

EXTERNAL EVALUATION - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of Evaluation

The external *evaluation of the Government Scholarship Programme of the Czech Republic for students from developing countries provided in 2013-2017* (herein after only Programme) was undertaken with the purpose to provide implementers¹ of Foreign Development Assistance of the Czech Republic (herein after the FDC) with information about operating, potential benefits, drawbacks and possible improvements of the Programme. Finding of the evaluation will serve as inputs for a preparation of new strategy of the Government Scholarship Programme. The assessment focused particularly on two programme target groups – that of government grant holders (including former holders) and public higher education institutions in the Czech Republic. Nevertheless, the further two programme target groups (the Czech Republic as a donor and developing countries) were also taken into account due to the focus of some evaluation questions.² Evaluation research was realized only in the Czech Republic. The expectations of the contracting authority were pronounced into a numerous evaluation questions regarding relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impacts and sustainability of the Programme. Some questions were outlined more generally, therefore, evaluation research included a probe into overall conception of the Programme and its benefits. Programme effects for the prime evaluation programme target groups can be hardly separated from the systemic setting and overall operation of Programme. The authors of evaluation scrutinized the following topics in detail: success rate and failure rate of government grant holders in their study, return rate of grant holders to their home countries, Programme's effects for students and universities providing education to government grant holders, and some administrative and process aspects of the Programme's functioning.

Methodology of the evaluation

The methodology of the evaluation was based on evaluation questions formulated by the contracting authority and on endeavour to become acquainted with theoretical knowledge and to understand mechanisms of scholarship programmes' operation (i.e. *theory-driven evaluation*). The important part of the evaluation design was a reconstruction of theory of change (i.e. intervention logic). The Strategy of providing of Government scholarships for students from developing countries for 2013-2018 (hereinafter Strategy) specifies objectives and expected effects for all target groups in a very limited way. Therefore, some aspects of the outcome mapping method (i.e. mapping of outcomes and impacts of the intervention during the evaluation research) were applied. Quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were used and the principles of triangulation were abided. Key methods of data and information collection included: (i) desk research, including thorough analysis of relevant available documents and data on scholarship holders and costs of the Programme, (ii) case studies on a sample of public higher education institutions that were realized mainly through individual and group semi-structured interviews with faculties' representatives and with scholarship holders, (iii) semi-structured interviews with experts on development studies and tertiary education, (iv) semi-structured interviews with representatives of the implementation structure of the Programme (altogether 62 persons were interviewed), (v) electronic questionnaire survey (CAWI) among current and former scholarship holders (430 filled questionnaires were processed, response rate reached 39 percent) and (vi) focus group with representatives of implementers, aimed at a verification of preliminary findings and recommendations. Qualitative data were analysed with the help of content and comparative analysis, quantitative data with the help of statistical analysis, including multidimensional regression analysis. Synthesis of findings consisted in reconstruction of effects for the particular Programme target groups.

Brief description of the evaluated Programme and of evaluation context

The evaluated Programme is a part of the FDC of the Czech Republic and its main purpose is to provide scholarships to applicants from developing countries and to enable them higher education in

¹ The contracting authority of evaluation were the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

² Simultaneously an internal assessment of the Programme was realized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

order to support human capital, social and economic development and to contribute to mitigation of poverty.

For the period 2013-2018, the Programme had a budget of approx. CZK 110-120 million annually on the basis of the relevant resolution of the Czech Government and it supported about 130 new scholars annually. With the help of the Czech Government scholarship, 550 grant holders on average study annually in the Czech Republic in different stages of study. Scholarships holders can choose from study programmes in Czech (Bachelor, Master, follow-up Master and Doctoral degree) and from study programmes in English (follow-up Master and doctoral degree). The scholarship holders are paid a scholarship, health care (through the Ministry of Health, the relevant health care facility that provided the health care receives reimbursement), the costs of the scholarship education are covered to the relevant public higher education institution as well as the allowance for scholarship holders school meals. Annually, quotas are decided for the allocation of scholarships between developing countries and different types of study programmes, incl. recommended fields of study.

