

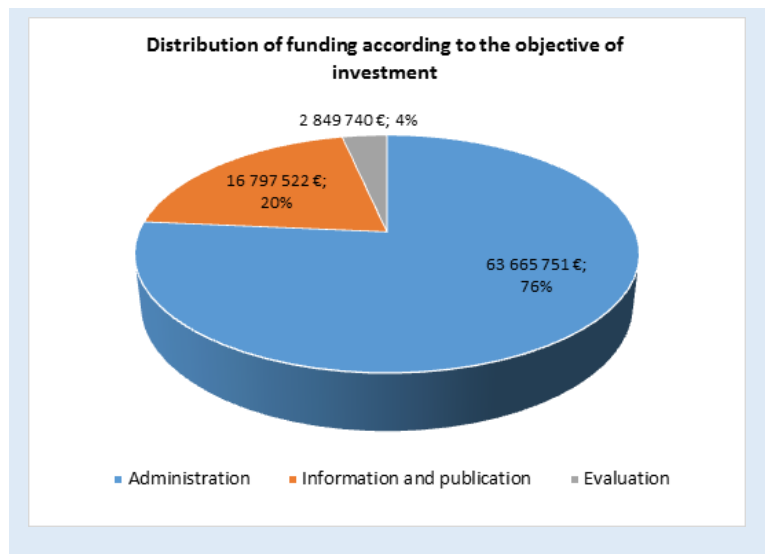
## SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION OF THE ACHIEVED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR 2007–2013

### AIMS OF EU INVESTMENTS AND FUNDS ALLOCATED TO ACHIEVE THEM

The Technical Assistance Operational Programme for 2007–2013 (hereinafter – the “TAOP”) was adopted on 22 November 2007 by European Commission’s decision No K(2007)6717. It is a special Operational Programme (hereinafter – the “OP”) designed to manage thematic 2007–2013 European Union (hereinafter – the “EU”) Structural Funds investments’ OPs. Technical assistance funds were allocated to achieve the following three objectives:

- to create an administrative system for the EU Structural Funds and to ensure its efficient functioning;
- to inform and raise awareness about the EU Structural Funds’ investments;
- to evaluate the use of the EU Structural Funds.

During the 2007–2013 programming period, 49 technical assistance projects were implemented for EUR 83,290,433.19 (1.2% of the total EU investments for the 2007–2013 programming period). These projects provided a basis for an adequate and efficient implementation of thematic OPs. Moreover, 2014–2015 TAOP funds were allocated to preparations for 2014–2020 EU investments (the funds were used to prepare strategic documents, national legislation, internal procedures, etc.).



### CREATING AN EFFECTIVE AND PROPERLY FUNCTIONING EU FUNDS’ ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM BASED ON SOUND FINANCE MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

The creation of a 2007–2013 EU Structural Funds’ administrative system and its effective functioning were ensured using the funds of TAOP objective 1. The administrative system was developed by using the best practices of the 2004–2006 programming period in the management of the EU Structural Funds, improving the legislative framework and further building administrative capacity. However, there was a lack of human resources for the management of the EU Structural Funds at the start of the programming period. This problem occurred because two programming periods overlapped (the implementation of OPs for 2007–2013 started while some of the projects from the 2004–2006 programming period were still being implemented), also because at the start of the programming period numerous calls for beneficiaries were made (that meant that in a short amount of time the workload to assess applications significantly increased). Moreover, there was a need to prepare for (or adjust to) new procedures and there was a sudden increase in the amount

of funds to be managed. In the later years this problem was resolved by optimising administrative procedures of the EU Structural Funds and by developing administrative capacity with the use of technical assistance funds. The following **main administrative capacity building areas** were implemented using the 2007–2013 technical assistance funds:

- ❖ ensuring sufficient availability of human resources in institutions managing the EU Structural Funds by paying salaries to civil servants and other employees who carry out functions related to the management of the EU Structural Funds;
- ❖ training employees responsible for the management of the EU Structural Funds. Centralised training has been organised at the system level by the Managing Authority or training institutions (for employees managing the EU Structural Funds) since 2012. Moreover, internal and interinstitutional training activities were carried out allowing institutions to exchange the best practices and additional administrative capacity building training activities were provided for by institutional plans;
- ❖ improving information systems and ensuring their broader application, in particular the EU structural assistance administration system (SFMIS) which helped institutions participating in the administrative system to ensure effective management, administrative and reporting functions;
- ❖ building administrative capacity of employees from institutions managing the EU Structural Funds via participation in various work groups and meetings (e.g. round-table discussions with social partners, seminars for beneficiaries, etc.) focused on various questions related to the administration of the system, also by resolving problem situations and accumulating valuable experience in the management of funds;
- ❖ building administrative capacity of employees from institutions managing the EU Structural Funds through professional internships where employees learn how other institutions work and what best practices exist, and through participation in events, conferences and training organised by the European Commission or other EU institutions.

The competence of the staff of institutions managing the EU Structural Funds is one of the most important conditions affecting the efficiency and effectiveness of the EU Structural Funds' administrative system. Therefore with the funds of TAOP objective 1 the aim was to achieve that at least 50% of employees managing the EU Structural Funds would improve their qualifications annually. To ensure consistent and relevant capacity building, the funds of objective 1 were used to analyse the staff's training system. The funds were also used for analysing competences required for the staff and for developing a competence roadmap. In 2012, **centralised training** was organised for all system participants on all subjects specified by the competence roadmap. By the end of 2015, with the initiative of the Managing Authority, 700 training events (about 4,500 academic hours) were held, attracting almost 12,000 non-unique participants from 25 institutions managing the EU Structural Funds. In the last implementation year of the TAOP, 716 employees improved their qualifications, i.e. 75% of all the employees who worked with the implementation of the TAOP (952). Better than expected results were achieved due to the fact that in 2012 centralised training

#### ***Investments into administrative capacity building of employees managing the EU Structural Funds***

The Ministry of Finance, as the Managing Authority, launched a centralised training project, which in international conference *La VITA è bella 2013* in Dublin won an award for innovative practices and initiatives to increase non-formal education



of adults in Europe. To determine the most innovative and perspective projects, the following aspects were taken into account: innovative work methods and environment, focus on personal and organisational capacity, documentation of learning results and continuity of training. The project was also presented in Brussels, in "Open days 2014" events with "twinning schemes" and European Commission's project "Regio-TAEIX Peer 2 peer", where the experience was shared with colleagues managing the EU Structural Funds in other Member States (Croatians, Czechs, Latvians).

was launched for institutions managing the EU Structural Funds. Its quality was highly evaluated by the participants. At the EU level these training activities won an award for innovative practices and initiatives to increase non-formal education of adults in Europe.

Other measures affecting the effectiveness of administrative system were also financed under objective 1. For example, successful **development of IT systems** through the improvement of the functionality of the SFMIS and the creation of a Data Trade System (hereinafter – the “DTS”) reduced administrative burden for project implementers and institutions managing the EU Structural Funds. The DTS was used to review project data while they were being implemented and allowed data transfers in electronic format between project implementers and implementing institutions. The functionality and convenience of the DTS was confirmed by a project implementers’ survey, which was conducted in 2013. Here 94% of the respondents evaluated the system as “very good”. Apart from that, administrative burden was also reduced by administrative simplification measures of the EU Structural Funds (for example, application of a simplified reimbursement method), financed by technical assistance funds.

The ex-ante evaluation of the Lithuanian Operational Programme for EU Structural and Investment Funds 2014–2020 confirmed that during the 2007–2013 programming period technical assistance funds helped to create an effective and properly functioning EU funds’ administrative system based on sound finance management principles. Further challenges of the system’s improvement are related to further simplification for project implementers and management of high staff turnover in the system.

