

# Evaluation practices assessing the impacts of initiatives targeting 25+ NEETs

COUNTRY REPORT – SLOVAKIA

*Slovak Business Agency*

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IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT 'LOST  
MILLENNIALS – TRANSNATIONAL RESEARCH  
NETWORK FOR THE EVALUATION OF INITIATIVES  
TARGETING 25+ NEETS'

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Project summary:

*The project 'Lost Millennials' focuses on a regularly neglected group of the generation of Millennials: young people aged 25-29 neither in employment or education and training (25+ NEETs). This generation started their working life shortly after the economic crisis of 2008, perceiving uncertainty and lack of security for work and well-being, they are more likely to be inactive or in precarious jobs. The main objective of the project is to contribute to the successful integration of 25+ NEETs to the labour market through increasing knowledge on the effects of employment initiatives on 25+ NEETs, building capacity of stakeholders to perform impact studies and thus improving the quality of labour market interventions. This objective will be achieved through the creation of the transnational research network which will share know-how and good practices, the evaluations of governmental and community-based initiatives targeting 25+ NEETs, as well as the engagement of stakeholders to increase the policy-relevance of project results.*

For more information, please visit our [website](#), contact us on [lm.leadpartner@hetfa.hu](mailto:lm.leadpartner@hetfa.hu) and follow our social media ([Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#)).

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Implemented by:



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## 1. Introduction

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The culture of public policy evaluation has improved significantly in Slovakia in recent years. The pressure from the European Community to carry out different types of evaluations in the context of ESIF-funded policies certainly plays a role. The initiative of the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic in which the establishment of analytical units in individual ministries has been systematically supported since 2014 has also certainly contributed to the cultivation of evaluation culture in Slovakia. These are mutually coordinated (through the so-called Management Committee for Analytical Units) and there are efforts aimed at standardising the processes of their activities (MoF SR, 2020). Academia is also increasingly involved in public policy evaluation. Increasingly, it is possible to observe cooperation between the public administration and academia in carrying out mainly an impact type of evaluation of selected public policies. Impact evaluation of public policies and the use of experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation methods are also increasingly the subject of research initiatives carried out in academia.

The area of employment and support for NEETs in Slovakia falls under the competence of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. Thus, the evaluations and analysis in this area is carried out by the Institute of Social Policy<sup>1</sup>, which is an analytical unit of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. This focuses on evaluating the impact of selected areas of specific public policies or the impact of public policies on specific selected target groups (people from the MRC background, single-parent households, etc.).

The dominant part of the evaluations carried out in the area of employment and NEETs are the result of commitments to the European Community and are related to the use of ESF funds. These evaluations are usually commissioned by the European Funds Section of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, are carried out by external contractors and most often focus on assessing the progress of a selected strategy or programme.

## 2. General information of evaluation practices

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In Slovakia, there are no programmes specifically designed to benefit the 25+ NEETs target group. The latter is integrally incorporated into the general category of NEETs, which is limited by the 29-year age limit. For this reason, there are no evaluation reports that specifically take the target group of 25+ NEETs into account.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.employment.gov.sk/isp/>

The implementation of employment policies for young people (including 25+ NEETs) is carried out through a separate priority axis of the Human Resources Operational Programme called the Youth Employment Initiative. This is co-financed by the European Community and is therefore subject to regular evaluation. Three evaluations of the priority axis have been carried out since 2014 to date (MoLSAF, 2018, 2021, 2021a). All three were commissioned by MoLSAF and were carried out externally. The evaluations were based on the use of statistical analysis, focus groups and interviews. The evaluations carried out in 2021, which were carried out as ex-post evaluations, concluded that the implementation of the programme was rather successful. In all cases, these are standard evaluations, based on a commitment to the European Community. Given the fact that these evaluations are commissioned by the implementer of the measures being evaluated, the degree of objectivity of the evaluations carried out can be debated. The recommendations formulated can also be regarded as rather general.