Main findings and conclusions

Evaluation criterion relevance

The programme activities are in line with strategic targeting of the FDC's relevant strategies and with the respective Sustainable Development Goals. With that respect, it is appropriate to assess the Programme relevance as high. However, this view on Programme relevance is rather of a declarative nature. In practical implementation however, some of programme activities are to a considerable extent contrary to the strategic principles set out in the basic strategic document of the FDC of the Czech Republic. There is a lack of a systematic approach to linking other FDC tools or other donor instruments and the Government Scholarship Programme. The Programme is territorially very fragmented in practice and it has been revealed to be a tool of foreign-diplomatic policy and of ensuring international commitments of the Czech Republic rather than an instrument of development policy. In addition, systemic collaboration with Programme alumni (graduates but also scholarships students) is missing. Therefore, the Programme relevance is assessed as rather low from this perspective. Furthermore, the evaluation proceeded assessment of relevance of particular programme activities towards the needs of target groups and this assessment of relevance was scored as rather high for all programme target groups (high for scholarships holders, rather high for public higher education institutions, Czech Republic and developing countries). However, it is crucial to take into account that the needs of particular target groups have been defined only during evaluation as the Programme Strategy did not set them.

Evaluation criterion economy and effectiveness

The Programme economy has been assessed as rather low. Linkages and synergies between the Programme and other instruments of the FDC is at low level. The Programme has been contributing to cooperation between Czech higher education institutions and institutions in partner developing countries with the aim to acquire broader knowledge and building collaboration only within universities where such cooperation existed already before this Programme started. Substantial condition for this kind of cooperation seems to be a thematic focus of educational programme and of research activities within particular Czech higher education institution. Nevertheless, some good practices have been identified related to cooperation between the Czech and developing country's partner higher education institutions and in terms of appropriate exploitation of attained education by the Programme graduates.

It has been proved to be impossible to assess effectiveness of Programme activities from the perspective of Programme goals as particular activities are interconnected and they can not be separated. In addition, there have been identified contradictions between some goals and activities as the way how some activities have been implemented leads to negative effects on other Programme goals. The most effective programme activities are for individual level, i.e. in accordance with goals set for scholarship holders. For this target group the Programme has brought undoubtedly considerable positive effects. On the other hand, the evaluation has shown that one of the programme goals (to enable higher education to applicants from developing countries for whom it is difficult or impossible to study at their own expense) has not been met as a considerable part of scholarship holders would

have probably studied in higher education in home countries or abroad even without existence of the Programme. In addition, conducted analyses have revealed that the Programme support have been channelled in particular to those developing countries with higher level of socioeconomic development (most of the supported scholars come from Moldavia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethiopia and Belarus). Further, based on questionnaire survey, a half of scholarship holders had experience with studying at higher education institution in home country before the participation in Programme and further five percent scholars elsewhere abroad. In some cases, duplication of attaining higher education might have occurred even though in some cases scholars left university in home country to study in the Czech Republic within the Programme.

Setting of the evaluation did not enable assessment of effectiveness of activities towards other programme goals (e.g. human capital development in developing countries, and hence social and economic development and poverty reduction). Nevertheless, in this case it can be supposed that potential programme effects might be visible only to a very limited extent in supported developing countries at local or community level, but hardly at the level of supported countries. The main reasons for limited chance of Programme to bring pronounced effects at the level of supported countries are as follows:

