

Deputy Prime Minister's Office for Investments and Informatization of the Slovak Republic

**Interim evaluation of the progress made in the
implementation of the horizontal principle Sustainable
Development and the horizontal principles Equality between
Men and Women and Non-discrimination at programme level**

**Final Report
Final version**



*Tento projekt bol spolufinancovaný
Európskou úniou.*



KPMG Slovensko spol. s r.o.

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This report contains 27 pages

Summary

Interim evaluation of the progress made in the implementation of the horizontal principle Sustainable Development and the horizontal principles Equality between Men and Women and Non-discrimination at programme level, was carried out to assess progress in the implementation of horizontal principles at the level of the European Structural and Investment Funds programmes in the 2014-2020 programming period, as well as to assess the achievement of the horizontal principles' objectives set out in the strategy documents.

The evaluation responded to identical questions for all horizontal principles and: (i) answered if the mechanisms created at national level can effectively promote the application of the horizontal principles in the implementation of the programs; (ii) assessed the effectiveness of measures taken to support and monitor the application of the horizontal principles; and (iii) focused on the contribution rate of interventions to the achievement of objectives set out in the strategy papers for horizontal principles at the national level.

The evaluation used semi-structured and in-depth interviews as the main tool for qualitative data collection. Data were processed in the form of a comparative analysis. The significant limitation of the evaluation was the actual state of implementation of the programmes, which was at the start of the implementation. This was why the fact-based answers to the evaluation questions and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures and their contribution to the achievement of the strategic objectives of the horizontal principles have certain limits resulting from the relatively low number of implemented interventions.

Based on the findings, the horizontal principles systems are applied across sectors and universally to all programmes. At the national level, a system of mechanisms is in place to ensure the application of horizontal principles, and coordination is the responsibility of coordinators of the horizontal principles. These, in cooperation with the Programme Managing Authorities, define measurable indicators and other data in the programme documents, that should indicate the achievement of the objectives set for the horizontal principles. At the same time, horizontal intervention principles should help to create synergies and eliminate measures with opposite effects or negative impacts on other areas.

The effectiveness of these measures or mechanisms can not be fully assessed within the evaluation with regard to the current stage of implementation. However, it is clear that the range of measurable indicators that are being monitored is significantly larger than necessary. This means that the current set-up of the monitoring process is demanding in terms of time and personal capacities in relation to the amount of data required, and it also contains a lot of information that does not have any further use in the process of the assessment of the achievement of the horizontal principles' objectives. Indicators of horizontal principles are often indicators at the output level, reflecting in particular the intervention logic of programmes, so they do not directly measure the achievement of horizontal principles' objectives.

Horizontal principles cover a wide range of areas where significant changes are taking place. These changes may result in a variety of positive or negative effects, which subsequently affect implemented interventions and may oppose to the objectives of

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horizontal principles. Therefore, the expertise of workers and monitoring staff is important in order to guide the continuation of interventions on the basis of identified risks. In the context of the above, it is crucial that there is a clear sustainable development strategy at national level that defines the main priorities.

Based on the above, we recommend for all horizontal principles:

- consider reducing the number of indicators and collecting only relevant data to assess the achievement of the objectives of the relevant horizontal principle;
- continue to apply the current system, which ensures that horizontal principles are taken into account when assessing project applications;
- streamline project monitoring and do not pick up indicators that measure only marginal effects in relation to horizontal principles as the final impacts of ESIF interventions can be monitored at the level of context indicators;
- strengthen the administrative and professional capacities of workers responsible for monitoring and make continuous use of project monitoring outputs as feedback for the continuation of interventions.

For the horizontal principle Sustainable Development:

- anchor the key priorities of sustainable development in the strategy document at national level for this area as soon as possible;
- further develop a methodology for monitoring the contribution of individual programmes to the horizontal principle Sustainable Development in relation to the new strategy in line with the recommendations of the European Commission and to continually assess the achievement of the objectives;
- put the emphasis on ten thematic indicators in a comprehensive assessment of the horizontal principle Sustainable Development, as defined by the European Commission in this area and monitored by Eurostat;
- enhance the exchange of information between programmes that may have synergies for sustainable development and identify potential conflict areas; and
- support the potential of coordinated and follow-up measures in the context of territorial development.

Abbreviations

	Automated Geographic Information System
AGIS	
AP	Action Plan
CLSAF	Centre of Labour, Social Affairs and Family
DPMOII	Deputy Prime Minister's Office for Investments and Informatization of the Slovak Republic
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EC	European Commission
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
EMW and ND	Equality of Men and Women and Non-Discrimination
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
EU FRA	EU Fundamental Rights Agency
EU SILC	EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
HP	Horizontal Principle
IACS	Integrated Administration and Control System
IB	Intermediate Body
IROP	Integrated Regional Operational Programme
ITMS2014+	Information Monitoring System
MA	Managing Authority
MoLSAF	Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic
ND	Non-discrimination
NSSD	National Strategy for Sustainable Development
OP	Operational Programme
OP EPA	Operational Programme Effective Public Administration
OP HR	Operational Programme Human Resources
OP II	Operational Programme Integrated Infrastructure
OP R&I	Operational Programme Research and Innovation
OP TA	Operational Programme Technical Assistance
OPF	Operational Programme Fisheries
PA	Partnership Agreement of the Slovak Republic for 2014-2020
RDP	Rural Development Programme 2014-2020
RES	Renewable Energy Sources
SD	Sustainable Development (for the 2014-2020 programming period)
SLFS	Selective Labor Force Survey
SO SR	Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic
SR	Slovak Republic

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1 Introduction and Report Structure

The submitted document represents the Final Report in the framework of the implementation of the Work 4 Interim Evaluation of the Progress in the Implementation of the Horizontal Principle (HP) Sustainable Growth (SG), HP Equality of Men and Women, and HP Non-discrimination (HP EMW and ND) at the programme level (the "assignment"), on the basis of the Partial Contract on Works No. 690/2016, concluded on 26 May 2016 between the Government Office of the Slovak Republic¹ as the Customer and the Consortium of KPMG Slovensko, spol. s r.o., Bratislava and stengl. a. s., Bratislava as the Contractor.

The report consists of the following parts:

- Chapter 2 - describes the objective and evaluation questions as set out in the Terms of Reference,
- Chapter 3 - contains a brief description of methodological approach,
- Chapter 4 - contains all preliminary findings and describes the mechanisms for implementing horizontal principles developed at national level,
- Chapter 5 - describes the findings and provides answers to the evaluation questions, and
- Chapter 6 - contains conclusions resulting from findings and followed by recommendations.