The evaluations that are more frequently quoted by the professional public come from the academic or social partner environment. Impact evaluation of individual active labour market measures is carried out by the Institute of Economics of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (CV,2014, Lubyová et al, 2015). These evaluations use large statistical samples of participants in individual measures. They are carried out by counterfactual analysis and other quantitative methods of an experimental nature. Due to the absence of data linkage between the evidence of jobseekers and the Social Insurance Institution, the success of the measures is evaluated on the basis of the re-registration of the participant of a particular measure in the register of jobseekers. A limitation of this type of measure is the relative low rate of use in the decision-making sphere. The evaluations carried out also do not specifically focus on assessing the impact of the selected policies/programs/measures on the target group of young people, rather they take into account the effectiveness of the selected policy on the overall group of jobseekers. The only exceptions are evaluations that examine the impact of a measure specifically targeted at young people (e.g., the Graduate Apprenticeship scheme) (Švábová and Kramárová, 2021). However, none of the evaluations specifically consider 25+ NEETs.

Evaluations of public employment policies are also of interest to social partners (Štefánik et al, 2022). However, a limitation from the perspective of Lost Millennials project is its weak emphasis on measures specifically targeting young people or the group of 25+ NEETs. The most recent evaluation carried out focuses on a comprehensive assessment of the set-up and implementation of public employment services and the success of responsive active labour market policy measures.

The quality of the performance of employment services is emphasised by evaluations carried out by the analytical unit of the Ministry of Finance - the Institute of Financial Policy or the Value for Money Unit (UHP, 2020). The strength of these evaluations, in addition to their relatively high recognition rate, is the

perception of the issue in the broader context of current social policy. However, it is difficult to see these evaluations as evaluating a specific policy aimed at improving the situation of 25+ NEETs.

### 3. Characteristics of evaluation practices

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As mentioned above, the evaluations carried out in Slovakia can be divided into three main categories.

The first category is those evaluations which are the result of commitments to the European Community. These are evaluations of the progress of the implementation of an operational programme, a specific priority axis or a specific strategy. These evaluations are externally commissioned by MoLSAF, which may affect the degree of the independency and objectivity of the individual findings. These evaluations are perceived by the professional public as technical reports, the implementation of which is mandatory. However, they are not usually documents that are significantly cited.

The second category is evaluations carried out in an academic setting. Here the emphasis is on impact evaluations. These usually use highly expert, mostly quantitative, evaluation methods. Evaluations use large datasets of administrative data. The outputs of evaluations are often published internationally in scientific journals, and the quality of evaluations is usually very good. However, a limitation is the limited linkage with the decision-making sphere, which manifests itself in the limited use of findings in policy-making.

The third category is evaluations carried out by the social partners or by the Ministry of Finance (which carries out evaluations of a wide range of sectoral policies). In the case of these category of evaluations, it is usually an evaluation combining qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods, carried out with the aim of improving public policies. This type of evaluation is usually carried out for a specific purpose and contains a high number of detailed recommendations. This type of evaluation is usually met with a response from the expert community.

In addition to the above categories, one more type of evaluation can be mentioned. This is the evaluation of the application of active labour market measures. This is published by the Slovak Labour, Social Affairs and Family Office on an annual basis. The content of the document is administrative data on the activities of the Labour, Social Affairs and Family Office in the field of employment, which are processed into text. Although it can be debated whether the document shows the basic features of an evaluation, this one offers a lot of valuable data that can be compared year-on-year. The document is an illustration of the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Labour's approach to the evaluation of individual active labour market policy measures, which is usually very flat and the success of individual programmes is often measured by the use of allocated financial resources.

### 3.1 Methodology of evaluation practices

Implemented evaluations often use a spectrum of statistical methods whose level of sophistication varies considerably. These use existing administrative data, and in the case of some evaluations there is also an attempt to combine several datasets of administrative data or to use a control group.

Focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews are frequently used methods as well. In those cases where this is indicated, the number of respondents varies most often between 20-40.

Secondary data processing and desk research are also common methods.

Several evaluations use online surveys. The target groups are usually local labour, social affairs and family offices, ESF beneficiaries, employers or other stakeholder groups. No evaluation could be identified that involved the programme's target group (NEETs) through an online survey. The main argument for not carrying out such an evaluation is the poor access to contacts of individual participants. Based on the data collected on the evaluations that have been carried out, it can also be argued that none of the evaluations carried out so far have taken into account the views of the target group of the programme being evaluated in a meaningful and systematic way.

