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Performance of the study “Impact of training projects implemented under Measures 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4 of the Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP) on meeting the local and regional needs of the labour markets”

SUMMARY OF THE FINAL REPORT

Contracting Authority

**MINISTRY OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
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PROJECT CONSORTIUM



Polskie Towarzystwo Socjologiczne (Polish Sociological Association)



August 2007

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1. Introduction

The study „Impact of training projects implemented under Measures 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4 of the Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP) on meeting the local and regional needs of the labour markets” was performed by the consortium of Agrotec Polska Sp. z o.o. and Polskie Towarzystwo Socjologiczne (Polish Sociological Association) between 30 March and 2 August 2007. The Ministry of Regional Development was the Contracting Authority and the principal recipient. Pursuant to the requirements specified by the Ministry of Regional Development, the evaluation was performed in the Małopolskie, Śląskie and Podlaskie Voivodeships. The study involved the application of an elaborate methodology, consisting of the analysis of secondary sources, individual interviews, targeted interviews, case studies of the spectacular successes of the Ultimate Beneficiaries, CATI interviews among the sample group of Ultimate Beneficiaries and the Ultimate Recipients/Beneficiaries from the selected voivodeships.

2. Scope of the study

The subject matter of the study covered three Measures of the Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP), which is one of the Operational Programmes implemented in Poland, under which support for Poland's development with Structural Funds is implemented. The aim of Measure 2.1 is to increase professional activation of the residents and their ability to adjust their skills and professional qualifications to the requirements of the regional labour market. Measure 2.3. relates to professional reorientation of persons abandoning agriculture. Measure 2.4. is to support professional reorientation of persons threatened by the restructuring processes.

The main objective of the study was to evaluate compatibility of trainings offered under IROP Measures 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4 with the needs of the local and regional labour markets.

The study covered the analyses of the respective types of trainings implemented under the above mentioned Measures.

The evaluation involved the following criteria:

- **institutional performance criterion** – in the scope of reply to the question whether the system of institutional relations, information flow and taking decisions in the scope of projects selection is appropriate from

the perspective of efficient implementation of the Measures covered by the study;

- **objectivity criterion** – in the scope of reply to the question whether and to what extent was the process of programming regional development of the labour market on the level of a voivodeship and project eligibility under the respective Measures based on the previous studies and analyses in the scope of needs of local and regional labour markets and whether it was conducted following the previously determined procedures;
- **adequacy criterion** – in the scope of reply to the question whether and how adequately do the trainings offered under the Measures studied reflect the needs of the local and regional labour markets;
- **usefulness criterion** – in the scope of compliance of knowledge and skills gained with the real needs of the Ultimate Beneficiary on the labour market;
- **effectiveness criterion** – in the scope of reply to the question whether and how do the Measures studied affect the structure of the local and regional labour markets;
- **efficiency criterion** – studied in the context of adequacy, i.e. in the scope of reply to the question whether the allocation of the funds expended is optimum from the perspective of the needs of the local and regional markets;
- **persistence criterion** – the attempt to evaluate the persistence of positive outcome of training upon its completion;
- **applicability criterion** – in the scope of reply to the question concerning the direct and indirect impact of the training programmes on the professional activation.

3. Research methods applied

The set of research methods applied to this study was of complementary nature. The application of diverse, qualitative and quantitative methods of research was planned, which facilitated the collection of comprehensive and exhaustive information obtained from a wide range of persons and institutions participating in the implementation of Measures on the regional labour markets. The application of diverse tools facilitated obtaining the accumulation effect and mutual complementation of data originating from various sources.

Simultaneously, information collected during the respective stages of the study facilitated the development and clarification of research tools during the study.

Analysis of secondary sources was the starting point of the definition and study of the institutional relations as part of the implementation of Measures evaluated. In addition it provided information about the progress of study of the needs of regional and local labour markets, objectivity of project selection criteria and the system of information flow between all the actors of regional labour markets. The analysis of secondary sources also provided basis for drawing up a map of social and institutional relations, guidelines concerning individual interviews, scenarios of the targeted interview, as well as the scenario of telephone interview for the purposes of Ultimate Beneficiaries testing.