## **TWO-THIRDS OF THE LITHUANIANS CLAIM THAT THEY PERSONALLY FELT BENEFITS OF 2007–2013 EU INVESTMENTS**

The implementation of publicity and information activities were aimed to **raise the awareness of the EU Structural Funds’ investments** (that at least 75% of potential beneficiaries’ would know about the possibilities to use the EU Structural Funds) **and increase the interest in benefits of the EU Structural Funds** (that at least 50% of the public would know about 2007–2013 EU Structural Funds’ investments in Lithuania). To achieve these aims technical assistance funds under objective 2 and thematic OPs’ priorities were used. During the whole programming period, 124 information initiatives were implemented (information campaigns, conferences, seminar series, websites, etc.), while the target established by the TAOP was 113. The main information activities related to the 2007–2013 EU Structural Funds’ investments in Lithuania were focused on three broad target audiences: general public, potential applicants and project implementers.

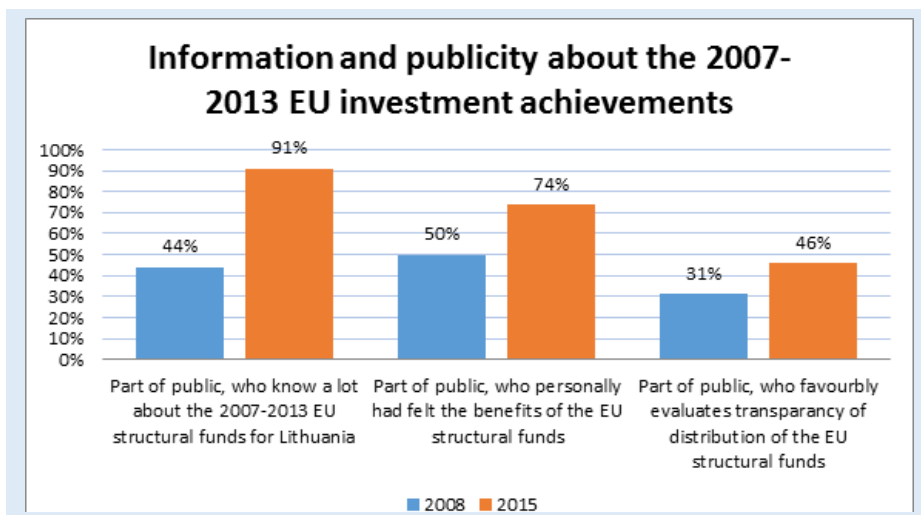
To ensure the efficiency of EU investments’ publicity and information system, information planning, coordination, monitoring and evaluation activities were conducted centrally as planned by the Plan for Information about EU Structural Assistance. Investments under objective 2 were allocated to permanent preparation and dissemination of specialised, specifically for target groups tailored information using the most effective means and to information campaigns about the use and achievements of the EU Structural Funds in the country. The investments were also made to improve partnerships and exchange of best practices between institutions, to develop competences and skills of employees responsible for information and publicity and to implement a publicity monitoring and evaluation system.

The evaluation of the effectiveness of the 2007–2013 EU Structural Funds’ administration system, which included a comparison between the 2007–2013 programming period and the 2004–2006 period, revealed that positive changes were, indeed, related to the provision of information to applicants and project implementers. Firstly, it is due to significant improvements in the EU Structural Funds’ website [www.esparama.lt](http://www.esparama.lt). The website contains all information necessary for

applicants and project implementers about EU Structural Funds' investments, i.e. a general source of information was created. Moreover, the depth and width of information on the website also significantly improved. [www.esparama.lt](http://www.esparama.lt) provides information about the Lithuanian Strategy for the Use of European Union Structural Assistance for 2007–2013 (hereinafter– the “Strategy”) and individual OPs aimed at implementing the Strategy. It also provides all relevant information about confirmed measures, calls for proposals, received and considered applications, implemented projects, calls for tender (of organisations which do not carry out procurement under the Public Procurement Law), relevant legislation and methodological documents related to the management of the EU Structural Funds, general information about the progress in the implementation and evaluation of OPs, preparations for an upcoming programming period, etc. During the 2007–2013 programming period [www.esparama.lt](http://www.esparama.lt) was used not only as a publicity tool for EU Structural Funds' investments, but also as a single-window system tool providing almost all relevant information for applicants and project implementers in the one place. In “Region Star 2010” awards organised by the European Commission for EU cohesion policy projects, [www.esparama.lt](http://www.esparama.lt) won the title of the best EU funds' website.

