June 30, 2011, Priority Axis 2 reached 2.59%, while Priority Axis 3 reported 3.16% of available funds spent. This spending is much lower as opposed to Priority Axes 1 and 4 (which have both reached more than 13%). This is due to the fact that the actual spending of funds for these priority axes began only in 2010.

Although the spending of financial resources has not yet reached 50%, it can be considered relevant, and reallocation of funds among the individual priority axes is not necessary. The funds are likely to achieve a positive level of spending. The evaluation took into the consideration the fact that education, and lifelong learning in particular, is a very specific area. Most beneficiaries come from the public sector and financing of their projects is carried out through advance payments. For this reason, spending is higher at lower levels and its increase will only be evident after the accounting of advance payments. Another positive trend is the increase in the number of applications for NRF in the last period: their number increased from 1,455 to 2,138 during the six months between Jan 1, 2011 and June 30, 2011, creating realistic expectations for future spending in 2012 and beyond.

The current status in spending reflects the developments so far and the frequency of the calls launched. As of June 30, 2011, there have been 41 calls announced and published as part of the Operational Programme 'Education' (the data does not include Technical Assistance Measures 4.3, 5.1 and 5.2). The overall allocation to 41 calls launched represents 527,734,728.14 EUR (EU funds and Slovak State budget). It represents 75.63% of the total allocation of 697,752,372 EUR (EU funds and Slovak State budget; the sum does not include the allocation to Technical Assistance Measures 4.3, 5.1 and 5.2).

Based on this data, we recommend that more calls will be launched to speed up spending (focusing on contracts for larger projects that would require more funds). This applies to all priority axes. It is essential that new calls are announced and published more rapidly.

Suggested Measures

Responses to the individual evaluation questions suggest that the MA and IBMA need to launch more calls, with an emphasis on contracts for larger projects that will require more funds and will help fulfil the OPE indicators. We suggest mainly the following measures:

- Measure 1.1: to prepare a national project focusing on management trainings for representatives of school management, and a call for demand-driven projects on cooperation among schools and local communities, which will help reach the specific objective titled, 'to improve the administration and management of schools and to motivate them to be more open to the needs of local communities'.
- Measure 1.2: to launch new calls focusing mainly on the development of human capital in research and development, with a particular emphasis on international mobility.
- Measure 2.1: as soon as possible to prepare national and demand-driven projects that would focus on basic system elements (National System of Qualifications, National Qualifications Framework, career counselling centres, analysis of training needs and forecasting skills required for the labour market, etc.).
- Measure 2.2: to pay closer attention to budgets in applications for NRF, so that efficiency of expenditures can be verified from their justifications.
- Measure 3.1: to launch further calls for demand-driven projects covering both the specific objectives under Measure 3.1.
- Measure 3.2: to prepare a national project focused on trainings for teachers and other staff working with persons with special educational needs, and to launch another call for demand-driven projects covering both specific objectives.
- Measure 4.2: to use the remaining allocation for mirror national projects in further education.

Personal interviews with representatives of final beneficiaries also provided a number of ideas that could facilitate the implementation of projects:

- To increase the threshold for project management and implementation costs due to the their high administrative burden.
- To offer trainings in the ITMS to beneficiaries.
- To create an internet discussion forum where beneficiaries could help each other in solving various issues associated with project implementation. Such a forum should be created at the initiative of beneficiaries, and intended especially for them.

Evaluation Methodology

The Evaluation Methodology for the ‘**Assessment of the relevance of the set-up of the OPE objectives given the status quo and the situation by 2013**’:

- The analysis of the OPE objectives and their implementation from the point of the existing strategic documents of the Slovak Ministry of Education;
- The analysis of the OPE objectives and their implementation from the point of recently adopted legislation;
- The analysis of the OPE objectives and their implementation from the point of fulfilment of strategies defined in the operational programme;
- Personal interviews with representatives of the Slovak Ministry of Education responsible for the individual areas of education. (Departments of Regional Education, Higher Education, Further Education and Youth);
- Personal on-site visits of selected projects;
- Determining the status of fulfilling the objectives for the individual years;
- Determining the expected values of the indicators of implemented projects.
- Comparison of the sum of values currently achieved for the OPE indicators plus the values planned for the implemented projects, and the total sum of planned values;
- Determining the current values of context indicators according to official statistical data;
- Analysis of relevancy and attainability of values of the OPE indicators (context indicators and indicators of Priority Axes 1 to 4);
- Analysis of efficiency in a selected sample of projects: 10 demand-driven projects for each measure (the only exception being the Measure 4.2 where only two projects are being implemented) and 4 national projects.

Evaluation Methodology for ‘**Evaluation of physical and financial implementation of the OPE - Convergence Objective and Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective**’:

- Determining the values expected for the OPE indicators for the individual years;
- Determining the current status of fulfilling the objectives for the individual years;
- Determining the values expected for the indicators of implemented projects
- Comparing the sum of values currently achieved for the OPE indicators plus the values planned for the implemented projects, with the total sum of planned values;
- Selection of indicators that represent the school reform in NP, and evaluating their implementation;
- Identifying all and successful applicants for NRF according to the measures;
- Identifying prospective applicants for NRF - elementary schools, high schools, universities and other entities eligible for NRF

Evaluation Methodology for the **‘Evaluation of financial progress made in the implementation of OPE - Convergence Objective and Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective’**:

- Analysis of planned allocations to the OPE for the individual objectives for the individual years;
- Analysis of the number of approved projects and their financial implementation for the individual years;
- Analysis of the amount of allocations to contracts concluded in mid-term of spending (period until 2015);
- Comparison of financial implementation achieved and the planned values of financial indicators.