The map of social and institutional relations was a form of presentation of the positions of institutions, organisations and other entities significant for the regional labour market. It facilitated broadening the knowledge of the relations between the actors of regional labour markets (including institutional relations) and the regional system of information flow.

Individual In-Depth Interviews (IDI) facilitated final clarification of the map of social and institutional relations. In addition, they provided knowledge of the relations between procedures and practice as well as information on the objectivity of criteria applied, threats and obstacles to the delivery of the trainings as well as of the examples of good practices. At least 3 in-depth interviews with the representatives of the Implementing Authorities were conducted in the voivodeships covered by the evaluation. The interviews provided information supporting the development of a tool to test Ultimate Beneficiaries, i.e. the scenario of the telephone interview, and the cases of spectacular successes of Ultimate Beneficiaries of the IROP Measures 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4.

Focus Group Interviews (FGI), similarly to the individual interviews, were used to finally clarify the knowledge in the field of relations between the procedures and practice, objectivity of criteria applied and examples of good practices. Due to the location of interviewees in the process of implementation of the Measures evaluated, Focus Group Interviews significantly complemented information that could be obtained by means of Individual In-Depth Interviews. The Project Evaluation Committee members and the selected representatives of the Ultimate Recipients/Beneficiaries were the interviewees in this case. The significant value of such form of conducting interviews was also the possibility to compare the opinions about the implementation formed, on the one hand, from the perspective of the evaluators, and on the other, from the perspective of

those who were evaluated. Each voivodeship covered by the evaluation featured one Focus Group Interview.

The testing of the Ultimate Beneficiaries was carried out by means of Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing - CATI. Large number of the population in question, i.e. persons who underwent trainings as part of the completed projects under IROP Measures 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4 implied the selection of this research method, whereas the diversity of the group - the sample selection manner. Persons trained did not constitute a homogeneous community, which prevented the selection by means of simple random sampling from the entirety of the population. Such sample would not ensure the implementation of objectives of the study presented by the Contracting Authority, i.e. sample representativeness within the respective IROP Measure types, and would not facilitate a reply to the question whether the training projects implemented meet the needs of the local and regional labour markets. The study was carried out between 2 and 26 June 2007 on a representative random layered disproportionate sample of 3200 persons. The sample was layered, paying special attention to the three types of Measures subject to evaluation and three voivodeships in which the test was carried out.

4. Structure of the Final Report

The results of the study are presented in the Final Report, following the logic of evaluation criteria assumed.

Chapter **4.3.1 Institutional performance criterion** discussed the institutional practice of Measures implementation, applied in voivodeships covered by the evaluation, as well as rules and methods of information circulation between all the actors involved in the implementation.

Chapter **4.3.2 Objectivity criterion** analyses the following factors that affect the objectivity of project eligibility process:

- Validity of data concerning the situation of the local and regional labour market;
- Quality of such data;
- Relation between the criteria and strategic objectives of the voivodeship;
- Accuracy of the qualitative criteria;
- Accessibility of the project selection criteria (in generally available documents);
- Occurrence of informal project selection criteria (as a negative phenomenon);
- Preparation of the Project Evaluation Committee members.

Chapter **4.3.3 Adequacy criterion** includes the analysis of this aspect of Measures evaluated in the scope of reply to two questions:

- Are IROP Measures 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4 good tools for implementing the regional policy of the labour market?
- Did the trainings offered under Measures 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4 meet the needs of local/regional labour markets?

The chapter, *inter alia*, includes the analysis of effectiveness of the Regional Measure Implementation Plans as instruments facilitating the adjustment of the training projects to the needs of the region.

Chapter **4.3.4 Usefulness criterion** presents the evaluation of the impact of trainings offered as part of the Measures evaluated on the implemented and planned career of the Ultimate Beneficiaries.

Chapter 4.3.5 **Efficiency criterion** discusses the impact of trainings offered on the qualifications of the Ultimate Beneficiaries and the pointless loss effect in the matter-of-fact aspect.

Chapter 4.3.6 **Effectiveness criterion** presents the evaluation of effectiveness of trainings offered in two aspects:

- Impact of the intervention on the labour market and
- Impact of the intervention on the living and professional situation of the Ultimate Beneficiaries.