In conclusion, the EU Structural Funds' publicity and information activities achieved its targets. The results of a public survey conducted in November 2015 show that public awareness about the EU investments in Lithuania during the 2007–2013 programming period increased more than twice, from 44% to 91%. Most respondents (91%) claimed that they knew “a lot / something” about the EU funds' investments in Lithuania. Two-thirds (65%) of the Lithuanians said that they had enough information about the EU investments in Lithuania. Moreover, most of the respondents understand the benefits of EU investments for Lithuania in the same context as they are indicated by the Strategy – to rapidly improve conditions for investing, working and living in Lithuania so that the economic growth would reach all residents of Lithuania.

Respondents agree the most with the statements that EU investments contribute to stimulating economic growth (86%), EU investments contribute to the improvement of the quality of life (82%), investments are aimed at positive social changes in the country (79%). In terms of personal benefits, 74% of the respondents



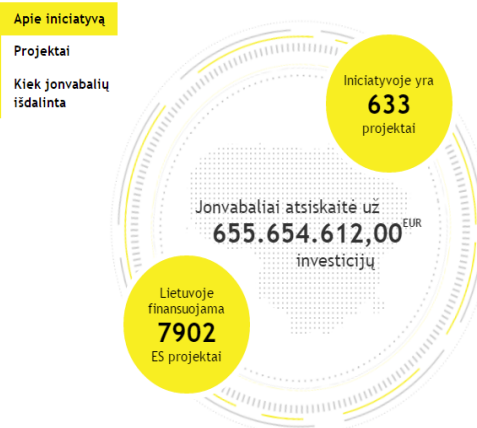
claimed that they personally felt the benefits of EU investments, which are mainly associated with improved roads, modernised schools, renewed medical institutions, participation in training, etc.

The main aims of the 2007–2013 programming period related to public awareness of EU funds have been already achieved, therefore the 2014–2020 period has different aims for information and communication activities. The new aims are more related to the promotion of changes in target groups' opinions and behaviours, which should ensure a better use of the results of the EU investments.

**“Jonvabalai” (literal translation – fireflies) – the easier way to know where EU money goes**

At the end of the 2007–2013 financial period, an information campaign about transparency initiative “Jonvabalai” was launched to encourage the openness of project implementers and the public interest in the EU projects. The initiative, which was founded by Investors’ Forum, association “Knowledge Economy Forum”, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuanian Responsible Business Association, Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists, the Ministry of Finance, Lithuanian Employers Confederation and Transparency International Lithuanian Chapter, aimed to increase the transparency of EU projects in Lithuania. This project (one-of-a-kind in the EU) has encouraged companies and other organisations on a voluntarily basis to reveal more information to the public than it is required by law. It has allowed the general public to know how much one or other item cost, to receive information about project implementers’ shareholders, organisational structure, etc. and to ask questions directly to project implementers.

At the end of the two-year transparency campaign, the survey data showed that **20% more residents thought that the EU Structural Funds were distributed in a transparent way**. In total 630 project implementers joined the initiative. The initiative launched by the Ministry of Finance and its partners won the European Commission’s “RegioStars 2016” award in the “Effective management” category for the promotion of transparency and accountability. These annual awards recognise only the most innovative and inspiring projects.



## INCREASING RESULTS-ORIENTED EU INVESTMENTS THROUGH THE INSTRUMENT OF EVALUATION

During the 2007-2013 programming period, evaluations of the EU Structural Funds’ investments were financed under TAOP objective 3 and thematic OPs’ priorities. Between 2008 and 2015 **28 strategic evaluations were conducted**, i.e. on average 3.5 evaluations per year, and target “Average number of conducted strategic evaluations per year” was exceeded by 20% (the target was on average three strategic evaluations per year).