¹ In accordance with Act No. 171/2016 Coll. amending Act No. 575/2001 Coll. on the organization of the activities of the Government and the organization of the central state administration, as amended, and amending certain acts, the Deputy Prime Minister's Office of the Slovak Republic for Investments and Informatization (DPMOII) was established with effect from 1 June 2016. Contract on Works No. 690/2016 has been delimited from the CO SR to DPMOII.

2 Purpose of Evaluation, Subject, Evaluation Questions and Tasks

2.1 Purpose and Subject matter of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide an objective assessment of the progress in the implementation of the Horizontal Principle Sustainable Development (HP SD) and Horizontal Principle Equality of Men and Women and Non-Discrimination (HP EMW and ND) at programme level, implementation of the ESFS in the 2014-2020 programming period and assessment of achievement level of HP SD objectives in relation to the global and strategic goals set out in the HP SD strategy document. The evaluation should also include an evaluation of tools created for monitoring the HP SD implementation for reporting.

The **subject matter** of the evaluation is to assess the functionality of the mechanisms created to ensure the application of the horizontal principles in the ESIF implementation. The evaluation is aimed at assessing the key actions taken in relation to the application of the horizontal principles under the operational programmes. The assessment includes an analysis of the benefits of implementing the ESIF to the objectives defined in the national strategy documents for the application of the horizontal principles.

2.2 Evaluation Questions

The assignment specification sets out the same questions for all three HPs, although HP EMW and ND addresses the evaluation as one area, as both HPs are covered by one administrator. The evaluation questions are as follows:

A: Horizontal principle SD

1. Can mechanisms established at the national level (at the level of the Partnership Agreement) effectively promote the implementation of the HP SD principles in ESIF implementation?
2. What is the effectiveness of the actions taken to support and monitor the implementation of HP SD principles within the individual operational programmes?
3. To what extent has the implementation of interventions supported by the ESIF contributed to the fulfillment of the objectives set out in the national strategy document for HP SD?

B: Horizontal principles EMW and ND

- Can mechanisms established at the national level (at the level of the Partnership Agreement) effectively promote the implementation of the HP EMW and ND principles in ESIF implementation?
- What is the effectiveness of the actions taken to support and monitor the implementation of HP EMW and ND principles within the individual operational programmes?



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To what extent has the implementation of interventions supported by the ESIF contributed to the fulfillment of the objectives set out in the national strategy document for HP EMW and ND?

3 Evaluation Methodology and Procedure

The evaluation uses, to a greater extent, qualitative tools that are key to answer the evaluation questions. Qualitative tools are primarily used to deepen understanding of the mechanisms and measures through which HPs are implemented across programmes. The primary intention was to use also quantitative tools to collect and analyse data. Those were supposed to be used to analyse programme variables as well as available statistics directly related to HP SD, EMW and ND. Given the real status of the implementation of the ESIF programmes, which were at the start of the evaluation, quantitative methods could not be applied. Partially structured and in-depth interviews were used as the main tool for qualitative data collection. Respondents were HP coordinators, staff of Managing Authorities for operational programme (MAs for OPs), Intermediary Bodies (IB) and other relevant institutions involved in the implementation of ESIF programmes. The collected data and information were compiled by means of a comparative analysis that compares the planned mechanisms defined in the HP implementation systems and the existing mechanisms within the individual programmes and how they functioned to implement HP policies. This evaluation is carried out in parallel with the *Evaluation of Progress in the Implementation of the Partnership Agreement of the Slovak Republic as of 31.12.2016* and, therefore, the possibility to conduct interviews with a larger number of relevant stakeholders for both evaluations was used simultaneously. Primary data was collected at programme level, for all individual programmes. The final report reflects the development as of 31.12. 2016.

The assessment of the effectiveness of the measures taken to apply the HP principles, in rigorous terms, implies an evaluation based on a comparison of planned and achieved objectives, through indicators at the level of the results. From this point of view, given the current state of project implementation and based on indicators, it is not possible to assess the effectiveness of the measures or the contribution of the ESIF interventions to meet the HP objectives. Responses to the evaluation questions can only be formulated so far based on the evaluation of how the individual programmes and the corresponding mechanisms are set up.

For evaluation purposes, the data needed to prepare the three identified evaluation questions for HP SD and HP EMW and ND separately were collected. Secondary data sources were, in particular, the data derived from the survey of the relevant documents - the Partnership Agreement of the SR (PA), the National Reform Programme (NRP) of the Slovak Republic for 2014, 2015 and 2016, the Europe 2020 Strategy, all ESIF programmes within PA, HP implementation systems and HP strategy documents, available sector reports, expert literature as well as publicly available context indicators and other relevant statistics.

Secondary data obtained from ITMS2014+ and in the case of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) data from AGIS and IACS in processed form as submitted to the Central Coordination Body were used only as indicative information indicating progress in individual programmes. These included, in particular, the values of the financial indicators which presented the allocation values in the calls as well as the total amounts of contracted and drawn funds for the individual programmes. The data available concerning the physical index values associated with HP SD and HP EMW and ND have so far not shown any progress.

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Since no evaluations in this area have yet been implemented, it is not possible to incorporate into this report the measures that would be implemented on the basis of recommendations from previous evaluations.

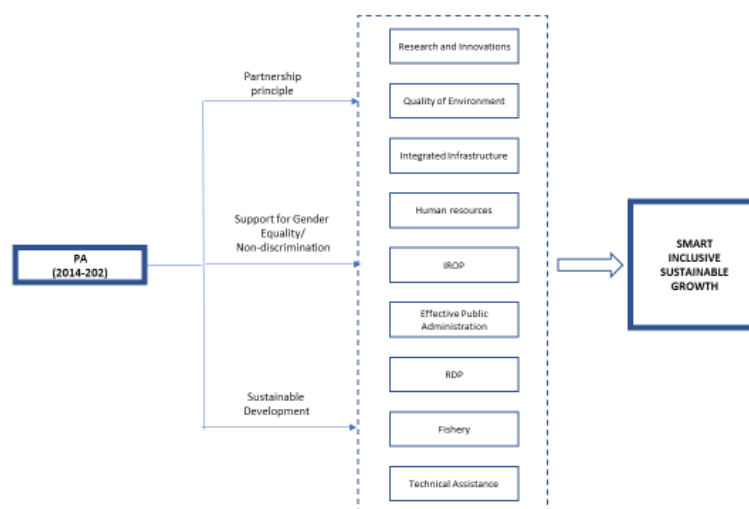
This evaluation has several limitations. One of the main reasons, which significantly limits the possibility of providing clear answers to some of the requirements for the assignment, is the real state of ESIF implementation in Slovakia at the time of drafting the evaluation report. Most of the projects have not yet been launched or are in the early stages of implementation, and their effects could not be analysed. At present, the evaluation can not provide a sufficiently comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of the measures and the contribution of ESIF interventions to meeting HP's strategic goals. As of 31.12.2016, 111 projects under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and five other OP projects were completed, of which four were technical assistance projects. We assume that the progress that was reflected in shifts in HP-related (context) indicators was probably to a certain extent the effect of programmes from the previous programming period 2007 - 2013.

