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6th international evaluation conference

**EVALUATION RESULTS FOR DECISION-MAKING:**

**Use, challenges and examples**

**20-21 May 2015**

**Vilnius, Lithuania**

**Important!** The conference will take place **on 20-21 May 2015**

**Call for papers**

The Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania kindly invites you to the 6th biannual international conference held in Lithuania on the evaluation of EU-funded programmes and other public policies. This is a biannual event (1st evaluation conference took place in Vilnius in 2005) which has become increasingly popular among speakers and participants from the EU countries and all over the world. Biannual evaluation conferences create a platform for an *exchange of best practices, networking* and, most importantly, it becomes an *inspiration source* for both evaluation commissioners and evaluators. The conference in 2015 aims to address issues such as how the best to *utilise evaluation findings* and move towards more *evidence-based approach for policy making.*

The organisers of the event sincerely hope that ideas shared by conference participants will contribute to successful evaluation and use of evaluation results for the improvement of EU funded programmes and public policies in general. You are invited to present your proposals for papers on the topics listed in this call for paper. We hope the topics proposed will be of high interest and relevance to you, and we look forward to seeing you in Vilnius!

**Theme**

The utilisation of evaluation findings is often addressed in academic literature and practical discussions, but there seems to be a lack of evidence on the use and impact of the Cohesion policy evaluation and its findings. Regulations of European structural and investment funds for 2014-2020 and other related documents establish increasingly detailed provisions related to a better use of evaluation findings and the involvement of policy makers into evaluation processes. Evaluation plays an important role in the context of *evidence-based* and *result-oriented* policy making. However, for evaluation to have an impact on the process and results of policy making, the culture of evidence-based policy making must exist and evaluation findings must be used.

Achieving *better use of evaluation findings* requires understanding which particular factors influence the utilisation of evaluation and its results, i.e. to what extent it is affected by internal factors (related to evaluation itself) and external factors (such as the existing management culture and public policy context, etc.). Other important questions include: what do we mean by the terms “utilisation” and “use” of evaluation? Is the implementation of evaluation recommendations a proper criterion to judge on the use and impacts of evaluation? How are the results of Cohesion policy evaluations used? All these questions will be discussed in the 6th international evaluation conference in Vilnius, Lithuania.

**Key questions of the Conference**

1. What is meant by evaluation utilisation, use, influence and impact? What is the difference between these terms? Are critics of the terms “utilisation” and “use” correct by saying that these terms do not reflect all possible effects of evaluation since they do not reflect indirect and unintended (positive or negative) influence of evaluation, as well as its long-term influence and influence on other subjects than those directly involved in the evaluation process?
2. Which factors influence utilisation, use and impact of evaluation? To what extent an evaluation impact depends on the evaluation process and other internal factors, such as timelines of an evaluation, clarity of an evaluation report, evaluation methodology, etc.?
3. What external factors influence evaluation use? What is the reality of decision-making? Can it be rational (i.e. evidence based)? Are policy makers interested in evaluation findings? How to avoid instrumental or symbolic use of evaluation?
4. Is evaluation contributing to independent and critical thinking in decision-making?
5. Is evaluation a proper instrument to generate evidence while bearing in mind that policy is often heavily affected by dynamics of economics, political interests and public demands to quick decision-making?
6. What do we know about the use and impact of Cohesion policy evaluations and evaluations of EU-funded programmes?
7. How different national and international organisations such as European Investment Bank, World Bank, OECD, United Nations and other encourage utilisation of evaluation, evaluate evaluation use and impact?

**Keywords:** *use of evaluation, utilisation of evaluation and evaluation findings, impact of evaluation, knowledge, evidence, evidence-based policy making, meta-evaluation, systematic review, evaluation methods, evaluation results.*

**Target Group**

We sincerely invite policy makers, public servants, evaluators, academics and other relevant parties from Lithuania, the EU and across the globe to the conference. This conference is open to all who is interested in improving policy-making at any of vertical (regional, national, supranational, international) levels.

**Speakers expected in the conference**

1. Representatives of evaluation units in different national, European and international organisations, such as different DG’s of the European Commission, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, the European Investment Bank, development cooperation agencies (e.g. Swedish SIDA, UK's DFID) and other organisations;
2. Experts (theorists and practitioners) of Cohesion policy, evaluation and public governance;
3. Experts carrying out meta-evaluations with the focus on the quality and use of evaluation results;
4. Evaluators conducting ex-post evaluations of the 2007–2013 programming period commissioned by the national authorities and the European Commission;
5. Experts carrying out pilot counterfactual impact evaluations with the support of the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) and Centre for Research on Impact Evaluations (CRIE);
6. Representatives of national and international evaluation associations, academicians and researchers analysing evaluation quality, utilisation and impact;
7. Other representatives from contracting authorities and companies that can present relevant evaluation findings in different investment areas (see description of parallel sessions).

