

## EFFECTIVENESS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF EU COHESION POLICY IN SLOVENIA

**Andreja Podpeskar**

**Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, Ljubljana, Slovenia**

*andreja.podpeskar@gmail.com*

**Vito Bobek**, Full Professor

**University of Applied Sciences FH Joanneum, Graz, Austria**

*vito.bobek@fh-joanneum.at*

**Monika Kirbiš Rojs**, Chief Director,

**Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy**

*monika.kirbis@gmail.com*

**Tatjana Horvat**, Associate Professor

**University of Primorska, Faculty of Management, Koper, Slovenia**

*tatjana.horvat@fm-kp.si*

**Abstract.** EU Cohesion Policy is one of the principal investment policies in Slovenia. It aims to support harmonious development throughout the EU. Technical Assistance is used for the effective management of ESI Funds. Its goal is to support institutional strengthening and administrative capacity building for effective implementation of the Operational Programme. Technical Assistance measures strengthen human resources' qualifications, which helps improve the use of Cohesion Policy funds. This research focuses on the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy (GODC) staff, examining their level of motivation for further professional development. First, it includes a descriptive method and examines a body of literature. It explains the concept of EU Cohesion Policy, describes GODC, outlines a set of motivating factors, and investigates the role of education and training. The empirical part applies a quantitative research method, an online survey investigating what the staff thinks about further education and training and what motivates them to pursue professional development. The information will shape future decisions concerning the professional development of staff. The results show that the staff is highly motivated to participate in education and training programs. They cite personal development and the desire to stay on top of developments in their area as the most important motivating factors. Career opportunities and keeping a job are the third and fourth motivating factors. Competition with co-workers, benefits and higher pay are less critical motivating factors.

**Key words:** EU Cohesion Policy, Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, motivation, education, training.

## ЭФФЕКТИВНОСТЬ РЕАЛИЗАЦИИ ПОЛИТИКИ СПЛОЧЕНИЯ ЕС В СЛОВЕНИИ

**Андреа Подпескар**

**Правительственное управление по вопросам развития и европейской политики сплочения,**

**Любляна, Словения**

*andreja.podpeskar@gmail.com*

**Вито Бобек**, профессор

**Университет прикладных наук ФН Иоаннеум, Грац, Австрия**

*vito.bobek@fh-joanneum.at*

**Моника Кирбиш Ройс**, главный директор

**Государственное управление по вопросам развития и европейской политики сплочения**

*monika.kirbis@gmail.com*

**Татьяна Хорват**, доцент

**Приморский университет, Факультет менеджмента, Копер, Словения**

*tatjana.horvat@fm-kp.si*

**Аннотация.** Политика сплочения ЕС является одной из основных инвестиционных стратегий в Словении. Она направлена на поддержку гармоничного развития на всей территории ЕС. Техническая помощь используется для эффективного управления средствами ESI. Его цель состоит в поддержке институционального укрепления и наращивания административного потенциала для эффективного осуществления Оперативной программы. Меры технической помощи повышают

квалификацию людских ресурсов, что помогает улучшить использование средств Политики сплочения. Это исследование посвящено сотрудникам Государственного управления по развитию и европейской политике сплочения (GODC), изучающим их уровень мотивации к дальнейшему профессиональному развитию. Во-первых, он включает в себя описательный метод и рассматривает большой объем литературы. В нем объясняется концепция политики сплочения ЕС, описывается GODC, излагается набор мотивирующих факторов и исследуется роль образования и профессиональной подготовки. В эмпирической части применяется количественный метод исследования - онлайн-опрос, в ходе которого выясняется, что сотрудники думают о дальнейшем образовании и профессиональной подготовке и что мотивирует их стремиться к профессиональному развитию. Эта информация будет определять будущие решения, касающиеся профессионального развития персонала. Результаты показывают, что персонал высоко мотивирован к участию в образовательных и обучающих программах. Они называют личностное развитие и желание быть в курсе событий в своей области в качестве наиболее важных мотивирующих факторов. Возможности карьерного роста и сохранение работы являются третьим и четвертым мотивирующими факторами. Конкуренция с коллегами, льготы и более высокая заработная плата являются менее важными мотивирующими факторами.

**Ключевые слова:** Политика сплочения ЕС, Правительствоственное управление по развитию и Европейская политика сплочения, мотивация, образование, обучение.

## Introduction

In implementing the European cohesion policy, we are talking about many financial resources, especially after the economic crisis in 2008, there was a need for the legitimacy of the use of public funds. Transparency and the achievement of clear and measurable results or effects are needed. Several factors influence the successful and efficient use of resources or absorption capacity. An essential factor is an administrative capacity, as it represents several elements, such as institutional arrangements, staff training, availability of instructions and guidelines, experience, and the like.