4 Findings

4.1 Mechanisms created at national level

HP coordination at national level is ensured by HP administrators. Their position is specific because they are neither in the position of a managing authority nor an intermediary body. HP administrators were part of the planning phase and are actively involved in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the ESFS. *The Implementation System of the Horizontal Principles for Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination for the years 2014-2020*, as well as the *Implementation System of the Horizontal Principle Sustainable Development for 2014-2020* (hereinafter the Implementation System) reflect the core contexts described in the PA and the mechanisms specified in the *System of Governance of European Structural and Investment Funds* for the 2014-2020 programming period.

Figure 1 Horizontal Principles in the context of PA 2014-2020 Implementation



Source: Authors

HP systems are extensively applied to all ESIF programmes (Figure 1). Description of HP application is part of the programming document of all programmes, and during the planning process, the basic HP settings were consulted with HP administrators for each programme. All HPs are applied across all ESIF programmes and universally. The HP compliance obligation is set by the General Regulation, but HP's main goals are defined by the EU fund from which the programmes and their priority axes are supported. Further details on the HP EMW and ND contexts are contained in Appendix 1 and the HP SD context is described in more detail in Appendix 2.

HP coordinators have selected HP related measurable indicators that contribute to meeting HP goals (key indicators for HP SD) from the indicators defined in the programming documents. In the case of HP EMW and ND, the HP coordinator for all

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OPs has designed a set of measurable indicators and separately a set of other data without target values.

Other data refers to data monitored at the level of supported projects that need to be collected but are not of the same nature as the indicators. According to the HP coordinator, these are cross-sectional figures, of which the single reporting at the level of all programmes is important from the point of view of PA objectives and are monitored at the level of all projects. Other data monitoring HP EMW and ND are projected into the following documents:

- Call or calling for submission of a request for a non-repayable financial contribution.
- Appendix Subject matter of the Grant Agreement (Table "Other data at project level").
- Annual and final monitoring report (Table Other data at project level).
- Follow-up monitoring report (Table Other data at project level);
- Scale of Measurable Indicators, section Other data.

Based on HP coordinators' proposal, MA will include among HP indicators those indicators, which help to track the contribution towards meeting HP objectives. The indicators that track the contribution to HP are assigned with a relevance to HP. This allows the HP coordinators to enter the system and work with this data.

When preparing a call/calling in relation to HP related information, MA collaborates with HP coordinators. MA defines compliance with HP as a condition for providing a contribution. HP coordinators are responsible for defining the terms for providing support to ensure the application of the HPs and how to verify them, which is binding for the MA. A more detailed specification of the conditions required to provide the contribution in terms of compliance with HPs in individual calls is set by the HP coordinator, in cooperation with the MA. When preparing a call or calling MA or IB selects those indicators from a set of measurable indicators and other data, that are relevant to the programme, concerned priority axis (PA) and/or investment priority (IP) and are relevant to the eligible activities of the call in question.

MA sends the draft text of the call and the relevant documents for comments. As part of the commenting process, HP administrator assesses the compliance of submitted documents with a valid HP implementation system. The HP application in each project application is assessed under the administrative verification, except for the OP EPA, where it is assessed in the evaluation process, whilst failure to fulfill this condition automatically means disqualification of the application. In the case of HP EMW and ND the project may be either in line with the principle of support or directly targeted at disadvantaged groups. These are mostly ESF interventions targeted to different groups of disadvantaged people, but this may also apply to various investment projects, eg. with an emphasis on barrier-free access.

During the project implementation, HP performance at the project level is monitored as part of project monitoring reports. They include information about HP performance (description of activities, financial indicators, measurable indicators, results, contribution to HP goals). HP coordinators get project-level HP performance data directly from project

monitoring reports in ITMS2014+. These include, in particular, data from the monitoring of measurable indicators that indicate the achievement of objectives.

4.1.1 HP Equality of men and women and non-discrimination

The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (MLSAF SR), the Department of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities, Section of horizontal principles carries out all the activities that are under the authority of coordinator of this HP, provides analytical, evaluation, strategic and legislative activity for the application of horizontal principles of support for equality of men and women and non-discrimination, including accessibility for disabled persons at national level. MLSAF SR is responsible for the state policy in the field of promoting equality between men and women and non-discrimination.

The HP EMW and ND administrator prepares annual reports and final report on HP implementation, showing HP performance of targets for each programme. These reports are the basis for a summary report for the ESIF prepared by the CCA.

For ESIF programmes, the main objective of HP EMW is:

- *to ensure equality of men and women in the labor market and its preparation*

and the main objective of HP ND:

- *to ensure equality of opportunities in the labor market and in the preparation.*

For other ESIF programmes, the main objective of HP EMW is:

- *reducing horizontal and vertical gender segregation in the male and female sectors*

and the main objective of HP ND:

- *ensuring equal opportunities in access and use of infrastructure and services.*

Particular emphasis is required for persons with disabilities for whom it is necessary to create special conditions of accessibility (eg. barrier-free architectural environment, accessible information, etc.), in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which entered into force for the SR on 25 June 2010 . Without the conditions it is not possible to integrate people with disabilities into society and into the working process.

The application of the horizontal principle of equality between men and women and non-discrimination is ensured through possible disqualification of project applications in case of non-compliance with the evaluation and selection process. HP EMW and ND coordinator should also cooperate in the evaluation of ESIF programmes. HP administrator is responsible for and executes evaluation of the ESIF contribution to the implementation and fulfillment of the HP goals.

The implementation system for HP EMW and ND was under revision and update at the time of drafting this final report and, according to respondents' information, it should be modified to "make it more concise and easier". One of the key modifications was the extension of the monitored indicators by so-called other data².

