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## **Supporting rural development from structural funds in new EU member states**

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### **Abstract**

EU Accession has had the most impact on the agricultural sector and rural dwellers' living conditions. Currently the first phase of EU Structural Funds benefits is coming to an end. The objective of this study is to provide an international overview on how to make use of rural development support within the new EU Member States. It also seeks to determine the importance of rural development in national development programmes, and the nature of measures intended to improve the quality of rural life, and whether these can possibly mesh with the objective indicators of agriculture.

### **Keywords**

rural development, structural funds, EAGGF

### **Introduction**

Hungary became an EU Member State on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004. As in most new Member States, the economically and politically important event of EU Accession has affected most the agricultural sector and rural dwellers' living conditions. In the next decade the EU's financing mechanism will be crucially important for agriculture and rural development in terms of development policy, which accentuates this topic's timeliness and importance.

The increasing presence of EU financial assistance programmes has placed development policy and policy evaluation in the forefront. Upon entering the EU, Hungary began to receive EU Structural Funds, but in fact the funds were available half a year earlier, bringing about a new era in Hungarian rural policy.

When establishing regulations for Structural Funds, the European Union set criteria for funding eligibility. Member States are not obliged to apply all the criteria, but they can choose based on the situation analysis and needs assessment.

After studying planning and programming documents for Structural Funds regarding new Member States, attention was turned to analysing these countries' rural development programmes. Pertinent research documents were studied and the following questions raised.

- What is the role and position of rural development within the framework of development policy stated in the respective national development plan of a given country? How much of the total Structural Funds allocated go toward rural development?
- What type of measures were chosen and applied for rural development within each of the national development plans? How do these relate to analysing the situation?
- Furthermore, to what extent were the objective indicators of agriculture taken into account when planning the use of these funds? Do the given countries differ in this regard, and what differences can be observed?

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On May 1, 2004 Hungary was not alone in joining the EU. Among the new entrants were also the Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Fact-finding was carried out based on documents from these seven countries<sup>2</sup> By reason of their history, geographical fundamentals, and economic structure these seven countries provide an appropriate comparison with Hungary. Though New Member states, Cyprus and Malta are not appropriate comparison models as they are small island-countries with substantially different fundamentals.

An international overview allows a more comprehensive study of the Hungarian Operational Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development. It also permits a comparative analysis regarding the different measures taken, as well as locating and pinpointing the best practices in this field.

## **Data and method**

In assessing Hungarian agriculture and rural development measures it is worth presenting an overview of the development plans in other new Member States.

According to Council Regulation 1260/1999 which establishes provisions for the Structural Funds, a basic assistance document can be a National Development Plan or a Single Programming Document, but it should contain a description/summary of measures to be implemented. These documents have been used as a basis in the comparative analysis. However, only those new Member States are included whose experience is relevant and useful to Hungary, meaning continental countries. Therefore for climatic, geographical, and economic reasons Malta and Cyprus are excluded.

### ***Czech Republic***

In terms of Czech agriculture's significance and needs, the Rural Development and Multi-Functional Agriculture operational programme's allocation accounts for 12% of total EU-expenditures.

The OP Rural Development and Multi-Functional Agriculture's strategic objectives are as follows:

1. Rural areas, improving agricultural technical equipment and processing businesses;
2. Improving the marketing of agricultural produce with higher added value and exporting to foreign markets;
3. Consolidating the forest and agricultural ownership structure and promoting multi-sector development in rural areas;
4. Solving rural development social issues by increasing employment, improving the age and education structure, and accessibility of information.

(However it should be noted that 'Revitalization of Rural Areas' priorities are included in the Joint Regional Operational Programme and is co-financed from the European Regional Development Fund.)

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<sup>2</sup> Under 'continental countries' – similarly to the Anglo-Saxon terminology – countries on the European peninsula of the Euro-Asian continent are meant with the exception of the island-countries.

### ***Estonia***

Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development priorities will be implemented through the following measures:

1. Investment in Agricultural Holdings
2. Investment Support for Improving the Processing and Marketing of Agricultural Products
3. Diversification of Economic Activities in Rural Areas
4. Integrated Land Improvement
5. Renovation and Development of Villages
6. Local initiative based Development Projects – LEADER
7. Forestry
8. Support for Setting up and Provision of Farm Advisory and Extension Services
9. Regulating the Fishing Capacity of the Fishing Fleet
10. Modernization and Renewal of the Fishing Fleet
11. Investment support Measures for Fisheries Production Chain
12. Other Fisheries Related Measures

### ***Hungary***

Agricultural policy objectives are designed to increase agricultural production efficiency and to make producers competitive and their market positions more attractive and more secure. The Hungarian Agricultural and Rural Development policy objectives:

- ✓ to improve the competitiveness of agricultural production and food processing;
- ✓ environmentally friendly agricultural development, and rationalization of land use;
- ✓ to promote the realignment of rural areas.