A technical assistance measure is intended for more efficient management of European funds. Technical support aims to improve the capacity of participating bodies and beneficiaries in the system. In the new programming period, the measure is called technical support. The Technical Support measure is described in Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013 (Ur. L. EU, št. L 347/320). At the initiative of the Commission, technical support of up to 0.35% of the annual allocation may be financed.

Technical support is intended for measures for the effective implementation of the OP, and special attention is encouraged in problematic and still relatively unknown areas. They are defined in the substantive priority axes and are crucial for achieving the objectives (Operational Program for the Implementation of European Cohesion Policy 2014-2020, 2015, p. 225).

The following activities can be financed through technical support (Operational Program for the Implementation of European Cohesion Policy in the Period 2014-2020, 2015, p. 227):

- employment;
- education and training;
- studies and evaluation;
- operation of the information system;
- informing the public;
- other support activities include rental of premises, computer equipment, organization of events, and the like.

The purpose of the research is, based on Fromm's motivational theory, to analyze and study the motivational factors for education and to determine how and in what way to increase the motivation for the education of employees at GODC. In the research, we presented how the field of employee education is regulated at GODC; we found out the attitude of employees towards education and what encourages or hinders them in education. The findings allow us to lay new foundations for the education system.

## Research question, methods of work, and research approach

The goals of the research are:

- gather and examine sources and literature based on which the concepts of European cohesion policy, essential elements, and objectives, motivation, learning, education, and training can be presented;
- present the organization and operation of GODC;
- use an online survey to research the attitudes of employees towards education at GODC;
- identify the factors that motivate employees for education;
- based on the data from the research, we confirmed or refuted the set hypotheses;
- check whether employees can be roughly divided into two groups in the case of motivation for education ("have-to-be");
- make recommendations on how to improve existing practice in the field of employee education.

We first collected and then examined primary and secondary sources in the study, which we then descriptively summarized. Historical analysis was also included in the comparison of programming periods.

Using the collection method, we also reviewed the characteristics of European cohesion policy, partially reviewed and selected domestic and foreign literature connected with motivation, education, and training. With the collected literature and a review of the current research work, it was easier to define the research topic and get a broader overview of the research area.

In the empirical part of the research, with the help of a quantitative research method, an online survey, we tried to collect data on education and motivational factors among all employees. We then analyzed and presented a survey of motivation for the education and training of employees at GODC.

We first asked ourselves a research question:

What is the attitude of employees towards education, and what is the motivation for education at the managing authority responsible for the effective and correct implementation of European cohesion policy?

With the help of hypotheses, we tried to answer the research question.

- Hypothesis 1: Professional training is generally essential for GODC employees.
- Hypothesis 2: Employees with a lower title are more easily motivated for education with material tools (according to Fromm, "to have"), while employees with a higher title are more easily motivated with intangible tools (according to Fromm "to be").
- Hypothesis 3: Part-time employees are more motivated to train with material tools, while longer-term employees are more motivated to train with intangible tools.

### **Technical Assistance**

Technical support represents three specific priority axes in the Operational Program, namely one for each fund. Technical support ensures more effective delivery of objectives related to the substantive priority axes (Operational Program for the Implementation of European Cohesion Policy 2014-2020, 2015, pp. 225-227).

The specific objectives of the priority axes of technical support that we want to achieve are (Operational Program for the Implementation of European Cohesion Policy in the period 2014-2020, 2015, pp. 225-227):

- Effective implementation of the OP - suitably qualified staff, improvement of the management, implementation, and control system.
- Increased capacity of beneficiaries - greater administrative capacity. They are divided into individual strands for employment, education, training, capacity building for better management, studies and evaluation, and other bases, analyzes, strategic programming documents, the development and maintenance of the information system, and other support activities.

In the 2014-2020 programming period, technical assistance funds are mainly used to finance administrative capacity for management and control entities. The funds are also intended for activities to reduce the administrative burden for all those involved in implementing European cohesion policy. It also ensures more efficient management and use of funds.

The indicator of results for training, defined in the Operational Program, envisages the percentage of employees from technical support funds and the average number of days of employees from technical support funds allocated per year for training. The indicators appeared for the first time in this programming period and need to be implemented every year. To this end, a training plan for 2014-2020 was prepared (Operational Program for the Implementation of European Cohesion Policy in the period 2014-2020, 2015, p. 227).