² Other data are statistical and do not have set target values.

The core strategic documents of HP EMW and ND can be the following: The National Strategy on Gender Equality for 2014-2019, the National Action Plan on the Elimination and Prevention of Violence against Women for 2014-2019, the National Programme for the Development of the Living Conditions of Persons with Disabilities for 2014 - 2020, the Strategy for the Integration of the Roma by 2020, The National Active Aging Agenda for 2014-2020, the Partnership Agreement of the Slovak Republic for 2014 - 2020, the ESIF Management System, the HP EMW and ND Implementation System, the Evaluation Plan, the Education Plan and the Communication Strategy.

The progress achieved in HP EMW and ND is not predetermined by any specific set of measurable indicators in the context of strategic objectives. This is neither at national level nor in the context of ESIF programmes at the result level - on the contrary, the set of indicators at the output level is significant. Other data associated with these HPs also measure particularly the outputs. In other words, the achievement of goals is not set by the target values of the indicators, as the coordinator has focused on the outputs at the project level in this programming period.

Given the complexity of gender equality and non-discrimination issue, it would be optimal to use so-called context indicators (listed in Annex 3) to monitor the impact that reflect the macro-level situation and these are regularly monitored by Eurostat, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (EU FRA). Context data illustrate how gender equality and the situation of non-discrimination is developing throughout the society. It is based on the fact that equality between men and women and non-discrimination are the main attributes of the social cohesion, which is the highest political objective of ESIF and EU interventions. The above-mentioned indicators are therefore the most appropriate macro-level tool for assessing whether the impacts of interventions within individual OPs, including the impacts of thousands of individual projects, have helped to achieve this objective. If the value of context indicators improves, it means that the ESIF is most likely positively contributing to the goals of gender equality and non-discrimination in this programming period.

4.1.2 HP Sustainable Development

Analytical, evaluation, strategic and methodological activity for the consistent application of the horizontal principle of SD is provided at the national level by the Deputy Prime Minister's Office of the Slovak Republic for Investments and Informatization (DPMOII SR). The coordinator at the working level is the Department of Cross-sectional priorities.

The main objective of HP SD is *to ensure environmental, social and economic sustainability of growth with particular emphasis on protecting and improving the environment, taking into account the "polluter pays" principle*. In the application of the "polluter pays" principle, two horizontal instruments are used in the SR: i) Integrated pollution prevention and control; and ii) Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). These horizontal instruments are also applied in the context of providing support from the ESIF. On the other hand, however, the experience from the EU countries indicates that a coherent system of different economic instruments (from taxes to incentives) is needed to ensure the implementation of this policy, based on the objectives while optimizing private and social costs.

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According to the latest evaluation of the European Commission from March 2017, there are three major challenges related to the implementation of environmental policy and EU law in Slovakia:

- Improving waste management, in particular increasing recycling, introducing separate waste collection and reducing landfills,
- Improving air quality in critical regions of the country, particularly in urban areas such as Bratislava and Košice, phasing out of harmful brown coal subsidies,
- Improving water management, particularly in terms of infrastructure projects, but also in approaches to agricultural use and landscape maintenance (drainage systems and nitrate pollution as well as forest management) and to more advanced methods of municipal waste water treatment.³

The aim of the measures should be in line with the EU strategic goals to move to a resource-efficient, circulating, environmentally friendly and competitive low carbon economy.

Europe 2020 - Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth priorities fully correspond to the three pillars of the HP SD - economic, environmental and social. Each project contributes to one of the HP SD pillars. Investments from the ESIF should not increase the burden on the environment.

The aim of HP should be to ensure that interventions address the identified key challenges and issues, with synergy effects and eliminating counter-measures. This means that interventions in one area should not generate negative impacts on sustainability in another area.

In order to assess the level of environmental burden, the applicant must submit a final document from the process of assessing the proposed activity in terms of the predicted environmental impacts of the activity, in accordance with the applicable legislation. This may be in the form of an opinion of the competent authority that the proposed activity, or the change of the proposed activity, is not subject to environmental impact assessment or may take the form of a decision (from an inquiry procedure or a final opinion). Similarly, in the case of activities subject to the obligation to issue an integrated permit, the applicant must also submit this authorization. Given the application of the "polluter pays" principle, expenditure on activities related to the fulfillment of the obligations laid down in generally binding legislation on the "polluter pays" principle, is not eligible expenditure⁴. This principle will be taken into account in the conditions for the grant, set out in the call for applications.

The issue of the national strategic document for SD remains open. According to preliminary information, this strategic document - Sustainable Development Study 2015+ should be approved in mid-2017. For the purposes of the report, a preliminary version of the study was used. This strategic document should be approved after approval to secure the HP SD application in the ESIF programmes. At present, the HP SD basic framework and target for ESIF programmes are defined as outlined in the

³ Commission staff working document: *Reviewing the implementation of EU environmental legislation Country Report - SLOVAKIA*. EC Brussels, 3 February 2017, SWD(2017) 58 final.

⁴ The text is in the PA SR for 2014-2020, p. 113, 1.5.3 Sustainable Development.

Implementation System. At EU level, HP SD has been developed in several strategic documents, guidelines and reports (Appendix 6).

According to the upcoming version of the document at national level, the strategy should concentrate on 10 key objectives:

1. *Promote sustainable economic growth through innovation and dematerialisation of production and consumption.*
2. *Promote measures to tackle the problem of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuel consumption.*
3. *Provide access to reliable, sustainable, modern and affordable energy.*
4. *Develop a concept of sustainable mobility based on comprehensive approaches to reducing fossil fuel consumption and changing the mode and scale of transport.*
5. *Ensure food security through sustainable agriculture and promote sustainable forestry.*
6. *Lead up to sustainable use of ecosystems, preserving biodiversity and promoting adaptation measures to climate change.*
7. *Reduce threats and improve the health of the population.*
8. *Reduce inequalities and strengthen economic and social cohesion.*
9. *Ensure productive and decent employment and the development of green jobs.*
10. *Ensure Slovakia's external and internal security, protect key infrastructure and eliminate environmental risks.*

The evaluation was based on the EU strategic materials, EC evaluations, analyzing all relevant national strategies, including the updated National Biodiversity Strategy by 2020, as well as other strategic documents adopted. In 2015, 17 goals for sustainable development were adopted in the UN. It is a development programme for the next 15 years (2015 - 2030), and these objectives should be reflected in development agendas at EU and Member State level as a framework.⁵ The still valid National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Slovak Republic from 2001 was also part of a desk review.

