



Evaluation process of the cohesion policy in Poland

**Summary of previous experience.
Plans and challenges for the future.**

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1. Introduction

Poland has been one of the main beneficiaries of the EU cohesion policy since 1 May 2004. At the final stage of the implementation of programmes co-financed by structural funds for the period 2004-2006, our country has already initiated the programmes for 2007-2013. Previous researches confirm social and economic benefits that Poland receives from cohesion policy and imply their systematic growth as the financial support is increased. Still, there are some questions to be considered: How to increase the scale of benefits? How to manage the expenditure of a large fund in order to assure durable effects that better meet needs of the country and individual voivodships?

Evaluation is a response tool for this kind of questions that, as a result, improves the quality of the cohesion policy implementation. Evaluation is defined as a judgement (assessment) of public intervention value with reference to criteria and explicit standards (e.g. its relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, viability and sustainability). The judgement usually concerns the needs which have to be met by the intervention, and the effects produced by it. The evaluation is based on information which is specially collected and interpreted according to appropriate methodology.

In Poland, evaluation as a tool was first used to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of public policies implementation only after the EU accession process started. The beginnings of evaluation concern the pre-accession funds, but the tool will develop more significantly with actions co-financed by the structural funds.

This report is to summarize the evaluation process of the cohesion policy in Poland and to determine the further directions of the development of an evaluation research. The first chapter will provide main stages of the evaluation process from May 2004, when the National Evaluation Unit was created, to the launch of complex cohesion policy evaluation system, covering financial perspectives for 2004-2006 as well as for 2007-2013.

The second chapter will in its first part provide the overall analysis of the evaluation undertakings executed between 2004 and 2007, when 135 researches were conducted. Quantitative analysis of the whole evaluation process was carried out on the basis of the research database. The material discussed in this chapter shall be a starting point for further studies in identified thematic fields. These are: overall socio-economic development of Poland, development and modernization of infrastructure, competitiveness and innovativeness of enterprises, human resources, regional and spatial development, capacity building in public administration and the implementation of the "good governance" principles. The abovementioned thematic fields refer to the main aim and specific objectives of National Development Plan for 2004-2006 and National Strategic Reference Framework for 2007-2013. Within the analysis the following factors were taken into account: thematic fields of research, evaluation capacity, the most interesting results and implications for evaluation process.

The two final chapters refer to the future. The third chapter concerns the preparatory process of strategic and periodical evaluation plans for 2007-2013. In this part, a synthetic summary based on analysis of all documents on strategic evaluation directions within particular operational programmes and NSRF as well as substantial evaluation actions for the on-going year will be presented. In the fourth chapter, the main challenges and directions of the evaluation process development in the following years are indicated.

The report provides the first attempt to summarize and assess the cohesion policy evaluation process in Poland. In the report some critical comments based on several years of experiences of National Evaluation Unit workers can be found. The presented and analyzed material may be an interesting reading for administration officials as well as others concerned with the development of evaluation in Poland. More information on the cohesion policy evaluation process can be found at www.ewaluacja.gov.pl.

2. Synthesis

The most important stages of the cohesion policy evaluation process in Poland

The cohesion policy evaluation process may be divided into three major stages. A preparatory stage carried out in 2004-2005, during which:

- the basic guidelines for the evaluation system were specified (included, among others, in *Evaluation Plan of the National Development Plan for 2004-2006* and in *Evaluation of the National Development Plan and Operational Programmes in Poland - Guide*),
- basics of evaluation capacity were started to be developed, and
- first evaluation researches were started, among which there was the ex-ante evaluation of the National Development Plan for 2007-2013.

The second stage was ex-ante evaluation of operational programmes for 2007-2013 conducted in 2006. The experience gathered during the ex-ante evaluation, which was a big organizational and substantive challenge for the Polish administration, allowed us to reorganize the Polish evaluation system and redefine its major principles. In 2007 an on-going evaluation system was started which integrated the evaluation processes of National Development Plan for 2007-2013 and National Strategic Reference Framework for 2007-2013. The basis for the decentralized evaluation system is an organizational and institutional structure that guarantees compliance with the partnership principle in the broadest possible scope.

The analysis of the researches conducted in 2004-2007

In the period 2004-2007 **135 evaluation researches** were conducted (122 of them covered the thematic fields characterized below and 12 were strategic environmental impact assessments conducted within the ex-ante evaluation process), among which almost a half (65) were ex-ante evaluations. The researches were in most cases conducted within individual operational programmes (about 80% of all the researches) and within NDP and NSRF (about 20% of the researches).

The cohesion policy evaluation process in 2004-2007 covered strategic thematic fields that resulted directly from the NSRF objectives:

In the field of ***NDP and NSRF impact on socio-economic development*** 9 evaluations were conducted. In most cases they covered macroeconomic impact and focused on the cohesion policy impact on shaping the major indicators at the levels of NDP and NSRF and other macroeconomic indicators. The goal of studies conducted in this field was to assess the impact of cohesion policy treated as a whole. These evaluations indicate that cohesion policy brings visible results in economic and social spheres. It is very likely that the evaluation process in this particular field will play a big role in the debate on the future shape of the cohesion policy.

In the period 2004-2007 6 evaluations were conducted in the field of ***The development and modernization of infrastructure***. Within the whole process of evaluation this field has been researched to a relatively small extent. Its results, above all, from the specificity of infrastructural investments which generate mainly long-term

effects, and from the lack of sufficient assessment tools. The character of the researches within this field was mainly diagnostic (covering the structure and cohesion of the investments made) and prognostic (attempting to assess the estimated impact of the investments). The main challenges within this field are the necessity to direct the process at evaluating the system of infrastructural investments implementation and working-out the appropriate tools for assessing the effects of interventions at the level of operational programmes and priority axes, as well as at the level of individual projects.