Each fund has its priority axis. It is financed by the Cohesion Fund, which covers Slovenia, and the ERDF and the ESF are divided into two regions, namely the Eastern Cohesion Region and the Western Cohesion Region. The level of co-financing varies depending on the fund (Operational Program for the Implementation of European Cohesion Policy in the period 2014-2020, 2015, p. 227):

- The Cohesion Fund is divided into the EU part (85%) and the Slovenian part (15%);
- The ERDF is divided into Eastern Slovenia (82.23%) and Western Slovenia (17.77%), and each region is further divided into the EU part (80%) and the Slovenian part (20%);
- The ESF is divided into Eastern Slovenia (70.5%), and Western Slovenia (29.5%), and each region is further divided into the EU part (80%) and the Slovenian part (20%).

The following stakeholders are involved in the implementation of technical support:

1. The governing body of the MA is the Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Development and European Cohesion Policy.
2. Intermediate bodies of the PO - are the ministries defined in Article 10 of the SLO Decree, where their tasks are also defined.
3. Beneficiaries - these are the Management and Supervision Body (MA, Certification Body, Audit Authority), intermediary bodies, and executive bodies (these are: the Public Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship, Innovation, Development, Investment and Tourism, the Public Fund of the Republic of Slovenia for Entrepreneurship, the Employment Service of Slovenia and the Public Scholarship, Development, Disability, and Maintenance Fund of the Republic of Slovenia) (Instructions of the Managing Authority for the implementation of technical support of the European Cohesion Policy Operational Program for the programming period 2014-2020, 2019, pp. 11-12).

The following activities are financed from technical support (Instructions of the Managing Authority for the implementation of technical support of the Operational Program of European Cohesion Policy for the programming period 2014-2020, 2019, p. 13):

- employment,
- education and training,
- studies and evaluation,
- information systems activities,
- informing the public,
- other support activities (rentals, purchase of computer equipment, organization of events, etc.).

As the 2014-2020 programming period does not focus only on drawing funds but is results-oriented, there is a strong emphasis on the prescribed indicators. The critical integration element between the EQF and the survey of employees' attitudes towards education are the indicators on technical Assistance related to training defined in the IP (share of employees in training and an average number of days per year when they are trained). Implementation of technical support of the European Cohesion Policy Operational Program for the programming period 2014-2020, 2019, p. 13).

Education and training are necessary to achieve results or goals, and we will try to determine what attitude employees have towards education or how to motivate employees.

### **Training and education at GODC**

The beginnings of motivational theories can be traced back to the time of the Greeks. The modern theories we know today, however, originated after 1930. Motivational theories seek to explain why man works and what factors influence his work.

Some researchers have addressed the question of what causes motivated human actions. They were engaged in studying human needs or their motives, which causes a particular form of behavior in individuals. Content motivational theories have been developed that deal with what stimulates, challenges, initiates new behavior. The most well-known content motivational theories are (Černetič, 2007, p. 223):

- Maslow's motivational theory;
- Herzberger's two-factor theory;
- Adler's ERG theory;
- theory of work characteristics (Hackmann, Oldham);
- Fromm's motivational theory.

The second part of the researchers dealt with how motivational behavior arises; they developed process motivational theories that deal with how to motivate behavior, explore how to encourage changes in behavior, how a particular way of behavior occurs. These theories include (Treven, 1998, p. 113):

- incentive theory;
- expectation theory (Vroom);
- theory of justice - equality (Adams).

One of the specific objectives of Technical Assistance is also the greater capacity of beneficiaries, greater administrative capacity. TP funds are intended for raising administrative capacity to improve employees' competencies through the implementation of continuous education and training, such as public procurement, computer skills, state aid, accounting, bookkeeping, management checks, exchange of good practices, and the like. Training and education are adapted to different target groups, depending on the topicality of the topic for the smoothest possible implementation of European cohesion policy.

The Rules on Education, Training, and Advanced Training of Civil Servants in the GODC set out the conditions, criteria, and procedures for exercising the rights and obligations of civil servants to education, training, and further training. The employee has the right to education in his interest and the interest of the employer. Education is realized as:

- training related to the employee's work;
- education for obtaining additional education,
- other forms of work-related education,
- education in the field of implementation of cohesion policy,
- knowledge transfer through internal education.

The contract defines education conditions, absences, costs, duration of education, and other essential provisions (Rules on education, training, and education of civil servants in the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, 2014, p. 2).

