The assessment on data availability for EU Cohesion Policy impact evaluations of Latvian Operational Programme for 2014 - 2020 programming period.

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Executive summary

The objective of this study was to ascertain the necessary data for the evaluation of effectiveness and impact of the EU Cohesion Policy (EU CP) funds Operational Programme (OP) for the programming period of 2014-2020.

The main tasks of this study were the following:
1. Collect information about the necessary data that can be used for the evaluation of EU CP funds OP priority axis.
2. Carry out a SWOT analysis about the collection of available and unavailable data, taking into account the financial, legal and administrative aspects of data collection.
3. Propose recommendations about the most efficient solutions for the collection, monitoring and administration of the data, as well as recommendations on improving the availability of data required for the impact evaluation of the EU CP funds OP.
4. Draw up guidelines for the use of impact evaluation methods, including counterfactual impact evaluation methods for the evaluation of EU CP funds OP of the 2014-2020 programming period.

In this Evaluation report the introduction is followed by the methodology chapter and the chapter on the main assumptions and limitations. This is continued by the chapter on the necessary data for evaluations and a chapter on the strengths, weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and threats (SWOT) for the collection of data. At the end of the study the main conclusions and recommendations for the data collection are set out. This report is accompanied by a separate document containing the guidelines on the use of impact evaluation methods for the evaluation of EU CP funds Work Programme of the 2014-2020 programming period (the Guidelines).

The research methodology chapter presents an approach for the identification, collection and analysis of the necessary data and data sources. To identify the necessary evaluation data an assumption of the most appropriate methods for the evaluation of each specific measure (SM) is made on the basis of the data used in evaluations of similar nature, data required for the application of the proposed evaluation methods, comments from surveyed institutions, the information contained in the OP for each SM result and outcome indicators, as well as the researchers' experience in the application of specific evaluation methods. The methodology also contains an explanation of the approach taken in SWOT analysis of the identified available and additional necessary (missing) evaluation data. SWOT analysis is carried out using criteria such as data availability, conditions of use, quality, acquisition opportunities, processing, available format and compatibility, level of detail and comparability with other data and data sources, financial aspects, legal aspects, administrative aspects, and other relevant aspects. Methodology chapter further describes the content of Guidelines that include an explanation of the basic elements and logic of evaluation; Guidelines also describe the usage of counterfactual evaluation methods, theory-based evaluation methods, economic evaluations and process evaluations, and contain a foreign practice evaluation examples from Denmark, UK, Austria, Poland and Lithuania.

Assumptions and limitations chapter provides the key assumptions and limitations for this study. Some of the most important limitations were the unavailability of the final version of the OP and the lack of evaluation plan; these limitations meant that the study was based on the data available to researchers in the draft OP and any future revisions of OP might affect the results of the study. Furthermore, the data identified as potentially required for evaluation of the OP was based on the researchers' assumptions about the potential impact assessment methods

to be used in the evaluation of the OP. This assumption implies that the identified data set may need to be supplemented in accordance with the specific future evaluation questions posed and methodologies selected by the evaluators.

The following chapter of the study provides a summary of the potentially necessary data for the impact evaluations of the OP. The chapter is structured according to the OP priority axis and the structure of SMs. For each priority axis of the OP first the European context is provided, followed by the analysis of foreign evaluation practice and a justification for the choice of specific evaluation methods. This is followed by a separate analysis of SM – first, a summary of each SM is given, then the most appropriate impact evaluation methods of the particular SM are put forward, finally, for each SM a list of the available and required additional (missing) evaluation data is presented. The evaluation data list contains information about the holder of the data, the source of the data (actual or potential), the method of data acquisition, the scope, period, format, frequency and updating frequency of data, as well as it provides the necessary additional information and comments where required.

The chapter on SWOT and costs and benefits (CBA) analysis describes the SWOT of the acquisition and usage of the available evaluation data, as well as provides SWOT and IIA analysis for the acquisition of the missing data. Some of the strengths associated with the use of the available data are that the data is collected by the official institutions and is available in public sources; the weaknesses for using the existing data are mainly related to the aspects of the data quality. Some threats or risks associated with using the available data is the incompatibility of different data or lack of data. Acquisition of the missing data required for evaluations is associated with additional costs which can vary from a few hundred euros to tens or even hundreds of thousands of euros. The benefits from tailored data acquisition is that it may be possible to obtain the necessary specific data required for evaluations or acquire the data in the most suitable format. This chapter also covers legal aspects of data acquisition; the specific section provides assessment of laws and regulations that restrict the individual (e.g., sensitive) data acquisition and use. The section also proposes some solutions for acquiring such type of data.

Finally, the study concludes with a summary of the main observations; these are associated with the use of impact assessment methods, data availability issues, as well as the acquisition of the missing data. The concluding part of the study provides recommendations on the data collection for impact evaluation purposes. Some of the recommendations that concern the collection of data are listed below:

- After drafting the Cohesion Policy Evaluation Plan, identify the data that is still required for specific planned evaluations (depending on evaluation question, scope etc.) in addition to what has been listed in this study.

- In accordance with the Evaluation Plan, the additional data required (above) and the data marked in this study as 'suggested to be is stored in CFLA VIS', identify the changes in the data fields required in the CFLA VIS (EU Funds Management Information System) and the application/ reporting templates for applicants/ beneficiaries.
- Agree on costs a delegate the data collection.
- Devise a control mechanism that would allow sanctioning of beneficiaries in case they fail to report the data required for evaluations.