**Registration to the Conference**

Registration will open on **1 April 2015.** Follow the news on the Conference website.

**The Conference website**

All relevant information and news about the conference are published on the Conference website:

<http://esinvesticijos.lt/en/news/evaluation-results-for-decision-makinguse-challenges-and-examples>

**The Organiser and Secretariat**

At the request of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania, the conference is organised by consultancy company ESTEP Vilnius.



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**The Sessions of the Conference**

The conference programme will include several plenary and parallel sessions and panel discussions. The preliminary topics of sessions are as follows:

1. Plenary session No 1. **“Which factors influence evaluation use and impact?”**
2. Plenary session No 2. **“How to conduct evaluation to make it reliable and influential?”**
3. Plenary session No 3. **“Evidence-based policy making and dissemination of evaluation results in the real world: examples of challenges and solutions”**
4. Parallel sessions **“Evaluation findings and impact in different policy areas”,** e.g. investment in people, institutional strengthening and administrative capacity building, investment in business development and investment in infrastructure development.

**Plenary session No 1  
“What factors influence evaluation use and impact?”**

The aim of this session is to discuss ways in which evaluation can be used and impact of evaluation can be measured, also to present methodology and findings of relevant meta-evaluations and systematic reviews.

**Key questions:**

1. What determines the utilisation of evaluation results? What is the difference between evaluation utilisation and use?
2. To what extent is the utilisation of evaluation results affected by internal (evaluation-specific) and external (such as the existing public management culture) factors?
3. How to define evaluation outputs, results and impact?
4. Is the implementation of evaluation recommendations a proper criterion to judge on the use and impact of an evaluation?
5. What type of evaluation use dominates in evaluation of EU-funded investments (instrumental, conceptual or symbolic)?
6. Is there any reliable evidence of the use and impact of evaluation of EU-funded interventions (the view of contracting authorities and evaluators)?
7. What are the results of meta-evaluations and other studies on the effect of Cohesion policy evaluation on the content and process of public policy in Lithuania and other EU countries?

**Papers expected in the session:**

* Academic or practical papers on the utilisation and impact of evaluation (findings).
* Presentations of specific cases and examples of practical use of evaluation results – not only evaluation of EU-funded investments, but also other public policies.
* Papers on methodologies and results of meta-evaluations and other studies analysing evaluation use and impact.

**Plenary session No 2   
“How to conduct evaluation to make it reliable and influential?”**

The aim of this session is to discuss internal factors that influence evaluation use and impact. These are factors related to evaluation itself, such as methodology, quality of evaluation, professionalism and ethics of evaluators, etc.

**Key questions:**

1. What is the context of decision-making? What are the driving forces and main obstacles to using evidence in decision-making? What challenges does evaluation face?
2. How to ensure the impartiality and reliability of expertise and evaluation results?
3. How often does the pressure to have evidence-based policy result in policy-based evidence?
4. To what extent are the independence, impartiality and reliability of evaluation affected by the experience and professional ethics of evaluators?
5. Are rigorous evaluation methods such as counterfactual impact evaluation a proper means of ensuring the reliability of evaluation results?
6. What are main constraints and challenges in application of counterfactual methods for impact evaluation (time, duration, cost, data availability, interpretation of evaluation results, external validity of evaluation findings, etc.)?
7. In what areas can policy experiments be used to ensure better external validity of evaluation findings? What are challenges and results of such experiments?
8. What lessons learnt from randomised control trials and other experiments are relevant in planning EU-funded investments and their evaluation?

**Papers expected in the session:**

* Papers on methodological challenges and constraints of evaluation and their impact on the utilisation of evaluation (results).
* Papers on factors determining the quality of evaluation.
* Papers on ethical and professional challenges of evaluation and research in general and how they impact the utilisation of evaluation (results).
* Papers on preparations for a wider application of counterfactual impact evaluation methods in evaluating the impact of the Cohesion policy 2014–2020.