Chapter **4.3.7 Persistence criterion** analyses the declarations of Ultimate Beneficiaries as regards the plans for the next 3-6 months and readiness for further training.

Chapter **4.3.8 Applicability criterion** constitutes the evaluation of the training offered as part of the Measures evaluated, paying special attention to taking up jobs concordant with the subjects trained by the Ultimate Beneficiaries. It first of all related to Measures 2.3 and 2.4, however the declarations of Ultimate Beneficiaries of Measure 2.1 were taken into account as well.

5. Main conclusions from the study, followed by recommendations

Main conclusions from the evaluation study are presented below and followed by recommendations concerning the new programming period.

Two models of implementation of the Measures evaluated were identified during the assessment of the Measures evaluated by means of the **institutional performance criterion**:

- *Technical and administrative approach* consisting in focusing first of all on the development of effectiveness of the Implementing Authority's (IA) functioning in relation to the Ultimate Recipients/Beneficiaries. The approach was most widely applied in the Podlaskie Voivodeship.
- *Partnership approach* consisting in considerable level of formalisation of partnership with institutions in the closer or further vicinity of the Implementing Authority and use of such partnership in the process of Measures implementation, first of all in the scope of promotion, analysis of the labour market and eligibility of projects. The approach was most developed in the Małopolskie Voivodeship; a little less advanced forms of this approach were noted in the Śląskie Voivodeship.

The selection of the approach in a given voivodeship was determined by the social and economic specificity and the level of social activation. In each of the voivodeships, the selection of the approach was optimum in the opinion of the Evaluators, considering the efficiency of Measures implementation.

However in the future, due to the limited effectiveness of the technical and administrative approach in the promotion among the possible Ultimate Recipients/Beneficiaries of such large programmes as OP HC, where far greater funds will be available than in the case of IROP, the *partnership approach* will be the optimum solution. Promotion of OP HC will require reaching a far wider group of possible Ultimate Recipients/Beneficiaries, which is supported by the developed and formalised network of social and institutional relations (partnership).

Action promoting the partnership approach should be taken as regards the Programme implementation. Projects implemented in this respect in the Małopolskie Voivodeship ("Umbrella Project", Małopolskie Obserwatorium Rynku Pracy i Edukacji) and the general practice of Małopolskie Voivodeship Labour Office consisting in the wide involvement of the representatives of partners from the public and private sectors as well as non-governmental organisations and universities (Chapter 4.3.1 of the Report) are worth recommending.

On account of the need to abandon the model of *technical and administrative* management and implementation of programmes relating to the work and development of human resources it is necessary to introduce obligatory participation of the external experts in the process concerning the eligibility of projects (as Project Evaluation Committee consultants).

High quality of the training programmes in voivodeships covered by the evaluation, irrespective of the approach assumed, resulted from the practice of the Voivodeship Labour Office that involved close cooperation with the Ultimate Recipients/Beneficiaries on the level of the respective projects. It was found for several criteria, including: **institutional performance, adequacy and effectiveness criteria**. The institution of the project supervisor was of key significance in this case, it however required considerable involvement of the Voivodeship Labour Office personnel. Similar practice in the case of the OP HC will require the involvement of far greater staff and institutional resources than in the 2004-2006 period. Simultaneously, it is recommended to maintain the project supervisor institution for the purposes of OP HC implementation.

If the similar level of the Implementing Authority involvement is assumed, it will also be necessary to increase the remuneration of the implementing Authority's employees, or perhaps to introduce other incentives due to the fact that, once they obtain knowledge of projects' eligibility recognition, they achieve the position on the labour market that allows them to apply for attractive jobs in the private sector (in training companies). It will facilitate the maintenance of the present standard of training projects implementation in the new financial perspective.

The analysis of the information flow between the Implementing Authority and the Ultimate Recipients/Beneficiaries (**institutional performance and objectivity criteria**) revealed the following obstacles to communication:

- Esotericism of the language of programming documents (in the opinion of the possible Ultimate Recipients/Beneficiaries);
- The Ultimate Recipients/Beneficiaries perceive the application for the ESF funds as a complicated and bureaucratized process.

Due to the negative experience relating to application of funds and the noted obstacles to information flow there is risk that the group of possible Ultimate Recipients/Beneficiaries will not increase to the level necessary in respect of the funds that will be available in the 2007-2013 period.