In the field of **Competitiveness and innovation of economy** 11 evaluations were conducted. They concerned the effects of interventions contributing to improvement of competitiveness of economy in both direct (direct support for enterprises) and indirect way (creating favourable conditions for the development of innovation and competitiveness). The analysis of research from this field shows it is necessary to direct the process at horizontal and comprehensive evaluation, and to analyse the correlation between support for the institution of business environment and growth of competitiveness and innovation of enterprises. The necessity for a deep-seated assessment of the effectiveness of interventions in this field is more and more evident, especially in the context of the possibility of the deadweight effect.

The thematic field **Human resources development** has been researched more thoroughly than any other during the whole process of the cohesion policy evaluation in Poland. In the field 25 evaluations were conducted. They concerned the assessment of the effects of the interventions for the final beneficiaries, assessment of the individual actions within operational programmes and of the institutions conducting the projects, as well as identification of the barriers in their implementation. Moreover, horizontal evaluations, including an inquiry into the impact of interventions on the employment rate, were conducted. The high quality of evaluation process in this field results, above all, from the high evaluation capacity of the institutions involved (in particular within the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development), as well as the specificity of the field (effects appear after a short period of time). The results indicate a significant impact of the structural funds on the human resources development, including growth in employment.

In the field of **Regional and territorial development** 42 evaluations were conducted, majority of which (35) were *ex-ante* evaluations (including an *ex-ante* evaluation of 16 Regional Operational Programmes). The most important in this field were horizontal evaluations, in particular an evaluation of the impact of structural funds on socio-economic development of subregions. The analysis of this field indicates the necessity of intensifying work on on-going evaluations matching the specificity of the field and directing the research at issues connected with territorial cohesion and spatial development.

In the field of **Public Administration Capacity Building and „good governance” principle’s application** 29 evaluations were conducted. Many of them were aimed at the identification of system and beneficiary barriers. The analysis of the field proved that efforts to research the system issues connected with implementing operational programmes 2007-2013 should be intensified. The same applies to researches on the effects of the cohesion policy’s application in Poland for the whole administration (including units not directly involved in implementing cohesion policy). It presents a great challenge and it is necessary to develop the methodology for investigating the effects of the „good governance” principle’s application. The results of the evaluation

of this field allowed identifying and removing a number of barriers and problems in implementing structural funds.

Apart from evaluation researches, activities aimed at **evaluation capacity** building are an important aspect of the evaluation process. Thanks to capacity analysis, strengths and weaknesses of the system may be identified within the framework of individual thematic fields. Institutions engaged in the evaluation process in the field of human resources development, especially Managing Authority of the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development and evaluation unit of the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development, have the largest evaluation capacity in the whole system. Large capacity in the field stems from the competence of institutions' personnel as well as their managements' awareness of the significance of the evaluation. Also, institutions that belong to the fields of *NDP and NSRF impact on socio-economic development* and *Competitiveness and innovation of economy* have a large capacity. Evaluation capacity building on the regional level as well as personnel reinforcement in the institutions involved in evaluation of the largest operational programme Infrastructure and Environment are important challenges for the whole evaluation system in Poland.

Analysis of the evaluation process in 2004-2007 described above allowed us to make the following general conclusions:

- in 2004-2007 the number of subjects that commissioned evaluation research was limited (over a half of the evaluations have been conducted by two evaluation units: National Evaluation Unit and Managing Authority of the Human Resources Development);
- evaluation service supply is growing noticeably and the opinion on the quality of the cooperation with evaluation practitioners is improving significantly;
- fast-growing quantity and range of conducted evaluations of the cohesion policy effects are observed;
- systematic improvement of the quality of the conducted research occurs;
- currently being a difficulty for conducting evaluations, physical monitoring system requires improvement.

Evaluation in 2008-2015 (strategic and periodical plans)

Planning principle is one of the main principles in evaluation process in 2007-2015. The principle is applied at two main levels of implementation (at the NDP and NSRF level, and at operational programmes level) both in strategic perspective for the whole period of programming and operational perspective for the every year of the operational programmes' implementation. For the period 2007-2015 in the whole system was budgeted at **PLN 190 million** (including about PLN 73 million at the regional level and about PLN 117 million at the central level). For 2008 **over 100 evaluations** at all implementation levels were planned. Most of all evaluations will consider issues of management and implementation of funds, project selection system and institutional capacity in general. Relatively many evaluations will consider

information and promotional actions. National Evaluation Unit is planning over ten evaluations at the level of National Development Plan and National Strategic Reference Framework.

Challenges for the evaluation process in Poland to face

Among the biggest challenges awaiting the Polish administration as far as the evaluation process is concerned are the following:

- providing arguments in the discussion on the future form of cohesion policy;
- using the evaluation as a tool in the process of the preparation and implementation of other – not related to the cohesion policy – national policies;
- stronger bound between the evaluation and the process of the operational programmes managing;
- effective use of the evaluation in allocation of the performance reserve in 2011;
- fast development of the capacity to commission and receive the evaluation research on the regional level;
- further development of the evaluation methodology;
- use of metaevaluation to evaluate implementing cohesion policy thoroughly;
- conducting ex post evaluation for 2004-2006;
- evaluation of the territorial cohesion issues;
- activation of academic and scientific circles in the growing market of evaluation services;
- conducting evaluations at lower implementation levels (including the project level);
- wider use of evaluation results.