

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EU FUNDS INVESTMENT COMMUNICATION PLAN FOR 2016: SUMMARY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS ANALYSIS

The aim and object of analysis

The main aim of evaluation was to conduct the effectiveness analysis of 2014–2020 EU investment funds communication. The main object of analysis is communication campaigns for 2016 approved in the 2015–2018 EU Funds Investment Communication Plan. In 2016 it was planned to implement 53 communication campaigns, out of which 36 were aimed at changing the attitudes and behaviours of target groups, while 17 at traditional information and publicity activities. For implementation of the communication activities 3.8 million EUR were assigned, i. e. about one-fifth of 2014–2020 EU Investment for Communication Strategy's total budget. 85% of the annual communication budget was aimed at communication of the “change”, while 15% – for implementation of traditional awareness raising activities. In total there are eleven Directions of Communication. In terms of budgetary allocation between them, 29% of the annual budget was assigned to the activities, which were implemented by an umbrella type Direction of Communication called “Lithuania, which we create with the EU investment”.

The extent and relevance of communication campaigns

In the Communication Plan of 2016 approved campaigns generally complied with 2014–2020 EU Funds Investment Communication Strategy, its aims and target groups. Institutions' campaigns (especially of intermediate and implementing institutions) complemented each other and that strengthened the message of communication. However, there were cases that some of institutions' communications aims, target groups and the actual targets overlapped. Most of institutions differentiated between communication campaigns' target groups, according to their sociological and geographical characteristics, and tried to use an adequate communication channel to reach them. The most popular communication channels were mass media, communication in social networks, interactive initiatives, direct meetings, trainings and seminars. Some more innovative measures were planned (for example, partisan marketing, TV project), but yet not implemented in 2016. Some of communication campaigns were organised during the call for proposals; other campaigns were started in specific time, when it is possible to have the biggest effect on target groups. However, some of the measures were less adequate to reach a specific group.

In 2016 the most active communication activities were carried out for potential beneficiaries and project implementers under umbrella type Direction of Communication called “Lithuania, which we create with the EU investment” as well as communication campaigns according to the following Directions: “Advanced Lithuania”, “Growing Lithuania”, “Sustainable Lithuania” and “Effective Lithuania”. In terms of implementation of the annual plan, the evaluation found that communication campaigns were late in all Directions, but in some of them the implementation haven't started at all (namely, “Healthy Lithuania”, “Enterprise Lithuania”, “Continuous Lithuania” and “Creative Lithuania”). Out of 53 communication campaigns, which were planned to be implemented in 2016, 24 campaigns were late or haven't started at all, i. e. more than 45% of all planned communication

activities. The most common reasons for late implementation were lack of administrative capacity and slow public procurement procedures. Various issues arose in all public procurement procedures' phases. During the interviews representatives of institutions revealed that public procurements were delayed due to long process of finding common communication aims and targets within the institutions themselves. Moreover, they indicated that it was challenging to prepare public procurement documents (especially rigorous evaluation criteria). There were cases when public procurements were cancelled and they needed to be held all over again, and there were even cases when already signed contracts with service providers were terminated, which resulted in late start of communication activities. Lack of administrative capacity to effectively carry out public procurements and to ensure proper quality of received services is a well-known problem of the whole EU Structural Funds management process, however there are ways to at least partially solve it: trainings, experience sharing, methodological and technical support (a creation of public procurements guidelines for standard services (for example, guidelines on communication campaigns and projects management, technical assistance services).

Measuring the effectiveness of communication activities

To evaluate the effectiveness of communication campaigns 203 indicators were set, out of which 165 were unique. For the most part, indicators of communication campaigns matched the aims of communication, activities and target groups; however some indicators' target values could be improved. It is especially important for the three main indicators, which are not only used as a couple communication campaigns' effectiveness indicators, but also as special result-level indicators for the whole Operational Programme for EU Structural Funds Investments for 2014-2020. The surveys, conducted on September 2016, show that the current situation is well above 2023 targets. Result-level targets set in the 2014–2020 OP were already achieved in 2015. In the current programming perspective's focus of the communication strategy was changed from traditional awareness raising objective to the aim to change attitudes and behaviours, therefore, it would be appropriate to set new or additional indicators, which would measure the desired behaviour changes. It is proposed to consider the following result-level indicator: "Percentage of the general public, who had an opportunity to engage in considering and discussing plans of EU investment projects". A call for more involvement of general public in discussing and planning EU projects would contribute to the transparency of EU funds' management.

The results of the evaluation shows that out of 165 unique indicators, approved in the 2015–2018 EU Funds Investment Communication Plan, 43 targets for 2018 are already achieved. However, taken into the account the actual communication campaigns carried out in 2016, it is concluded that they contributed to positive changes of 36 indicators (out of which 29 are those, which already achieved the targets set in the Plan). The positive changes in the rest of indicators were influenced by external factors and institutions' other communication actions (not according to the Plan). Positive changes in the values of indicators allows to conclude that in 2016 the most effective communication campaigns were implemented under five directions: "Lithuania, which we create with the EU investment", "Advanced Lithuania", "Qualified Lithuania", "Active Lithuania" and "Effective Lithuania".