On that account the implementation of the OP HC publicity strategy should consider taking measures aimed directly at the possible project drafters who have so far never utilised the European Union funds, from the small centres, as well as those who were unsuccessful in the application for the ESF funds in the 2004-2006 period.

The following publicity instruments and information submission channels should be used to the greatest possible extent:

- a. Information trainings aimed at those ineffectively applying for funds, with the significant share of workshop methods;

- b. National and regional information networks of business associations, non-governmental organisations and professional organisations (e.g. associations of trainers);
- c. Local media to the greater extent than the national media;
- d. New information circulation networks, e.g. the network of Local Action Groups established as part of the LEADER+ Initiative or the network of partnerships established as part of the EQUAL Initiative;
- e. Elements of guerrilla marketing, e.g. active participation on Internet forums (provoking and moderating discussions).

Irrespective of the pressure on the use of local media, the establishment, with the use of Structural Funds, of attractive feature and trainings series devoted to the development of human capital transmitted on public television (e.g. TVP3) for at least the first year, when the 2007-2013 programming period funds are available, should be considered.

As regards the **objectivity criterion**, the following was noted, *inter alia*:

- Insufficient forecast studies of the labour market;
- Lack of studies considering the employers/employees not benefiting from the services of public institutions of the labour market;
- Lack of a wider knowledge in the voivodeships evaluated of the results and methodologies of studies carried out under the IROP 2.1 Measure in other regions, which aimed at the analysis of local and regional labour markets;
- The changes on the labour market are considered in the Framework Measure Implementation Plans insufficiently and with delay.

Thus:

- Research projects implemented under the Measure 2.1 should be subject to general overview in all voivodeships – considering the use and dissemination of labour market research and information management instruments established as part of the projects;
- Additional scoring for such research projects should be introduced under the OP HC, the aim of which would be to constantly monitor the changes on the regional/local labour market, paying special attention to the employers/employees not benefiting from the services of public institutions of the labour market;
- The obligatory periodic (annual or, if relevant from the methodological point of view, more often) publishing by the Implementing Authority of the forecast changes on the regional/local labour markets should be introduced to the implementation procedures, paying special attention to the implementation of objectives and priorities of OP HC. Such forecasts would be prepared by the independent research units on the basis of methodology designed by such units and approved by the Managing Authority, and would be required in the Framework Measure

Implementation Plans passed by the implementing Authority. The Managing Authority would coordinate the preparation of forecasts for the 16 voivodeships.

The evaluation revealed that it would be favourable for the implementation of Measures to disseminate the analyses of the local/regional labour market carried out by the Beneficiaries of high research potential as part of drawing up the training programmes. The analyses are not available for the Ultimate Recipients/Beneficiaries altogether. The Beneficiaries carrying out research for their own purposes are not motivated to publish it. They often consider it a threat to their competitive position of the market. Introduction of mechanism motivating the Ultimate Recipients/Beneficiaries, carrying out their own labour market research for the purposes of the training programmes submitted to publish the results of such analyses, could be a solution. We suggest that the motivating mechanism consisting in the extension of the list of eligible expenditure to include expenditure on financing the labour market research for the purposes of given projects is introduced. The condition for the expenditure to be eligible would be publishing its results for the purposes of other trainings projects. Wider access to the results of research carried out by given Ultimate Recipients/Beneficiaries of greater potential would result in the improvement of the quality of projects submitted by the Ultimate Recipients/Beneficiaries who cannot afford wide analyses of the labour market on account of their limited potential.

In order to ensure the greatest possible **objectivity of the process** of recognising project eligibility and to increase its **adequacy** to the needs of the regional/local labour markets, it is justified to establish methodology of forecasting the labour market tendencies. The methodology should take into account the entirety of the social and economic processes currently taking place in relation to the accession to the EU and absolutely fall outside the scope of the currently noted tendencies. The methodology should be established by a team of independent experts (a think-tank) originating from various research and academic centres. The team would be responsible for possible modifications to the methodology and for preparing national forecasts. The methodology would also cover the development of a set of tools to draw up short-term (national and regional) forecasts that would constitute an integral part of the annual Measure Implementation Plans. The team may be financed by Technical Assistance.

