


# PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE IMPLEMENTATION IN LITHUANIA


RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION OF THE PARTNERSHIP  
PRINCIPLE IMPLEMENTATION IN THE USE OF 2014-2020  
EU FUNDS INVESTMENTS



Kuriame  
Lietuvos ateitį  
2014–2020 metų  
Europos Sąjungos  
fondų investicijų  
veiksmų programa



# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?



*Partnership—inclusion of competent regional, local, municipal, and other public institutions as well as economic and social partners and institutions representing civil society, including environmental protection partners, non-governmental organisations, and institutions responsible for promoting gender equality and non-discrimination, in the management process of EU structural funds: OP planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.*


European Union (EU)-wide consensus that each member state must cooperate and consult with civil society representatives, business representatives, employers, and employees while planning and implementing EU funded programmes was reached long ago. It is widely acknowledged that organisations representing the interests of various societal groups and businesses are well aware of the most acute issues in a given country and the true needs of its inhabitants. These groups are often able to provide the most effective solutions to these issues and develop ways to satisfy needs based on their

experience, and they can help ensure that EU funds are invested where they are most needed with the highest potential impact.

In the context of EU funds assistance, organisations representing the interests of various societal groups, businesses, employers, and employees are called partners, and the process of cooperation and consultation with these organisations is called partnership. Organising the partnership process and involving partners in the planning and implementation of EU funded programmes, which is referred to as implementation of the partnership principle, is mandatory for all member states and is constantly promoted by EU and national-level institutions.

Evaluation of the partnership principle implementation in Lithuania for 2014–2020 EU funds investments was carried based on the criteria of relevance, sufficiency, and efficiency.

The most extensively analysed subject related to this research was the implementation of horizontal partnership (i.e., cooperation with social-economic partners and civil society organisations).



# PARTNERSHIP STYLES

## TECHNICAL-BUREAUCRATIC STYLE

Partnership is implemented because it is mandatory



Partners do not have the decision-making right



Partners' influence on public policy decision-making is limited



Partners' capacities are limited

## SOCIAL MOVEMENT-BASED STYLE

Partnership process is used to legitimate actions



Limited number of partners participate



Partners are responsible for public policy decision making



Partners have limited experience but are motivated and able to mobilise the resources

## POLITICAL INFLUENCE-BASED STYLE

Partnership process is used to maintain the stability and existing balance of powers



Partners are experienced and influential



Limited number of partners participate

## COLLABORATIVE STYLE

Partnership process is used to ensure the representation of various interests



Broad range of partners participate



Dialogue among all parties is established



Partners have real influence



Amount of partners' experience varies, they are motivated



# PREVAILING PRACTICE

*Collaborative partnership style—the partnership process is used to ensure the representation of various interests, a broad range of partners participate, dialogue among all parties is established, partners have real influence, partners are motivated.*

The partnership process consists of the selection and involvement of partners, partners' influence on decision-making, and their provision of adequate feedback. Proper implementation of each of these partnership stages is crucial to ensuring a successful partnership process. The aforementioned partnership stages as well as the quality of their implementation are also affected by the public sector institutions' motivation to involve partners and partners' motivation and capacities to participate in the partnership process.

Various characteristics and combinations of characteristics of the aforementioned partnership-process stages tend to reveal certain partnership styles that different public institutions apply: technical bureaucratic, political influence, social movement, and collaborative (adapted from Innes, 2003).


The evaluation revealed that the partnership in the management of 2014–2020 EU funds in Lithuania is in the transitional stage between the technical-bureaucratic and collaborative style.

This means that the partnership in the management of 2014–2020 EU funds exceeds formal technical-bureaucratic necessity: all ministries at least sometimes carry out additional consultations on administered priorities and measures with partners, not limiting their partnership practices to the mandatory

forms and situations established in national and EU-level legislation; social-economic partners, organisations representing civil society, regional institutions, and local government institutions are extensively involved in the management processes of the 2014–2020 Operational Program (OP); and partners are involved in all stages of OP implementation and participate both by providing comments and remarks in written form and by participating in meetings with the representatives of public sector institutions. Closer cooperation with partners is constantly and actively promoted by the managing institution—the Ministry of Finance. However, line ministries are also motivated to involve partners due to their eagerness to ensure the effectiveness and stability of OP implementation.

Increased attention to the partnership and its promotion is also demonstrated by changes in partnership regulations, new methodological documents, and relatively good understanding of the partnership's added value among public sector institutions.

All of this lays the foundation for the implementation of the collaborative partnership. However, the practical implementation of the partnership process still lacks certain qualities before we can conclude that implementation of the OP is based on equal cooperation with partner organisations.



# HOW TO IMPROVE COOPERATION WITH PARTNERS?

The main characteristics of the collaborative partnership are inherent to certain processes of particular ministries. However, a systematic and consistent approach to partner involvement is still lacking.