Of the above objectives, the Agriculture and Rural Development Operation Programme (OPARD) only serves to attain the first and third objectives, while environmentally friendly agricultural development and rationalization of land use are included in the National Rural Development Programme containing the accompanying measures financed by the EAGGF Guarantee Section.

On the basis of the strategy, the OPARD objectives are implemented through the following three priorities:

1. Establishment of competitive basic material agricultural production
  - a) Investment in agricultural holdings;
  - b) Modernization of fisheries;
  - c) Support for young farmers;
  - d) Improving conditions for personnel involved in production.
2. Modernization of food processing
3. Development of rural areas
  - a) Enhancement of the range and quality of products and services produced in the countryside;
  - b) Development of infrastructure that creates the basis for sustainable agricultural production and local processing;
  - c) Creation of attractive village conditions, preserving rural heritage;
  - d) LEADER+ programme.

### ***Latvia***

Latvia has a number problems to overcome. Some of these include structural problems in agriculture and product processing, a low level of entrepreneurship in rural areas and insufficient initiative among rural inhabitants. Latvia needs to ensure sustainable rural, agricultural and forestry development and to do this a complex approach towards solving rural problems is necessary. Other rural issues include modernization of agricultural production, soil improvement, competitive processing of agricultural products, creating employment, effective use of natural resources, motivating rural inhabitants and the inclusion of young persons in agricultural production. Another priority is the sustainable utilization of available fish resources to harvest sea and inland fish resources to produce high value added fish products. The hope is for Latvian seafood to be competitive on local and international markets as well as to create opportunities for the acquisition of new market outlets.

In order to achieve the above objectives the priority of the Promotion of Development of Rural Areas and Fisheries has several sub-priorities which are listed below:

1. Promoting Agricultural Development and Rural Areas:
  - a) Investments in Agricultural Holdings;
  - b) Getting Young Farmers Started;
  - c) Improvement in the Processing and Marketing of Agricultural Products;
  - d) Promoting Adaptation and the Development of Rural Areas;
  - e) Forestry Development;
  - f) Developing Local Action (LEADER+ Type Measure);
  - g) Training.
2. Promotion of Sustainable Fisheries Development:
  - a) Adjustment of Fishing Initiatives;
  - b) Fleet Renewal and Modernization of Fishing Vessels;
  - c) Development of Processing and Marketing Fishery and Aquaculture Products, Fishing Port Facilities and Aquaculture;
  - d) Development of the Coastal Fishery, Socio-Economic Measures, Promoting New Market Outlets and Supporting Producer Organizations.

### ***Lithuania***

The Rural and Fisheries Development goals and priorities were based on numerous criteria and objectives. Among these were existing natural resources and residents' traditions, modernizing the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector. These were to be coupled with investment in alternative activities to traditional farming and in economic diversification to help mitigate modernization's negative social and economic consequences in rural and coastal areas.

Seeking to achieve this goal, the following objectives have been set:

1. Creation of competitive EU market-oriented agriculture, encouragement of food safety and development of marketing allowing the more effective use of existing opportunities and to ensure employment in rural areas:
  - a) Investment in Agricultural Holdings;
  - b) Support for Young Farmers;
  - c) Promoting the Adaptation and Development of Rural Areas (Re-parceling activity);
  - d) Improving the Processing and Marketing of Agricultural Products.

2. Diversification of economic activities in rural areas; to help agricultural producers through participation in additional economic activities brought about by fostering biological diversity within the landscape and environment:
  - a) Forestry;
  - b) Promoting the Adaptation and Development of Rural Areas;
  - c) LEADER+ type measure and Training.
3. Creation of a resource-based and market-oriented modern and competitive fisheries sector that complies with EU requirements and lessens the social consequences of restructuring:
  - a) Fishing fleet related actions;
  - b) Protection and development of aquatic resources, fishing port facilities, processing and marketing, and inland fishing;
  - c) Other fisheries related actions.