Every year, an Annual Education, Training, and Development Plan is prepared, which sets out the content of training for employees in European cohesion policy. Criteria and procedures, amount and distribution of funds are also determined. The plan is made taking into account the needs of GODC, based on annual interviews and planned funds. The plan has been prepared following the guidelines of the Public Administration Development Strategy 2015-2020. Most often, employees attend free pieces of training. Paid training can be based on the prescribed requirements of the job (professional exams, protection of personal data, etc.) or for content that is important for acquiring, deepening knowledge in work. However, employees can participate in training organized by the Service as a management body (Plan for education, training, and advanced training of employees in the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy for 2020, 2020).

### **Empirical research**

The online questionnaire was sent via business e-mail, tailored to two target groups, namely all employees through technical Assistance and management, who received a tailored questionnaire with an additional set covering the management's opinion on the situation. Knowledge of employees. To provide an understandable questionnaire, we pre-tested it with the loud thinking method. We also tested it on a few technical assistance staff, but not at GODC, but at other ministries.

The questionnaire was created with the 1KA tool, and additional anonymity was ensured by avoiding questions or their combinations, with which it would be possible to determine which employee it is. We called for solving the online questionnaire twice. The second time we thanked everyone who had already solved it and once again asked all those who had not yet solved the questionnaire. The obtained data were then statistically analyzed (frequency distributions, correlations between variables), the results were visually presented, and attempts were made to confirm or reject the hypotheses.

Based on an online survey of all employees in the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, we wanted to obtain data on attitudes towards education and motivational factors. The online questionnaire was adapted for two target groups, namely for all employees and management staff. A questionnaire for employees was sent to 180 addresses, and a questionnaire for superiors was sent to 18 addresses. The questionnaire for employees was answered in whole or in part by 99 people, which means 55% of all those invited, and the questionnaire for superiors was completed by 11 people, which means 61% of those invited. The questionnaire for management staff has a customized questionnaire with an additional set that covers the opinion of management on the situation of employees. There were 19 questions on the online questionnaire and seven more questions for superiors. Since most of the questions for employees and superiors were the same, in data processing, we will first describe the results of employees and compare them with superiors. In particular, we will look at the results of special additional questions for superiors.

## Research discussion

The data obtained from the online survey were statistically analyzed (frequency distributions, correlations between variables), and we tried to answer the research question and confirm or reject the hypotheses.

- Hypothesis 1: Professional training is generally essential for GODC employees. We checked how vital education is to employees. 69% of them think this is very important, 27% is essential, only 4% of employees could not decide. The hypothesis is confirmed.
- Hypothesis 2: Employees with a lower title are more easily motivated for education with material tools (according to Fromm, "to have"), while employees with a higher title are more easily motivated with intangible tools (according to Fromm "to be").

The next question we are interested in relates to employee motivation by title. We chose two factors, namely a higher salary, which according to Fromm, represents "having" and the opposite factor - promotion in titles, which according to Fromm, represents "being." There are fewer employees at GODC with a lower title than with higher ones, we selected professional technical staff and consultants for the lower ones, and undersecretaries and secretaries are employed with higher titles. Five employees in the professional and technical positions opted for a higher salary as a factor that influences or strongly influences education. Only two employees say that this does not affect or does not affect at all (out of a total of 8 employees in the professional and technical position). 2 counselors decided that the high salary does not or does not affect at all, and also two employees say that they have a substantial impact or influence (out of a total of 5 employees in the position of a counselor). For lower-ranking employees, the hypothesis could be confirmed. However, it is very similar if we look at employees in a higher position, such as Undersecretary and secretary. 11 undersecretaries believe that a higher salary does not affect at all or does not affect a higher motivation for education. By contrast, 18 undersecretaries agree that a higher salary has a more significant impact on motivation for education. It is similar to secretaries. Eight of them believe that a higher salary has no or no effect on education, and seven secretaries think the opposite.

The promotion factor in the titles, however, was checked with undersecretaries and secretaries. Ten employees with the title of Undersecretary consider that promotion in titles does not or does not affect at all, while 15 of them consider that they affect or greatly influence (out of a total of 31 Undersecretaries who answered this question). Among the secretaries, seven believe that they do not affect or affect education at all, and seven secretaries believe that this affects or greatly influences education (out of 18 secretaries who participated in the survey).

For higher-ranking employees, this hypothesis could be confirmed. However, if we look at employees in lower positions, it is again very similar. 4 employees in the professional and technical position and the consultant believe that promotion in titles does not affect or does not affect the motivation for education. On the other hand, seven employees in lower positions believe that promotion in titles effects or significantly affects the motivation for education.

The analysis results do not allow us either explicit confirmation or rejection because both employees in lower and higher positions believe that higher salary and promotion in titles increase motivation for education.