Irrespective of the functioning of such a team of experts on the national level, it is necessary for the Implementing Authorities to involve external experts in order to consult the Framework Measure Implementation Plans. Relying only on the Voivodeship Labour Office staff resources may result in narrowing the point of view included in the Framework Measure Implementation Plans only to that of the public institution of the labour market and thus to considering data obtained

from employers and employees not benefiting from Poviát Labour Office agency to an insufficient extent.

The issue raised above relates also to the **effectiveness** of trainings. The conclusion from the evaluation is the high mark for the effectiveness of trainings, yet this conclusion could be reinforced by placing it in a wider context, both national and European.

On that account it would be justified to carry out thorough comparative research on the effectiveness of trainings implemented as part of IROP and as compared to other similar trainings funded by the ESF. The research would be one of the bases of methodology of forecasting changes on the labour market in the 2007-2013 period recommended above. The aim of such research would be to develop constant monitoring of changes as regards the selected labour market indicators on the following levels:

- National;
- Regional;
- Local.

It is worth pointing out here the experience of certain "old" EU Member States. In Finland, for example, cooperation was initiated with the selected trade scientific institute in respect of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, as part of Technical Assistance. The cooperation involved the purchase of high-quality professional computer software for the institute to carry out economic analyses. It seems that similar solution should also be applied in Poland to benefit from the research potential on the central and regional level. Furthermore, such approach has already been applied on the regional level, which is reflected by the labour market analyses ordered by the Voivodeship Labour Offices in voivodeships covered by the evaluation. It is therefore worth making an attempt to synchronise actions of the central and regional levels towards the establishment of such a system to monitor changes and programming.

The evaluation revealed the limited effectiveness of the evaluated Measures as instruments of regional policy implemented on the labour market. The adequacy of trainings (in the context of the evaluation of Ultimate Beneficiaries as regards the impact of trainings on their qualifications and positions on the labour market) was considerably affected by effective market surveillance carried out by the training companies within the areas and subjects, within which they had potential and experience.

Voivodeship Labour Offices directed attention to the flexibility of Framework Measure Implementation Plans as a tool of regional labour market policy resulting, *inter alia*, from the long period of giving approval by the IROP

Managing Authority to the possible proposals to elaborate the criteria (preferences). The reason pointed out was the lack of consent of the Managing Authority to formulate preferences, e.g. in the form of territorial restrictions on the selection of Ultimate Beneficiaries. It was suggested that the Implementing Authorities should have the right to independently introduce such modifications to the implementation procedures due to the fact that it facilitated intervention management suitably to the local and regional needs.

Simultaneously, the Substantive Project Evaluation Sheet was demonstrated as the main formal obstacle to considering the regional and local specificity of the labour market. It was maintained that its structure failed to facilitate the introduction of the regional component to the evaluation, and shifting that aspect to descriptive justification of the evaluation could result in the accusation of subjectivity by the Beneficiaries.

On that account:

- In cases justified by the labour market assessment included in the Framework Measure Implementation Plan, territorial (local and regional) restrictions should be allowed in the process of selection of Ultimate Beneficiaries. The analysis facilitating such restrictions should take into account two matters: labour market needs and gaps on the training services market in the case of local markets (i.e. lack of readiness on the part of the training companies to implement projects and seek Beneficiaries within certain areas of the voivodeships);
- The Substantive Project Evaluation Sheet (and the Application Generator respectively) should take into account the locations, in which the adjustment of the project to regional or local specificity of the labour market on the basis of criteria included in the Framework Measure Implementation Plans would be evaluated. It can be a separate space devoted to the justification of project implementation, target groups and project outcome assumed. The assessment of the labour market included in the Framework Measure Implementation Plan, passed by the Implementing Authority, should provide basis for scoring.

The modifications specified above are significant due to the **objectivity** of the recognition of project eligibility and the **adequacy** of the training offer of the Measures evaluated as compared to the needs of the regional and local labour markets.

On account of the changes on the labour market that are difficult to forecast, the reallocation of funds between the Measures implemented by the Implementing Authority as part of the priority should also be considered. It would contribute to the **adequacy** of Measures for the benefit of the regional labour market. The above mentioned solution would facilitate flexible reaction to the changes in the

situation on the labour market, e.g. by specifying the level of shifting the funds that can be determined by the Implementing Authority.