There is a whole range of options for HP SD support - eg. improving participatory implementation and defining key approaches in the waste management, air and energy sectors. The aim should be to move towards a resource-efficient, environmentally friendly and competitive low-carbon economy (Appendix 2). At the same time, it is important that the environmental aspects with social (in particular tackling the problem of poverty, equal opportunities) and economic ones (especially the future of work and patterns of production and consumption) are better aligned with the global sustainable development goals of 2015 - 2030.

⁵ Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

5 Results of analyses based on evaluation questions

5.1 HP Equality of Men and Women and Non-discrimination

Can mechanisms established at the national level (at the level of the Partnership Agreement) effectively promote the implementation of the HP EMW and ND principles in ESIF implementation?

At the national level, a system of mechanisms is in place that has the potential to effectively enforce HP performance. A specific feature of the system is that HP performance directly links the central level (HP coordinator and individual MAs) to the level of projects. This is a strength and, at the same time, the weakness of this system. The conflict between the intent, the logic of interventions and the wider context of the impact on equality between men and women and on non-discrimination must not always be apparent at the project level (eg. when assessing a project). Even with a well-intended and well-designed project that takes HP into consideration, it can sometimes lead to unintended side-effects that may have negative impacts on HP. It is therefore crucial that on-site monitoring of the projects is carried out in a good way and that the potentially problematic aspects of the individual projects can also be identified in the implementation phase. If necessary, real early intervention on the project and its modification will be carried out to meet the goals in line with HP.

What is the effectiveness of the actions taken to support and monitor the implementation of HP EMW and ND principles within the individual operational programmes?

A specific feature of the HP enforcement system is that at the central level, one HP administrator is responsible for the analytical, evaluation, strategic and legislative activity for HP EMW and ND implementation at national level. Its outputs related to the application of HP EMW and ND are binding for each MA.

At the level of individual programmes, the application of HP EMW and ND policies is solved uniformly. The texts in the programmes almost uniformly postulate the application of the EMW and ND principles in all projects (irrespective of their nature) and refer to the need to introduce offset measures and activities aimed at supporting disadvantaged groups. The individual programmes state that the first level of verification, application of the principles of equality between men and women and non-discrimination, as a condition for the provision of assistance, is verification in the project selection process. At the same time, all programmes also refer to so-called disqualification criterion. This means that one of the basic assumptions of project success when applying is meeting the HP criteria set out in the call, otherwise it can not obtain grant. The disqualification criterion applies to the process of selecting and evaluating projects, and to the process of implementation itself. If an on-site financial control detects violation of the HP EMW and ND terms and conditions, the disqualification criterion may also be applied.

Due to the fact that the monitoring system directly relates to the project level, it will be of the utmost importance to create conditions for quality and qualified monitoring of the project implementation. The application of HP EMW and ND in individual programmes and its monitoring is summarized in Appendix 4. Monitoring at the local (project) level, as well as answering the question of the effectiveness of HP policy enforcement measures, is seen as absolutely crucial. In other words, the measures taken to support

and monitor HP application will be as effective as the monitoring of projects will be of high quality. In the next phase of the implementation of the ESIF projects, it will be necessary to provide sufficient staffing capacities for project monitoring (sufficient number) as well as sufficient skills and qualifications for workers and monitoring staff. At present, the system includes hundreds of indicators in all ESIF programmes. However, the hierarchy of selected indicators does not fully reflect the objectives set for HPs but often follows the intervention logic in the concerned programme. This means that even with so many indicators, which are almost exclusively output indicators, it is not possible to monitor the fulfilment of HP goals. The quality of some indicators also shows some reserves in terms of relevance to HP (Appendix 7).

To what extent has the implementation of interventions supported by the ESIF contributed to the fulfilment of the objectives set out in the national strategy document for HP EMW and ND?

As of 31 December 2016, it is not possible to monitor the fulfilment of the objectives given the very early stage of implementation of the ESIF programmes. It is clear from the character of individual programmes that some of them, or only their specific priority axes, are more relevant to HP's performance than others. Among the most relevant OPs are: the OP Human Resources (OP HR), the Integrated Regional OP (IROP), the Operational Programme Research and Innovation (OP R&I), the Operational Programme Integrated Infrastructure (OP II) and the Operational Programme Effective Public Administration (OP EPA). In these cases, monitoring of selected indicators that are genuinely relevant to HP EMW and ND is justified and should be consistent with HP goals.

The Managing authorities or Intermediary Bodies and the coordinator of HP EMW and ND have conducted intensive communication, which also focused on the so-called other data. Nowadays, it is still working to incorporate this data into ITMS2014+, and the intent of stakeholders is to exclude any double data entry and allow existing data (e.g. data from a participant's card) to be processed for the coordinator.

MAs and IBs are not fully identified with monitoring other data proposed by HP EMW and ND administrator. While monitoring itself has not yet begun, it is now clear that a system of monitoring and collecting all data will require a considerable amount of time and staff. It is necessary to appreciate the very pedant work of the coordinator and the effort to map a wide range of information and data. However, the basic set-up of the monitoring system shows that the number of indicators at the programme level is relatively high and binds to all components (priority axes, investment priorities or priorities and focus areas) of the programmes. This fact relates to two questions that are crucial to setting up a system:

- The first one concerns the future processing and use of monitored data (also based on past experience from the previous programming period 2007 - 2013). The intention to collect a large number of detailed indicators is ambitious as it assumes that such a large database will be fully exploited. It needs to be decided whether it is better to work with a significantly less number of indicators and data when setting up the system. Evaluations from the previous programming period 2007 - 2013 can serve as useful guidance for identifying which data (of what type) have been applied in analyses and evaluations and which data were missing for analyses; as well as what data were inappropriate, redundant or never used.

— The second question concerns the fact that the current system mainly works with input and output indicators. In order to assess the achievement of objectives, however, results indicators are crucial, and impact indicators are important in the context of impacts, often at the macro level. However, current HP indicators were not determined by the intervention logic and objectives set out in the Implementation System, but they take over the existing indicators that copy the intervention logic of the individual ESIF programmes. In such a setting, it is difficult to identify indicators that will simultaneously measure both the achievement of HP goals and the objectives of the relevant programme (or specific investment priority objectives) that are significantly different. Therefore, measurable indicators are relevant only at the level of outputs, because setting out performance indicators, that take into account HP and also the programme goals, is extremely challenging.