- Hypothesis 3: Part-time employees are more motivated to train with material tools, while longer-term employees are more motivated to train with intangible tools.

In the following hypothesis, we tested employees who have been employed in the field of EKP for up to 10 years and over ten years. We again took a higher salary for the tangible tool and the intangible, promotion to titles.

The factor of higher salary for 15 employees with a length of Service of less than ten years represents that it has no or no influence. For 17 employees who have been working for EKP for up to 10 years, it impacts or has much influence.

In the case of employees with shorter working lives, up to 10 years, it is easier to motivate them for education with material tools. The hypothesis for part-time employees can be confirmed.

Fifteen employees over the age of 10 consider the promotion in the title to be a factor that does not affect or influence education at all. Twenty-three employees, however, believe that promotion in titles has an impact and has a substantial impact on education.

Even with employees with longer working lives, we can confirm that they are more motivated to learn by intangible tools. We fully confirm the hypothesis.

Finally, we will answer the research question: What is the attitude of employees towards education, and what is the motivation for education at the managing authority responsible for the effective and correct implementation of European cohesion policy?

The analysis of our survey shows that employees have a high level of motivation for education. As many as 67% are highly motivated or motivated for education in the context of employment at GODC. Also, 85% of employees answered that they have a lot or much knowledge. It is similar to the level of qualification, which 77% of employees think they have a lot or a lot of.

The most important factors that motivate employees to education are personal development and the desire to date. New job opportunities and job retention follow them. In contrast, motivation for education is least affected by competition with co-workers, and monetary rewards and higher salaries are not good incentives.

### **Conclusion**

The research itself and the data obtained constitute a significant contribution to GODC in education and training. The analyzes show the importance of education for implementing European cohesion policy, both for employees and superiors. However, we suggest that the satisfaction survey be repeated at least once a year, significantly to determine which skills they need the most.

The implementation of the European cohesion policy requires transparency and the achievement of clear and measurable results or effects. An important factor for more successful absorption capacity is administrative capacity, and part of this is staff training.

The factors that affect the desire and motivation for education are different and not the same for all people. There are mainly subjective factors, which depend mainly on social and cultural circumstances, while objective factors are primarily common. One of the factors that can be considered objective is money or salary. In addition to this factor and related career advancement, there are many other factors. Familiarity with other factors can enable management to create a more productive work environment without significant financial burdens.

Both individuals and leaders could use the results of the research in the organization:

- services would be provided more efficiently and effectively,
- greater self-confidence at work,
- greater motivation to work,
- better climate among employees,
- less patient and related additional burdens,
- facilitating the adoption of change and promoting development,
- greater absorption capacity.

The research results will change the way employees are trained and thus change the way they manage human resources in their organization.

### **Literature and sources**

1. Černetič, M. (2007). Management in sociologija organizacij. Kranj: Založba Moderna organizacija.
2. Načrt izobraževanja, usposabljanja in izpopolnjevanja zaposlenih v Službi Vlade RS za razvoj in evropsko kohezijsko politiko za leto 2020. (2020). Ljubljana: Služba Vlade RS za razvoj in evropsko kohezijsko politiko.
3. Navodila organa upravljanja za izvajanje tehnične podpore operativnega programa evropske kohezijske politike za programsko obdobje 2014–2020. (2019). Ljubljana: Služba Vlade RS za razvoj in evropsko kohezijsko politiko.
4. Operativni program za izvajanje evropske kohezijske politike v obdobju 2014-2020. (2015). Ljubljana: Služba Vlade RS za razvoj in evropsko kohezijsko politiko.
5. Pravilnik o izobraževanju, usposabljanju in izobraževanju javnih uslužbencev v Službi Vlade RS za razvoj in evropsko kohezijsko politiko. (2014). Ljubljana: Služba Vlade RS za razvoj in evropsko kohezijsko politiko.
6. Treven, S. (1998). Management človeških virov. Ljubljana: Gospodarski vestnik.
7. Uredba o skupnih določbah - Uredba (EU) št. 1303/2013 Evropskega parlamenta in Sveta z dne 17. decembra 2013 o skupnih določbah o Evropskem skladu za regionalni razvoj, Evropskem socialnem

skladu, Kohezijskem skladu, Evropskem kmetijskem skladu za razvoj podeželja in Evropskem skladu za pomorstvo in ribištvo, o splošnih določbah o Evropskem skladu za regionalni razvoj, Evropskem socialnem skladu, Kohezijskem skladu in Evropskem skladu za pomorstvo in ribištvo ter o razveljavitvi Uredbe Sveta (ES) št. 1083/2006.