When partnership processes are initiated, a clear understanding of who can be considered eligible partners as well as appropriate partner-selection procedures are often lacking. Usually, partners from previous partnership activities are invited to participate in the partnership process, and in some cases, the list of invited partners are supplemented with partners suggested by umbrella organisations. However, no additional verification of whether all involved organisations comply with the definition of partners is carried out, meaning all interested organisations can participate. Therefore, in some cases, organisa-

tions that would not be considered partners participate, so a balanced representation of various stakeholder groups is not ensured.

Often, partner involvement in the partnership process is delayed—that is, partners do not participate in investment planning or early measure development, only participating in discussions on particular intervention implementation details. Furthermore, even when they are involved in the early stages of the public policy process, consistent involvement of the same group of partners throughout the whole process is not ensured. This inconsistent partner involvement often results in partner organisations only hearing information given by the ministries without being able to participate in partnership activities as equal members of consultations or discussions.

This lack of partner influence is also diminished by a lack of adequate feedback during meetings. During meetings with partners, most ministries do not document partners' comments, remarks, or suggestions in writing and do not give public feedback on which comments, remarks, and suggestions were accepted.

Smooth implementation of the partnership process is also hindered by partner organisations' lack of resources and capacity to participate in EU funds management activities

(i.e., their relative inactivity). Lack of financial, time, and human resources significantly limit partners' ability to represent broader society's interests.

In the partnership process, the implementation of the principle of transparency is not sufficiently ensured. During OP measure planning, partners are often provided with narrow information on one measure only but do not have access to information on a particular ministry's overall intervention logic regarding the administered measure or on the wider context of the interventions and planned activities.

The implementation of the principle of transparency also requires ensuring the transparency of cooperation with certain partners, which is currently not sufficiently addressed; rather, information about which partners are involved in partnership activities or which partners provide comments is publicised only in exceptional cases.

*During partnership implementation, first of all, a consistent approach to and unanimous practices of partner involvement among different ministries are lacking. The quality of the partnership as well as the means of its organisation differ depending on the ministry. However, universal shortcomings characteristic of the majority of ministries and all stages of EU fund management also exist.*



# BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the aforementioned issues, particular practices of certain ministries indicate growing attention to the partnership process.

The Ministry of Culture employs transparent and deliberate partner-selection procedures based on internally approved selection criteria. Similar selection criteria should be approved by all ministries, and in all instances, deliberate and transparent partner selection based on these criteria should be carried out, ensuring that only certain organisations serve as partners—namely, organisations that are the most representative, act on behalf of a certain society group or common public interests, operate in a relevant public policy sector, and are nationally or regionally acknowledged.

The Ministry of Social Security and Labour involves partners in partnership activities from the earliest stages of public policy intervention planning, (i.e., upon drafting strategic sectoral documents) as well as ensures consistent partner participation during all stages of OP measure development. Similar practices of involving partners in drafting strategic sectoral documents or developing OP priorities and measures should be applied by other ministries as well. Certain sector-relevant partners should also be involved consistently in all stages of OP management and all stages of intervention planning.

The Ministry of Economy provides additional information to partners on its activities and, in this way, promotes more active participation. The transparency of partnership activities—information about the general intervention logic, the wider context of the aims and activities of the measures administered by a particular ministry, and publicization of the partners involved in a particular measure's planning activities—should be implemented by all ministries that organise partnership activities.


Ministries react to written comments and suggestions from partners by preparing and publicising tables of responses indicating which of the comments or suggestions were accepted and which were not along with the reasons for the decision. In this way, feedback for partners who have provided comments and suggestions is ensured. Based on this practice,

feedback to partners should also be guaranteed during meetings with representatives of public sector institutions. During meetings, the feedback can be ensured by preparing and publicising tables of responses to partners' remarks or full meeting protocols, preparing and publicising a summary of the main decisions made during the meeting along with a list of meeting participants, or by sending an amended version of the document to all partners who participated in the meeting before making it public.

A partnership also cannot be successful without strong partner organisations with relevant capacities. Even though the issue of lacking resources should be tackled systematically at the national level, the practice of funding programs with non-EU funds shows that partner organisations benefit significantly from projects aimed at strengthening the administrative capacities of partner organisations. Thus, EU funds could also be used to strengthen partner organisations.

*Deliberate and transparent partner selection, early and consistent partner involvement, assurance of adequate feedback, and increased transparency in the partnership process combined with strengthening partner organisations are the foundation of successful cooperation and more effective use of EU funds.*





The publication is based on the results of the evaluation of the Implementation of the Partnership Principle. The evaluation was carried out by “BGI Consulting”, Ltd, commissioned by the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania (July 2017).

The evaluation report can be accessed at:

[http://www.esinvesticijos.lt/lt/es\\_panaudojamumo\\_vertinimas](http://www.esinvesticijos.lt/lt/es_panaudojamumo_vertinimas)

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