In order to strengthen the quality of EU Structural Funds’ evaluation, to improve methodological knowledge of responsible civil servants and to encourage decision makers to use evaluation results and make evidenced-based decisions, the Managing Authority consistently conducted evaluation capacity building (hereinafter – “ECB”) activities. Between 2008 and 2015, TAOP funds were used to implement 53 measures. The benefits of ECB activities can be summarised as follows:

- ❖ training activities carried out in 2008–2015 provided new theoretical and practical knowledge to civil servants who are responsible for the EU Structural Funds’ evaluation in the Managing Authority and intermediate bodies. This knowledge improved the quality of evaluations;
- ❖ the drafting and updating of methodological documents for evaluation (especially their consolidation to the Methodological Guidelines for Evaluation) contributed to a stronger methodological basis of evaluation of the EU Structural Funds investments and ensured that all relevant and practical evaluation questions were extensively analysed and provided in the Lithuanian language;
- ❖ international evaluation conferences not only have benefited institutions managing the EU Structural Funds (new knowledge, examples of foreign practice, new contacts with the best foreign experts, etc.), but also contributed to a better Lithuania’s image in the evaluation field and to better information about the dissemination of evaluations;
- ❖ thematic evaluations met the needs of the Managing Authority in terms of relevance and provided answers to specific questions. Moreover, there were cases when, for the sake of training, some of the evaluation tasks were given to Managing Authority’s employees to improve their evaluation skills;
- ❖ other project activities (discussions, scientific and popular articles in the media, evaluation publicity events) contributed to the culture of evidence-based decision-making and the formation of the evaluation network in Lithuania.

It is important to mention that during the 2007–2013 programming period more attention was paid to **new evaluation methods** and the use of “hard” evaluation methods. For example, in 2013 the assessment of the applicability of counterfactual evaluation methods and the availability of statistical data to evaluate the impact of EU structural support was conducted, analysing the possibilities to apply counterfactual impact evaluation methods in different EU structural support interventions; in 2014 training on counterfactual impact evaluation was organised for employees of institutions managing the EU Structural Funds and for external evaluators. It should be noted that during the 2007–2013 programming period several evaluations of EU Structural Funds investments were conducted using counterfactual impact evaluation methods.

**Lithuania won European Commission’s award for the best EU Structural Funds’ impact evaluation.**



The Impact of EU Structural Assistance on Quality of Life, Social Exclusion and Poverty Reduction in Lithuania, which was commissioned by the Ministry of Finance in 2013, won the European Commission’s award for the best evaluation on employment and social exclusion.

Lithuania received the award at the European Commission’s 7th evaluation conference, which was held on 16–17 May 2016 in Sofia.

First of all, this evaluation was useful because the 2007–2013 EU funds’ interventions were coupled with specific poverty and social exclusion reduction theories and also because it confirmed the academic community’s insights that in Lithuania the focus was on individual approach to the problem of poverty and it lacked a more structural approach to it. To evaluate the impact of the interventions, the Quality of Life index was designed. The values of the index were coupled with specific 2007–2013 EU Structural Funds interventions’ results, which allowed it to reflect the impact of the interventions. The other important result of the evaluation – impact evaluation of the EU Structural Funds at the micro level, which was conducted using a counterfactual impact evaluation method. Thanks to this method, for the first time in Lithuania the net effect of five active labour market measures implemented in 2007–2013 was analysed, specifying which of them had the biggest impact on participants’ employability, income and the number of worked days after the project implementation.

Apart from the ECB activities, in 2007–2015 other activities focused on the promotion of evidence-based decision making, the dissemination of evaluation results and the promotion of their use were consistently conducted (presentations of evaluation results in a conference format, presentations to the Parliament and the Monitoring Committee, publicity via websites and other media channels). TAOP result indicator “Evaluation recommendations which are adopted to implement (percentage of all recommendations in the completed evaluations)” was exceeded by 29% between 2008 and 2015 – 603 of 666 recommendations (90%) were adopted (the target was 70%). The implementation of recommendations mostly contributed to the improvement of measures’ administration (improvement of administrative procedures, adjustment of administrative documents and introduction of new functions of administration, monitoring and control), investment and financial changes (review of financial proportions of support, identification of financial priorities), improvement of strategic planning and promotion of more active support coordination. A higher than planned implementation percentage of evaluation recommendations leads to a conclusion that evaluation results have been integrated into the decision making process, hence the implementation of TAOP objective 3 improved the quality, efficiency and consistency of the use of the EU Structural Funds.