Evaluation brief: *Evaluating the effects of business competitiveness measures (2004-2006) in West Pomerania* (Poland)

Key words: beneficiary surveys, direct and indirect financial support for SMEs, advisory services

1. Introductory information

- An ex-post evaluation of enterprise support instruments in West Pomerania, Poland within the Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP) and the Sectoral Operational Programme 'Improvement of the Competitiveness of Enterprises' (SOP-ICE), during the 2004-2006 programming period.
- The evaluation was commissioned by the Marshal Office of Western Pomerania Voivodeship.
- It was conducted between April and September 2010 with an approximate budget of €57,000.

2. Summary

The EU Structural Fund operational interventions implemented in Poland during the 2004-2006 period included a number of measures aimed at improving business competitiveness and innovation performance, particularly of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). This ex-post evaluation covered seven measures implemented in West Pomerania, Poland during the 2004-2006 period: five measures from the Sectoral Operational Programme 'Improvement of the Competitiveness of Enterprises' (SOP-ICE) and two from the Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP).

The evaluation is an example of an early attempt to assess the effects of Structural Fund interventions in a 'new' Member State provided through a mix of national (sectoral) and regionally managed interventions. Moreover, the evaluation faced the challenge of assessing the impact of a mix of different types of intervention supporting business competitiveness and innovation. The study assessed the impacts of support measures on two main target groups: enterprises and loan and guarantee funds.

The main evaluation questions were as follows:

- Evaluate the results of the two programmes and their sustainability;
- To what extent were the objectives met for the SME support measures within these programmes?
- Evaluate the impact of capital contribution to loan and guarantee funds on their activity and on the enterprises which made use of their offer;
- Identify best practices from the projects undertaken and the scope for adopting such practices more widely in the Regional Operational Programme for West Pomerania for 2007-2013;
- Evaluate the relevance of the Regional Operational Programme (ROP) for West Pomerania for 2007-2013 given the changes to SME competitiveness and innovativeness after the completion of the IROP and the SOP-ICE;
- Make recommendations to the Managing Authority of the ROP for West Pomeranian Region concerning the implementation of Priority I 'Economy – Innovation – Technology'.

The following evaluation methods were used: document and literature analysis, telephone questionnaires with beneficiaries, in-depth interviews with beneficiaries, case studies, interviews with experts and focus groups. While the range of methods used is not specific to evaluation of innovation and entrepreneurship support, the evaluation adopted an approach that triangulated both:

- research techniques: by applying various complementary data collection methods;
- information sources: collecting data from various groups in order to gather diverse information concerning a given topic from persons with different points of view on the analysed issue and/or with a specific range of knowledge.

The evaluation includes a number of positive aspects. The focus of the evaluation was highly relevant given the development priorities of the region and the need to support entrepreneurship and innovativeness. It was the first attempt to sum up results from the previous programming period and draw lessons for support measures implemented in the framework of the Regional Operational Programme (2007-2013). A robust and flexible co-operation between the contractor and the stakeholders enabled a rapid resolution of problems that arose. The adoption of a participatory approach (e.g. focus groups), notably at the stage of drawing conclusions and formulating recommendations, had a positive influence on the utility of the evaluation.

The most significant issues identified by this study were: the timely commissioning and launch of evaluation study; the lack of activity reports and monitoring data; inappropriate use of certain evaluation methods, especially case studies and control groups; and difficulties for stakeholders to accept a common definition of innovation. Other issues included the need to evaluate different target groups and types of activities with different intervention logics; as well as the use of multiple methods, which resulted in the normative part of evaluation being underdeveloped.

The evaluation of business support instruments should adapt methods and approaches to the specific types of support measures. Indeed, it proved difficult to combine in a single evaluation both direct support instruments (such as investment grants for enterprises) and financial engineering support (loan and guarantee funds). Besides that, there is a need for a more systematic and rigorous use of qualitative methods to capture effects on SME competitiveness and innovativeness.

3. Further information

- The full case study may be found at: (url)
- Link to the evaluation study: http://www.rpo.wzp.pl/download/index/biblioteka/5424.
- Link to the Managing Authority that commissioned the evaluation: http://www.um-zachodniopomorskie.pl/.