In the area of employment support, there has also been no evaluation that has described the situation through case studies.

### 3.2 Types of evaluations and their results

The culture of argumentation on the basis of implemented evaluations is significantly improved in the debate. However, political decisions that ignore expert arguments in public policy design remain a problem. The adoption of inappropriate solutions and the reckless pursuit of political agendas is unfortunately not an exception in Slovakia, and it is also frequently found in the field of employment and support for NEETs. Although some of the evaluations carried out are highly respected and the expert debate is based on their findings, these are not always taken into account in the final policy/programme design. It can also be argued that the acceptance of the implementation of evaluations in public policy making varies considerably and is significantly conditioned by the personal assumptions of the responsible policy makers. While in some cases the results of evaluations are fully incorporated into the next generation of programmes, in other cases the results of evaluations are ignored and their implementation is only pro-forma.

The attitude and involvement of international institutions (as EC, e.g., DG EMP) is also an interesting phenomenon. They monitor the content of the evaluations in considerable detail and often incorporate the findings into their recommendations to individual ministries. The implementation of the recommendations is thus often also enforced through international organisations.

The results of evaluations of individual programmes are also conditional on the indicators against which the success of the programme is measured. In the case of active labour market measures, success is usually measured by the number of jobs created and retained. Structural barriers that prevent people from disadvantaged groups from succeeding in the labour market are rarely taken into account. The results of the evaluation of individual labour market measures should therefore be seen in a broader context and the objectives of the evaluation and the formulation of the evaluation questions should be very sensitively considered.

The relatively wide range of recommendations made by evaluations is usually addressed to the quality and performance of public employment services. The recommendations concern both the level of funding, the structure of funding, the segmentation of interventions and the performance itself.

The recommendations of evaluations commissioned by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family for the use of European Structural and Investment Funds usually concern the administrative set-up and flexibility of the programmes. However, the recommendations usually remain at a general level and the programmes are assessed as rather successful.

## 4. Conclusions

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The evaluation of public policies is gradually becoming standard. Public policies in the field of employment and support for NEETs implemented in Slovakia are no exception. While a number of evaluations are carried out thanks to commitments to the European community, evaluations of policies that are not funded by the European Structural and Investment Funds are also increasingly being carried out. In these cases, they are most often initiated by academia, ministerial analytical units or the social partners.

Acceptance of the findings of evaluations faces major challenges, but thanks to international pressure and the existence of even high-quality evaluations, the situation is gradually improving.

The problem in implementing highly expert impact evaluations is the weak interconnection of databases between institutions and often the low level of willingness to share existing administrative data at the side of the public authorities. External evaluators do not have access to the codes through which anonymised data on individuals collected by different public institutions can be linked. A limitation is the low level of possibilities to link data collected by labour offices, social security, health insurance, possibly foreclosure records and other datasets. The ability to work with interlinked data would significantly increase the possibilities to carry out highly expert impact evaluations that would take into account the impacts of the programme from different aspects.



Another existing challenge is the limited capacity to carry out evaluations linking multiple public policy areas. Evaluations carried out tend to focus on one specific public policy area (e.g., active labour market measures), while not taking into account other policies that significantly determine the performance of initial policies (e.g., social policy, education, etc.). Intersectionality of the marginalisation of the disadvantaged participants is also heavily overlooked. The implementation of evaluations that look at the issue being evaluated in a broader perspective tends to be the exception.

No less present is the challenge of human capacity, which can be used to the benefit of the implementation of evaluations. Slovakia is a small country that suffers significantly from a lack of available manpower. Areas such as the implementation of evaluations are also significantly affected by the marked trend of young experts leaving the country.

On the other hand, however, positive trends can also be noted. Among the main ones is the systematic building up of analytical units in specific ministries. Analytical units usually retain a significant degree of independence and can often be very critical of the policies implemented by their founder (a particular ministry). However, the problem of internal analytical units is often inadequate staffing (often due to the inability to fill vacancies), which makes the analytical units unable to carry out the desired range of assessments.

Another positive trend is the strengthening of cooperation between ministries and academia in the field of evaluation and the growing public demand for evaluation of public policies.

Despite all the existing challenges and limitations, it can be stated that the application of evaluation culture in Slovakia is gradually improving compared to the past.

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