Therefore, monitoring of HP results at the level of all ESIF programmes, implemented through contextual macro indicators (data collected by Eurostat, EIGE, EU FRA), broken down by gender and sorted into time series, will be irreplaceable in the next stage of the 2014 - 2020 programming period. It is provisionally possible to consider for this purpose a selection from the indicators summarized in Appendix 3.

5.2 HP Sustainable Development

Can mechanisms established at the national level (at the level of the Partnership Agreement) effectively promote the implementation of the HP SD principles in ESIF implementation?

While technically the system as defined in the Implementation System is functionally set up, there are three sets of issues that are linked to the effectiveness of mechanisms set up at the national level to effectively enforce / apply the HP SD policy when implementing the ESIF:

- The problem of defining and practical identification of sustainable solutions,
- Implementation of HP SD in the upcoming calls and project evaluation process,
- HP administrator's capacity.

The problem of defining and practical identification of sustainable solutions is linked to the very wide scope of this horizontal priority, which is to try to make the three complicated areas of economic, social and environmental factors a symbiosis. While there is a framework for global UN objectives and EU-Slovak documents, the conflict between the intent and the logic of intervention and the wider contextual implications for sustainability, may not always be clear. Sometimes, there is a sudden development of support for one area (for example, renewable energy sources), unplanned social, or environmental effects. Therefore, it is crucial that information about such infiltrations be timely incorporated into the system. By means of early identification of potentially problematic areas, through feedback, these could be taken into account in the continuation of interventions.

Implementing HP SD in the upcoming calls and in the process of project evaluation requires managers working on preparation and evaluation of calls and projects to be very familiar with the HP. According to the PA, the authority responsible for the implementation of HP SD should provide educational and training activities for the

implementation of sustainable development to the entities involved in the implementation of the ESIF, the relevant socio-economic partners as well as the evaluators of the applications.

The above mentioned areas are closely related to the problem of HP coordinator's capacities. The PA has mentioned this issue and it argues that an effective and efficient implementation of the horizontal principle of sustainable development will need to be increased at national level, or optimize the number of employees who will ensure the performance of the listed activities. The competent representatives of DPMOII SR for the application of the horizontal principle of sustainable development, according to PA, should be represented in all monitoring committees and working groups for the preparation and implementation of programmes under the ESIF. These tasks are not corresponding to the HP administrator's staff, and this will be hot issue soon as the implementation process intensifies.

What is the effectiveness of the actions taken to support and monitor the implementation of HP SD principles within the individual operational programmes?

When analysing the individual programmes of the ESIF, the emphasis is put on HP SD. On the other hand, the OP texts themselves are mainly aimed at defining the framework for the implementation of interventions and it is therefore necessary to fully monitor the overall benefits of the programme and the individual projects in the implementation process. This is not always easy to identify in practice. The synergic effects of projects supported by different OPs may have positive but also negative impacts on sustainable growth. The description of HP SD ensurance at the programme level is summarized in Appendix 6. HP SD implementation is planned in all programmes, mainly at the project level, and should be ensured through assessment in the project selection process as well as during project implementation monitoring and control.

Technical cooperation and coordination are described functionally and the MA for each programme is intended to provide the body responsible for applying HP SD with information on the contribution to the HP goals. This should be done mainly by evaluation of monitoring reports and on-site checks at regular time intervals.

Within the synergies between the programmes, there are detailed systems of mutual coordination described. E.g. between OP Integrated Infrastructure (OP II) and RDP, or OP Efficient Public Administration (OP EPA). These coordination systems are geared to spatial and technical coordination, but these and similar coordination mechanisms could also be used to address potential discrepancies in the HP SD performance.

Coordinated HP SD approach, intersecting multiple priority axes/investment priorities/measures or projects of individual operational programmes, should strategically evaluate synergies and potential problems. Based on an analysis of planned actions, it is possible to identify several areas in individual programmes or calls where priorities may be in possible conflicts with HP SD:

- **Support for Renewable Energy Sources (RES):** Support for RES can create problems for sustainable management of natural resources and biodiversity protection. Large-scale biomass incinerators increase the cost of chips and lead to the burning of better wood. Small hydropower plants, biogas facilities and other small sources, built on economic calculations, need to be better coordinated with environmental and social factors. In line with the framework approach outlined in

the PA, it is needed in the project evaluation and selection process to establish sustainability criteria for the use of biomass, in line with the recommendations of the Commission Report to the Council and the European Parliament on sustainability requirements for the use of solid and gaseous biomass sources for production of electricity, heat and cold.⁶ The perspective area of RES is biogas, but it is currently focused primarily on the processing of maize silage, which is estimated to be processed up to 50 %.⁷ The challenge is to look for sustainable solutions in linking RDI objectives, climate change and natural resource and waste management (mainly municipal). The amended Waste Act (79/2015) imposes an obligation on each municipality and city to process biodegradable waste and the use of biogas is an alternative. Further development may be in response to current changes in national legislation on smell trapping, which may have a negative impact on support for this type of RES.

- **Adaptation to Climate change / Flood protection measures:** Balancing technical measures against floods with agro-environmental measures for water retention in the country or promoting more resilient and labor-intensive organic food can create new employment opportunities, especially in rural areas.
- **Tourism Industry and Biodiversity Conservation:** Support for infrastructure and services in the tourism can adversely affect biodiversity. In order to further support investment activities, it is therefore important to harmonize the development of the activities supported in the individual programmes.
- **Investments in Integrated Infrastructure:** Investments in transport infrastructure can have an impact on soil protection, biodiversity (fragmentation of land) and increased transport emissions. Slovakia has reserves in the implementation of activities aimed at developing sustainable mobility compared to the most advanced EU member countries.
- **Labor market:** Investing in new technologies, increasing efficiency and performance of industry, informatization of state administration, transition to new ways of heating, etc. have large positive impacts on the environment, cost and efficiency of the private and public sectors. On the other hand, they often reduce the need for workforce. Coordination between measures in each programme should balance these side effects. A specific area, which is underdeveloped, is a coordinated approach in support of the so-called "green" jobs.

The key concept, which is developed in individual ESIF programmes and has the potential to support HP SD, is an integrated approach to territorial development. In its context, it is community-led local development, integrated measures for sustainable urban development and regional territorial strategies whose coordination and management are key to their final effects. It is also important to coordinate the sequence of implemented interventions, eg. prior to supporting individual projects in a particular local government or territory, it would be appropriate to first develop low-carbon strategies / Sustainable Energy Action Plans.