### ***Poland***

Poland differs from other new Member States in that agriculture and rural development actions are separated into two operational programmes:

1. Operational programme – Restructuring and modernizing the food sector and rural development:
  - a) Support for agricultural changes and adjustments
    - Investments in agricultural holdings;
    - Helping young farmers start new farms;
    - Training;
    - Support for agriculture advisory services;
    - Re-parceling;
    - Agricultural water resources management;
  - b) Sustainable development in rural areas
    - Restoration of rural areas, cultural heritage protection, and preservation;
    - Diversification of agricultural activities and activities related to agriculture to provide multiple activities or alternative incomes
    - Development and improvement of agriculture-related technical infrastructure;
    - Restoring forestry production potential which has been damaged by natural disaster and fire and introducing appropriate preventive measures;
  - c) Development and adjustment to EC standards regarding agricultural products processing
    - Improving processing and marketing of agricultural products.
2. Operational programme – Fisheries and fish processing:
  - a) Adapting fishing investments to resources
    - Scrapping of vessels;
    - Transferring to third countries or re-locating to other types of operations;
    - Joint ventures;

- b) The renovation and modernization of the fishing fleet
  - Construction of new vessels;
  - Modernization of the existing vessels;
  - Withdrawal from service (without public aid) for renovation purposes;
- c) The protection and development of water resources, fish breeding, equipment for fishing harbors, fish processing and marketing, the inland fishery
  - Protection and development of water resources;
  - Fish breeding;
  - Fishing harbor infrastructure;
  - Fish processing and marketing;
  - Inland fishing;
- d) Other activities
  - Coastal fishing;
  - Social and economic activities;
  - Promotion;
  - Organization of market turnover;
  - Temporarily shutting down activity and other financial compensation;
  - Innovation and other initiatives.

### ***Slovakia***

The Slovak National Development Plan's specific objective for increasing the efficiency of agricultural production and the rural population's quality of life directly contributes to all three development axis of their development strategy: economic growth and competitiveness, employment, and well-balanced regional development.

Objectives of the Rural Development and Development of Multi-Functional Agriculture operational programmes are concentrated in 3 priority areas to further investment in agriculture and rural development:

1. Support for productive agriculture
  - investment in agricultural holdings,
  - improving processing and marketing of agricultural products.
2. Support for sustainable rural development
  - Sustainable forest management and forestry development,
  - Fishery,
  - Promoting the adaptation and development of rural areas,
  - Training.
3. Technical assistance

### *Slovenia*

Priorities in terms of restructuring agriculture and rural development are ensuring competitiveness, sustainable use of natural resources, preservation of rural population density and harmonization with community legislation. Strategic objectives will be implemented within the following programmes:

1. Restructuring agriculture
  - a) Improving agricultural structures;
  - b) Modernization of farms;
  - c) Improving organization of agricultural producers.
2. Restructuring of the food processing industry
  - a) Support for the food-processing industry so to promote investment in tangible assets;
  - b) Support for development and organizational activities to improve food-processing industry competitiveness.
3. Rural development
  - a) Developing ancillary activities and related jobs in rural areas;
  - b) Bringing together farmers to further setting up new economic infrastructure for more efficient product marketing;
  - c) Improving rural infrastructure, village renovation, and the protection and preservation of rural heritage;
  - d) Comprehensive preservation of the environment concerning agriculture and forestry, protection of the cultural landscape, and environmentally-friendly animal breeding as well as the interconnected preservation of water resources;
  - e) Diversification of agricultural and non-agricultural activities in order to ensure alternative income in rural areas.
4. Forestry development
  - a) Strengthening the multipurpose role of forests;
  - b) Comprehensive monitoring of the state of forests, sustainable forest management and multiple exploitation;
  - c) Bringing together forest owners to improve management of privately-owned forests;
  - d) Raising public awareness of the importance of forests and forestry.
5. Fisheries development
  - a) Sustainable resource management – fishing grounds;
  - b) Increasing production capacities for freshwater fish farming;
6. Knowledge
  - a) Increasing the education level and vocational qualifications of persons employed on farms;
  - b) Increasing the share of people involved in life-long learning, honing skills, and permanent education and training in rural areas;
  - c) Putting modern scientific findings and new technology into practice in agriculture and food-processing.



## Results and Conclusions

A comparative analysis of EU assistance for agriculture and rural development under the umbrella of Structural Funds explains the similarities and differences from three main viewpoints:

### 1. Financial representation within the total national allocation (Budgeting)

Agriculture and fisheries related investments are financed from both the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) and from the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG).