**Plenary session No 3   
“Evidence-based policy making and dissemination of evaluation results in the real world: examples of challenges and solutions”**

This session is dedicated to discussions of external factors, influencing evaluation use and impact. Utilisation of evaluations primarily depends on the existing public management culture, readiness and interest of policy makers to make evidence-based decisions. That is why it is necessary to discuss the challenges and practice of evidence-based policy making and of different instruments that generate evidence for decision-making (evaluation, performance audit, impact assessment, functional reviews, etc.). Is better dissemination of evaluation results one of the solutions to ensure better use of evidence in decision-making? What challenges are faced by different national and international organisations in disseminating evaluation findings and what solutions do they apply? How to make a good evaluation report and to inform decision makers about the evaluation findings? In attempt to boost evaluation use and impact, it is important to share and discuss practical issues and their solutions, to exchange experiences and best practices in the field of dissemination of evaluation findings.

**Key questions:**

***Questions about evidence-based policy-making and the role of policy evaluation:***

1. What qualities prove the existence of evidence-based management culture?
2. To what extent does Cohesion policy and EU-funded interventions affect public governance at the national level?
3. What instruments of evidence-based policy-making (evaluation, performance audit, regulatory impact assessment, systematic reviews, functional reviews, etc.) are applied in Lithuania and other countries in the EU and around the world?
4. Who are the main clients and users of evidence (i.e. evaluation results)? Are knowledge and evidence actually used in the policy-making process?
5. What measures are used to ensure proper use of evaluation results and other evidence? How implementation of evaluation recommendations is ensured and monitored? (Experience of the European Commission, national and international institutions)
6. How to plan and organise evaluations to ensure the utilisation of their results?
7. How to draft a good evaluation report?
8. How to disseminate evaluation results?
9. How to measure the use and impact of evaluations?
10. How to conduct meta-evaluations?

***Questions about drafting of evaluation reports and dissemination of evaluation results:***

1. What standards and requirements are applied to the drafting of evaluation reports? What are the main characteristics of this “genre”?
2. Are there any universal principles one should be aware of while drafting an evaluation report (the view of contracting authorities and evaluators)?
3. What criteria determine the quality and clarity of an evaluation report?
4. How long does it take to draft an evaluation report?
5. How to manage the scope of a report? How to properly present information and visualise data?
6. How to formulate good evaluation conclusions and recommendations?
7. How can the quality of evaluation reports be assessed? What are (if any) the results meta-evaluations on the quality of evaluation findings?

**Papers expected in the session:**

* Papers on challenges and benefits of evidence-based policy-making and different instruments to generate evidence (evaluation, performance audit, regulatory impact assessments, functional reviews, etc.).
* Papers on organisation of the evaluation process, drafting of evaluation reports and dissemination of evaluation results in different national and international organisations (exchange of experiences).
* Practical papers on challenges in drafting evaluation reports and ways to ensure the quality of evaluation reports.

**PARALLEL SESSIONS   
“Evaluation findings and impact in different policy areas”**

Parallel sessions are aimed at presenting evaluation findings and their impact in specific policies. Papers based on real examples of evaluations and systematic reviews that address questions of evaluation findings and their impact in different policies are expected to contribute to the discussions on internal and external factors that influence evaluation use and impact. Papers based on the results of single case evaluations or systematic reviews not only in the field of EU-funded investments, but also other policies are expected.

**The policy areas of interest (topics of parallel sessions):**

1. Investment in people.
2. Investment in business development.
3. Investment social and economic infrastructure.
4. Investment in institutional strengthening and administrative capacity building.

**Key questions of parallel sessions:**

1. What is the evaluation evidence (results) about the effectiveness and impact of public investment in different policy areas?
2. What are the lessons learnt from the previous evaluations, if any?
3. What limits the use and impact of evaluation (results)?
4. How does evaluation change the process and contents of public policies?
5. What are the reasons for non-utilisation of evaluation results?

**Each individual presentation (paper) is expected to follow the proposed structure:**

* What were the aim, object and purpose of the evaluation?
* How does the evaluation differ from previous evaluations conducted in this field?
* What methods were used for the evaluation? What determined the choice of methods?
* What data were used for the evaluation?
* How was the evaluation process organised? Were decision-makers and other stakeholders involved in the evaluation process? If so, how? What were the benefits of their involvement?
* What are the main evaluation findings and their relevance?
* What are the use, external validity and (expected) impact of the evaluation findings?

**Papers expected in the session:**

* Papers on evaluation findings and their impact on different policy areas
* Papers on results and use of systematic reviews.
* Papers on the quality and gaps of evaluation evidence in different policy areas.
* Papers on the results and impact of both individual evaluations and systematic reviews in the field of EU-funded investment (Cohesion policy) and other policy areas/ investment programmes.