⁶ Furthermore, there are measures to limit the production of solid pollutant emissions and minimize negative impacts on air quality (eg. support for low emission facilities).

⁷ Silage, which was originally intended for cattle fattening, rises in price, which adversely affects cattle breeding and feed prices.

Among the HP SD implementation tools, the most commonly mentioned is the "polluter pays" principle, which is theoretically well developed in Slovakia, but there is a lack of better implementation support. A key challenge is first and foremost to analyse the effectiveness and potential of applied and potentially applicable economic instruments to protect the environment. There are many examples of good practice from EU countries and are developed by OECD methodologies to assess their potential in a given socio-economic context. The aim should be to optimize and reconcile the use of different economic instruments to protect the environment in order to achieve the results for optimal costs. The challenge is green public procurement, which is stated in a declarative manner, but a wider application is missing. A less analysed and exploited area is the link between Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Green Procurement and Environmental Management Systems (EMS). The option for HP SD support would also be to link the principles of social and green procurement to the development of local economies. The Ministry of the Environment prepared the National Action Plan for Green Public Procurement in the Slovak Republic for 2016 - 2020. The strategic goal is to set green public procurement in Slovak conditions by setting up measures and activities that, within the proactive approach of the relevant institutions, will meet more ambitious Green Public Procurement targets. The Action Plan also clearly defines the concept of "green" contract based on strategic international documents and the well-established green public procurement procedures at national level.⁸ Experience in implementing the plan would need to be analysed to support and develop public procurement as a tool for sustainable development. At the same time, it is necessary to continue adopting methodological guidelines and share good practice examples that would help to increase the use of these instruments.

To what extent has the implementation of interventions supported by the ESFS contributed to the fulfillment of the objectives set out in the national strategy document for HP SD?

Since programmes were at the stage of calls with the minimum number of contracted projects at the time of preparation of the evaluation, it is not possible to fully assess the contribution of the implementation of interventions supported by the ESIF to meet the objectives set out in the national strategic documents for HP SD. However, on the basis of the first outputs and the experiences of the previous programming period, it is possible to identify some risks and options.

First of all, it is necessary to continuously develop the HP SD goals. Coordination on HP SD enforcement should eliminate interventions into areas where the priorities of individual OPs may be in potential conflicts with overall direction for sustainable development. In the second place, the evaluation itself consists of two interrelated aspects:

- How to comprehensively evaluate the fulfillment of the goals set out in the national strategic document for HP SD?
- How has the implementation of interventions supported by the ESIF contributed to the results?

Assessing the implementation of interventions supported by the ESIF and their contribution to meeting the objectives set out in the relevant HP SD strategies and

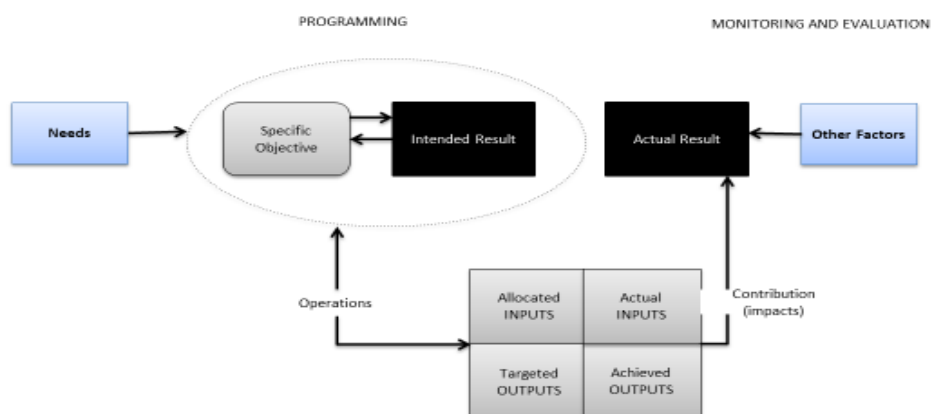
⁸ <http://www.rokovania.sk/Rokovanie.aspx/BodRokovaniaDetail?idMaterial=26092>

documents will require the development of a universal methodology and the evaluation of the benefits of the individual OPs to the HP SD.

In line with the recommended methodology of the European Commission (Figure 2), it is important to identify the actual results of the interventions but also to analyse the results achieved in the context of other factors. In the case of HP SD, this is a context-based assessment of the overall progress of the Slovak Republic towards the defined sustainability goals. The main indicators of the Europe 2020 strategy and other values of the results achieved in the economic, social and environmental fields can be assessed here. The second aspect, i.e. how big proportion of the progress has been achieved as a result of ESIF interventions, is a more complicated issue. It requires identifying, analysing and "filtering" what other factors were affecting the end result. While evaluating the fulfillment of the goals set out in relevant HP SD strategies and documents is primarily the subject of a quantitative assessment of key indicators, context and impact assessment will require a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The indicators listed in Appendix 5 can also serve as inspiration for indicators at the level of results and in the context of long-term impacts.

Also this HP, analogically like HP EMW and ND, monitors a wide range of several hundred cross-sectional indicators across all parts of ESIF programmes. It is therefore appropriate to consider whether this range of data will have some practical use and to simplify the monitoring system solely to collect relevant and used data.

Figure 2 Outputs, results and impacts in the context of programming, monitoring and evaluation



Source: Programming period 2014 - 2020: Guidance document on monitoring and evaluation - European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund—Concepts and Recommendations

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

Answers to the evaluation questions emerged from the above findings, supplemented by the following conclusions and corresponding recommendations.

The HP EMW and ND universal Implementation policies set out in the HP Implementation Systems are in practice implemented without major problems and can be generalized to all ESIF programmes. However, in more detail, several areas have been identified where a change in the system would allow a more efficient use of resources and greater emphasis on objectives in relation to HPs. While from the point of view of the process, given the start of implementation, no major complications have been detected, but the extent and/or the amount of data the system is processing is obviously bigger than necessary.

In particular, the monitoring process appears to be demanding in the current setting, both in terms of time and human resources or staff capacities. To illustrate: OP Research and Innovation has defined 70 measurable indicators in ITMS2014+ of which 23 relevant for HP EMW and ND and HP SD, 2 for HP EMW and 45 for HP SD, OP Human resources has 144 measurable indicators, of which 99 relevant for HP EMW and ND and HP SD, 37 for HP EMW and 8 for HP SD. Project measurable indicators are not divided into output and result indicators. In addition to the indicators, there are another 63 other data defined eg. for TC1 which includes only part of the OP R&I. Implementation systems do not indicate why monitoring of such a number of indicators and other data should be genuinely justified. In addition, most of these data, as confirmed by experience from the previous programming period, most likely will not be further exploited.