Rural development is also mainly financed from the EAGGF Guidance Section. However, some countries (such as the Czech Republic and Hungary) have similar initiatives, but with well-separated specifications, and they can be financed from the European Regional Development Fund.

The following chart demonstrates the Structural Funds proportion within the total national allocation for each of the newly acceded beneficiary countries:

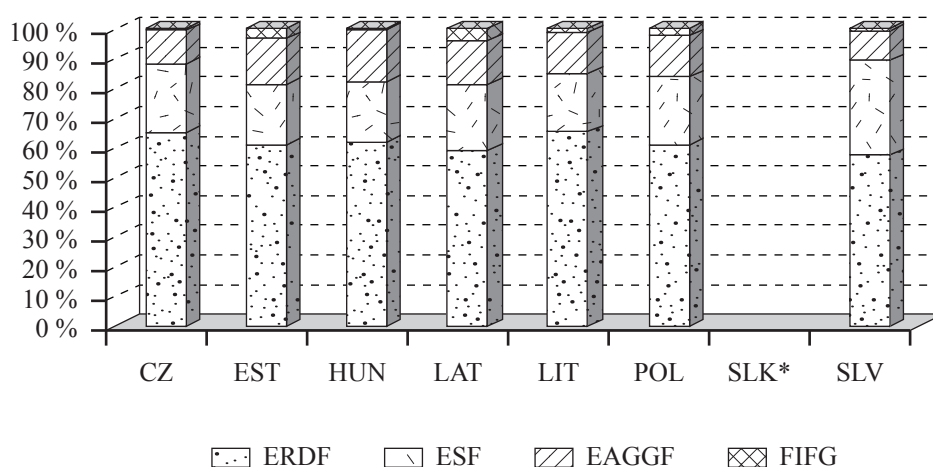


Figure 1: **Proportion of Structural Funds in total allocation 2004-2006**

\* The financial tables of the National Development Plan of the Slovak Republic were not elaborated in the standard format given by the European Commission, therefore they do not contain data according to the breakdown above.  
Source: author's own creation

According to the chart no major differences are discernible among the national strategies for distribution of funds. The ratio of EAGGF and FIFG resources varies between 10 and 19 percent, and thus can be considered stable and balanced.

This budgetary balance among countries does not necessarily mean that the proportional use of EAGGF and FIFG funds correlates with agriculture's economic role within each of the countries. The following table illustrates the principal agricultural objective indicators within national economies.

Table 1

**Agriculture indicators and rural development support  
in the new Member States 2004-2006**

	<b>Agriculture in GDP (%)</b>	<b>Employment in agriculture (%)</b>	<b>Agricultural land (%)</b>	<b>EAGGF Guidance Section* + FIFG ratio (%)</b>
Czech Republic	3.40	5.20	54.30	12.00
Estonia	3.70	28.40	19.70	18.66
<b>Hungary</b>	<b>3.70</b>	<b>6.50</b>	<b>66.50</b>	<b>18.00</b>
Latvia	4.70	15.50	38.30	18.81
Lithuania	7.00	19.90	51.60	15.08
Poland	2.90	27.50	59.00	16.20
Slovenia	3.30	n/a	40.00	10.00
EU-15 average	1.70	4.30	42.00	not relevant

\* Since the scope of the study only extends to the Structural Funds the Guidance Section of EAGGF has been taken into account.

Source: author's own creation, on the basis of the national development plans of each of the countries; furthermore the data concerning the EU-15 average are from "Agricultural Situation in the Candidate Countries, Country Report on Hungary (July 2002)" issued by the European Commission.

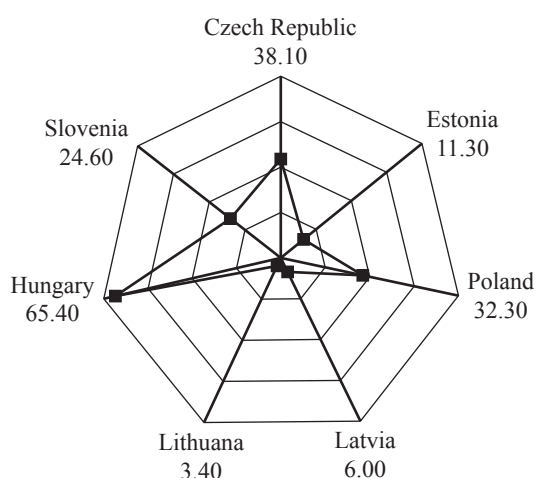
According to the table the following conclusions can be drawn:

- a) Agriculture's role within annual GDP does not differ significantly, with the exception of Lithuania where its proportion is almost double that of the other countries. However these figures are substantially higher than the EU-15 average. At the same time the Lithuanian ratio of EAGGF and FIFG funds is among the lowest, apparently upsetting the balance. Also in Slovenia the ratio of financial assistance for agriculture and rural development can be considered as lower than justified compared to Estonia or Hungary where the proportion of agriculture in terms of GDP is almost the same.
- b) As for the amount of labour employed in the agricultural sector, the picture is rather comprehensive as the indicator varies between 5 and 30 percent. No correlation can be found for the allocation of agriculturally related financial support. If one compares the countries' indicators, in the Czech Republic and in Hungary one sees that the financial assistance is far greater than justified by their employment indicator, but in other countries the financial assistance given rural development is under-represented.
- c) If one takes the proportion of agricultural land within each country's total territory and relates it to the amount of EU assistance devoted to agriculture, one sees that in Latvia and Estonia the proportion of EU assistance devoted to agriculture seems excessive but this can be explained by their similar geographical situation and poor quality acidic soil which requires more work and attention.

Though no major difference can be discerned regarding the nations' Structural Funds allocation strategy, this fact does not pertain to the OPARD internal financing structure and equivalent operational programmes. According to rules and regulations governing Structural Funds these operational programmes are financed from 3 different sources:

- the Structural Funds themselves, in this case from the EAGGF Guidance Section;
- co-financing ensured by central budgetary resources;
- contributions by those benefiting from the individual projects.

Those benefiting from the individual projects are also called upon to contribute to the projects, and the following chart indicates which beneficiaries are required to assume the heaviest burden in terms of the countries' operational programmes for agriculture and rural



development respectively.

Figure 2: **Average level of beneficiaries' contribution to OPARD-equivalent programmes in new Member States**

Source: author's own creation

Several countries (e.g. Lithuania and Latvia) during the planning procedure opted to cover the additional Structural Funds' finances entirely from budgetary resources. Nevertheless, even in these countries, support for the agriculture and rural development sector cannot be considered complete as beneficiaries also have to provide a modest amount from their own pockets.

The average contribution from programme beneficiaries in the above countries varies between 3 and 65%. The lowest is in Latvia and Lithuania where all the other operational programmes are fully financed from state resources while in Hungary beneficiaries have the heaviest burden when it comes to contributing from their own pockets.

Requiring programme beneficiaries to contribute heavily may produce a dual effect regarding OPARD implementation. On the one hand, it may improve the sector's financing structure by encouraging increased involvement by more private (market) resources, in turn

increasing initiatives and thus the number of projects to be implemented. This means that other than the beneficiaries own resources additional capital becomes part of programme implementation.

On the other hand, a clearly negative effect of this requirement is that it discriminates in favour of wealthier producers with greater access to financing, and of course excludes poorer producers. For example, beneficiaries can be required to co-finance 65% of the programme and there are also subsequent payments.

## ***2. Measures and activities intended to be implemented under the agriculture and rural development chapter of planning documents (Substance)***

Objectives, measures and activities are identified by each country's SWOT-analysis and therefore can widely vary. However, they can be termed unimaginative as the same measures, only with different emphasis, are repeated and even at the level of eligible activities only slight differences can be observed. This repetition could be explained by a shared historic perspective meaning the countries are seeking solutions to similar problems, especially among those with a smaller amount of assistance spread among a high number of measures and activities, meaning financial resources seem to be thinly spread among the large number of measures.

Two important factors define the measures applied by the countries: (i) how soon after implementation can a measure's results be achieved and observed.; and (ii) whether and how long these results are sustainable. Based on these factors, measures can be classified into the following groups:

- *quick result – short sustainability*: these measures are relatively easy to implement, and the results can be demonstrated almost immediately, but the impact is short-term. New equipment tends to be part of this group so the typical measures taken are investments in agricultural holdings, and modernization of the processing of agricultural, fishing and forestry products. It is noteworthy that every country studied has applied this group of measures, but for some countries – like Hungary – these measures represent the overwhelming majority of the measures taken.
- *quick result – long sustainability*: here implementation is easy and the results short-term, but the actual impact only occurs over time. An example of this class is support given to young farmers, or training programmes, vocational training, education providing a solid knowledge base.
- *slow result – short sustainability*: here implementation of measures is more complicated, difficult and hence time-consuming, but the impact is only short-term. Typically these entail (re)construction work and investments for applying modern technology or serving to comply with animal health and hygiene requirements.
- *slow result – long sustainability*: these measures are the most difficult to justify and verify as implementing them is time-consuming and the impact is only detectable in the long term. However, these measures can actually contribute to structural changes and sustainable development, a trait which the sometimes financially questionable above measures lack. These measures sometimes entail land consolidation and innovation, and only a small number of countries-Poland and Slovenia-backed and applied them, and this was likely due to time and financial constraints.