The closed list of project types under the IROP Complement did not contribute to **adequacy** of the training offer to the needs of the regional and local labour markets. Introduction of the open list of forms of support under OP HC could be a solution, considering the situation on the labour market that is difficult to forecast. It may be implemented on the level of elaborating the Operational Programme.

The **effectiveness** of the Measures is determined also by the scope of support provided within one project. It was found that the projects covering the whole package of services aimed at the effective change of the situation of the Ultimate Beneficiary (mediation, advisory, coaching) would be justified only in the case of certain target groups of Ultimate Beneficiaries, first of all those who are less effective in seeking appropriate jobs on the labour market. In the case of persons seeking appropriate jobs on the labour market effectively, such projects may involve the deterioration of the *expenditure – result* relation.

On that account:

- It is necessary to specify the target groups of Ultimate Beneficiaries and project types, for which additional points for a package approach should be provided under the evaluation system. It may be developed by means of the potential of research units located in the regions, that carry out labour market research, *inter alia*, Measure 2.1 drafters, and on the basis of research carried out by the above mentioned think-tank;
- The introduction of additional points under the project evaluation system for a package approach for the specific target groups of Ultimate Beneficiaries is more effective from the point of view of implementing the project objectives.

In the course of the study it was found that knowledge of the tendencies as regards later fate of Ultimate Beneficiaries and the impact of trainings on their careers was scattered and originated from various sources which were not linked to each other. Ultimate Beneficiaries sense the lack of balance between the increase of qualifications and the career opportunities in companies, in which they are employed, or the jobs available on the market. It is reflected in particular by the conviction that trainings do not result in the increase of their remuneration. Lack of the mechanism supporting complementarity (in the context of the development of offers on the labour market) of the Measures evaluated is perceptible. When considered as a complementary set of instruments of the labour market policy, they drawn attention to the fact of the lack of uniform management of information on the Ultimate Beneficiaries (participants of trainings under IROP Measures 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4) in the scope of

qualifications obtained in a given region. Information on the regional human resources is one of the strategic factors as regards taking decisions by the labour market entities (employers), *inter alia*, concerning possible investment. On that account knowledge of the outcome of Measures evaluated should be appropriately processed on account of the needs of the region's economy.

The following solutions may improve the situation:

- Establishment of the system of monitoring the fate of Ultimate Beneficiaries. The best method in this case may be the preparation of a representative sample of Ultimate Beneficiaries and monitoring it every 6 months;
- Establishment (or development) of the job advisory and agency system for Ultimate Beneficiaries on the basis of partnership of Poviats Labour Offices, Voivodeship Labour Offices, employers, self-governments and other entities willing to cooperate for the benefit of regional and local labour markets. Such partnerships would be established, for examples, under Human Resource Development PHARE. On that account it is possible to support partnerships already established and to relate to previous experience. Such advisory and agency system should be particularly developed for the residents of rural and the peripheral areas (in relation to the centres of development in a given voivodeship). These groups have not developed skills or willingness to actively seek jobs. In general, such system would contribute to the enhancement of competitiveness of employers on the labour market and contribute to the increase of opportunities to apply the qualifications obtained, and thus to enhance the position of Ultimate Beneficiaries on the labour market;
- Establishment of a database of persons who obtained new qualifications by participating in the trainings for the Ultimate Recipients/Beneficiaries of other priorities of the same Programme (e.g. IROP) or of other Operational Programmes to have access to information on the scope of qualifications obtained under the trainings available within a given area. Consideration of the implementation of this recommendation will require additional legal analyses in the scope of the Personal Data Protection Act.
- Introduction, as a subject of the labour market research implemented or ordered by the Implementing Authorities, of analyses of the employment needs that occur as a result of the implementation of the Operational Programmes and Measures aimed at the employers.

The solutions suggested and accepted in the 2007-2013 financial perspective should have positive impact on the projects in the scope of development of human resources in the aspect of their **usefulness** for the Ultimate Beneficiaries, **effectiveness, persistence of results** and **applicability**.