In addition to the scope and amount of indicators and other data, their quality is also important. HP indicators should reflect the specific objective of the respective principle. The current number of indicators that are associated, but logically not always related to HP, can not affect meeting HP goals. The goals set out in the HP implementation systems do not have any defined indicators or indicate the intervention logic, which is considered to be the relevant output and result when applying HPs. HPs thus measure meeting their goals by means of indicators based on the intervention logic of each programme and HP is often indirectly related. A relatively large number of indicators should assess both the meeting HP EMW and ND and HP SD objectives, which are problematic in view of the different goals set by each HP. It should be remembered that, despite the fact that HP SD, due to its extraordinary complexity, has some synergies with HP EMW and ND, it does not overlap with them in all aspects.

The process of preparing calls, evaluating project applications and monitoring projects during implementation requires that responsible staff/workers thoroughly know the HP. Due to the rapid development of support for one area, there are unplanned effects in the social or environmental spheres, and the synergies of projects supported from different OPs may have positive or negative impacts on sustainable growth. Therefore, it is crucial that such information is incorporated into the system and that coordination in promoting HPs works, eliminating interventions into areas where the priorities of individual OPs may conflict with the overall direction of HPs. Thus, early identification of potentially problematic, or sometimes controversial situations can prevent different risks and make it possible to better guide the continuation of interventions.

The area of sustainable growth in the context of EU policies is a dynamic objective as it undergoes intense development and the definition of priorities and objectives. The concept of a resource-efficient circulation of the economy will be key to the evaluation of the programming period until 2020, as in the preparation of strategies and objectives for the projected period until 2030. For the HP SG, there is no strategy at national level yet. The development of this strategy is rather lengthy, but it is crucial to provide a framework for sustainable development in the Slovak Republic in the area with such a wide scope. It is expected to define the real priorities and define the main lines that will also be reflected in the application of HPs in the ESIF programmes.

Based on the above, we recommend for all horizontal principles:

- to consider improving the quality of the project implementation monitoring and collect only a few truly relevant indicators that can be used to assess the performance of HP objectives. The HP monitoring system should identify indicators and other data only for those priority areas or investment priorities of programmes where projects that are relevant to the HP are implemented. HP indicators should be set in line with HP goals and should monitor compliance with these goals. Reducing the number of indicators should be carried out under expert supervision and in cooperation with HP administrators to avoid mistakes and subsequent problems in monitoring and evaluation.
- such revised monitoring would have greater potential to provide high-quality data to assess both the planned and unplanned effects of HPs implementation and the fulfillment of their objectives.
- to consider monitoring and data collection in accordance with the above recommendation, i.e. to a less extent, at the level of outputs and results, also through relevant indicators reflecting the objectives of each HP. Monitoring would focus only on those projects that are relevant to HPs, although HPs as such would still apply flatly as a benchmark for all projects in the application evaluation phase.
- to make monitoring more effective and in projects that have completely marginal effects in relation to HPs, minimize or eliminate HP indicators. The impacts of individual projects on gender equality and non-discrimination will be demonstrated in aggregate at the level of context indicators that are statistically monitored at the national level. In assessing the impact of HPs at the level of the ESIF, administrators can select the most appropriate indicators on the basis of national priorities from several existing indicators monitored in the databases of Eurostat, EIGE or the EU FRA. Some of them are also proposed in this evaluation report.
- to strengthen administrative capacities and to support the monitoring process at project level by increasing the number of staff responsible for monitoring where they are lacking, as well as through trainings and further training of workers responsible for this activity. At the same time, to further enhance the expertise and quality of expert outputs in relation to the preparation of the calls. Responsible staff should be further improving their knowledge in relevant issues, whether in the EMW and ND or SD domains. Their expertise should guarantee that the data obtained through the implementation, monitoring or evaluation of the projects will serve to improve the overall management system and to better specify future interventions.

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- outputs from ongoing monitoring should serve as feedback for the continuation of interventions. In this context, the on-site monitoring of project implementation seems to be crucial, not only for the recipient of a non-repayable financial contribution, but also for the target groups (natural or legal entities) affected by the project. This will allow timely identification of both problematic and unplanned side effects. In the event of non-compliance with HP objectives, a remedy, in the extreme case and where possible, a sanction mechanism could be introduced during the project implementation. At the same time, such effects could be corrected or eliminated by adjusting conditions in other calls.

For HP SD we recommend:

- to finalize and approve the strategic reference framework for the HP SD implementation and its better set-up as soon as possible. At the same time, the development of framework strategies at EU level (circular economy) and Slovak level (new environmental policy and low carbon strategy) should be monitored and the Cohesion Policy and HP objectives to be coordinated with strategic objectives at the national level.
- to further develop a methodology to monitor the contribution of individual OPs to HP SD, which will be important for evaluating the implementation of ESIF interventions in relation to the fulfillment of the objectives set out in relevant HP SD strategies and documents. In line with the recommendations of the European Commission, it is crucial to identify the actual results of the interventions but also to analyse the results achieved in the context of other factors.
- to continually assess the contribution of the implementation of interventions supported by the ESIF to meet the objectives set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy and its follow-up national strategic documents relevant to HP SD.
- in a comprehensive HP SD evaluation, to determine 10 thematic indicators as defined for this area by the EU and monitored by Eurostat (Socio-Economic Development, Social Inclusion, Demographic Change, Public Health, Climate Change and Energy, Sustainable Transport, Natural Resources, Global Partnership, Good Governance). In each of these topics, a system should be developed to evaluate the overall contribution of the ESIF to the identified values of the individual indicators and how to evaluate the contribution of interventions for HP SD.
- to enhance the exchange of information between programmes that may have synergy effects on sustainable development in order to early identify potential areas of conflict important for HP SD implementation. The exchange of information should lead to recommendations for strengthening positive synergies (eg. between measures in the circular economy and job creation) and addressing problem areas (eg. the need to reduce household energy consumption and the lack of co-financing for low income households) to support the potential of coordinated and self-supporting measures in the context of territorial development.
- support the potential of coordinated and follow-up measures in the context of territorial development. Through exchange of information and sharing good practice examples, support strategic approaches using local low carbon



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strategies, participatory approaches and the use of available but less widely used instruments, such as social and green public procurement, notably taking into account the adopted Green Public Procurement Action Plan in the Slovak Republic for 2016-2020.