Ultimately beneficiary countries can be divided into the following groups:

- a) *Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary* - only 'traditional' agricultural, forestry and rural development activities are initiated. Emphasis tends to be on investment projects: infrastructure development, and equipment modernization; and even when it comes to preserving rural heritage reconstruction activities are primarily financed. In these three countries economic diversification regarding employment and income is commonplace. Soft measures such as job training and networking linked to the above are less frequent.
- b) *Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland* - these countries have long Baltic Sea coastlines and fishing is the key element in their development programme. A major priority is modernizing the fishery fleet, a goal related to EU fishing quotas. They also hope to help alleviate the social and economic impact of fishing fleet restructuring and downsizing through compensation. Furthermore, substantial resources are being allocated to increase fish processing facilities and enhance safety measures. Poland has the most ambitious programme as there a separate operational programme has been established to support the Polish fishery. As for the other measures, these three countries follow the same practices and tendencies as the countries in the above group.

*Slovenia* is the only country that cannot be classified in these terms. The country does have an Adriatic coastline, but it is much smaller in comparison to the Baltic countries and Poland. Although its fishery is part of the Slovenian development programme, the focus is on freshwater fish farming and there are no measures regarding its fishing fleet. Slovenia is noteworthy through its emphasis on education, training, R+D, plus networking activities and measures.

Slovenia's particular situation is due to Structural Funds' regulations and the nation's economic development indicators Slovenia elaborated a 2004-2006 National Development Plan and benefited under Objective 1 for regional support. However, as of 2007, Slovenia's GDP exceeded 75% of the EU average and therefore the country will no longer be eligible for Objective 1 support. In the 2007-13 budgetary period Slovenia will only be eligible for structural support under the 'regional competitiveness and employment' and 'European territorial co-operation' priorities. These priorities are basically the counterparts of Objective 2 and 3 and the relevant community initiatives under the current support umbrella. If Slovenia's intent was to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the current support umbrella in the next budgetary period, a logical decision would be to pursue these types of measures.

### ***3. Impact on the sustainability of rural areas***

Structural Funds are the EU's major financial cohesive tool, and are supposed to decrease regional economic and social disparities. Simultaneously, cohesion policy is closely linked to the Gothenburg and Lisbon processes and aims at improving employment capacities.

However, it is difficult to measure each development programme's impact since the programmes' indicators are not uniform. The majority of the countries do not even include them, and those who do have varied practices.

- *Poland* introduced its unemployment rate as an impact indicator for the Sectoral Operational Programme for Restructuring and Modernisation of the Food Sector and Rural Development, and the expected change is -2%;

- As an impact indicator *Lithuania* placed the net jobs created and/or maintained in terms of the programme with a target value of 4000 jobs;
- *Estonia* did not use indicators but presented the HERMIN model to simulate the development programme's impact.. However, this model has only two sectoral categories and lacks an indicator for agriculture and rural development. Nevertheless, the total number of jobs created due to the entire programme's implementation is predicted to be 24,820 by the year 2008;
- For the programme level and the OP level, *The Czech Republic* introduced the unemployment rate as an indicator. However, for the OP the proposed impact indicator is the unemployment rate change in less favoured areas (LFAs). Furthermore, for this indicator no baseline and no target value have been estimated.

The number of maintained and created jobs is a major and compulsory indicator regarding the contracts governing supported projects. However, if one examines the Hungarian OPARD context, one sees that at the programme level this is not even highlighted.

By the end of the year of 2006 these indicators were as follows:

Table 2

**Employment indicators in rural development projects**

Number of projects	Total amount of support (HUF)	Maintained working places (p)	Established working places (p)
4,211	113,460,452,902	55,809	7,736

Source: EMIR (Unified Monitoring Information System for the Structural Funds)

The above numbers indicate project objectives, but at the time the present study was conducted there was no available information regarding whether the objectives were actually fulfilled.

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