- Programme is geographically very fragmented and supports broad range of fields. In period 2013-2017 the Programme supported 67 different developing countries. It can be presumed that geographical fragmentation has increased inter alia administrative costs of Programme, however, these were not a part of the evaluation examination. Within the process of scholarship holders' selection, a particular emphasis is paid to a selection of study fields that are in line with the needs of respective supported country. However, the evaluation has shown that 45 percent scholarship holders has been studying different study field in the Czech Republic than was the field they had applied for within the selection process at embassies. In more than half of these cases the changed field was not among the recommended study fields for particular developing country.
- Rate of successful accomplishment of studies by scholarship holders is rather low. In addition, based on questionnaire survey, scholarship holders come back to home countries only to low extent after finishing their studies in the Czech Republic (please see more further below).
- Government scholarship holders represent only a very small part of students from the third countries that undertake higher education study in the Czech Republic and are not self-payers (i.e. their studies are also funded from the state budget). From some countries supported by the Programme (e.g. Serbia, Kazakhstan, or Ghana), much more students study by the means of institutional financing of Czech higher education, their study is also funded by the Czech Republic. This issue might considerable influence (potential) effects of the Programme.

Evaluation criteria efficiency and impacts

These criteria have been assessed differently for particular programme target groups: rather high for the group of students-scholarships holders, rather low for Czech public higher education institutions and low for the target groups the Czech Republic and developing countries. This overall assessment is based for example on the following concrete finding:

- The majority of intended and unintended programme effects could have been shown at individual level of scholarship holders. For most of them, participation in the Programme has meant a key life change and opportunity for personal development.
- The Programme has been contributing to development of internacionalisation and cosmopolitan environment at involved Czech universities, however, the potential of the Programme is not appropriately exploited for the development of international cooperation in education and research between Czech higher education institutions and partner institutions from developing countries. Such cooperation is at the beginning at some analysed universities (or the interest was expressed) and undoubtedly there are opportunities how to systematically encourage programme effects in this line.
- Similarly, the potential of Programme is not well exploited from the perspective of effects for the Czech Republic in terms of creating bilateral relationships and linkages on foreign countries. The reason for that consists particularly in absence of systemic approach to collaboration with

Programme alumni (and also scholarship holders during their stay in the Czech Republic) at the level of Programme holder. This is a limit not only for programme benefits for the Czech Republic but also for involved developing countries. Furthermore, expected effects for developing countries have been limited by relatively high rate of unsuccessful accomplishment of studies by scholarship holders and by the fact that scholarship holders come back to home countries after finishing their studies in the Czech Republic only to low extend.

Evaluation has paid considerable attention to un/successfulness of scholarship holders in accomplishment their studies and it has been revealed the following:

- The official statistics say that the rate of successful study completion reached 28 percent for scholarship holders entering the Programme between 2007-2013. Nevertheless, this figure is underestimated because scholarship holders are not systematically traced after passing standard length of study and hence leaving the Programme but accomplishing the study later.
- In terms of the different types of study programmes, the lowest rate of success was officially recorded for Bachelor study programmes (5 percent - the figure is however extremely underestimated due to the approach how information about Bachelor degree is recorded in official database – students who continue after successful accomplishment of Bachelor degree in studies of follow-up Master degree are as successful holders recorded only once successfully finish this follow-up degree). Low success rate is registered for Master study programmes (practically only medical field) but study success in this case is low also for Czech students.
- The highest success rate was found out for scholarship holders undertaking follow-up Master study programmes in English (58 percent of them finished studies successfully in standard length of study).
- Due to drawbacks in official data about success rate of scholarship holders, the evaluation analysed unsuccessfulness of scholarship holders in studies. Statistical analyses have proved that studying in Czech programme significantly increases probability of study failure while studying in English programme significantly decreases this probability. Further, studying of follow-up Master degree decreases probability of study failure while studying of multiyear Master programme increases this probability. Consequently, priority support of study in Czech and of Bachelor degree does not revealed to be suitable for expected development programme effects with respect to both success in accomplishment of studies and relatively added value of this level of education.
- Statistical analysis has also discovered that from countries with high number of scholarship holders, relatively high failure rate in accomplishment study was shown for students from Ethiopia and Afghanistan, on the other hand lower failure rate for holders from Moldavia. When taking into consideration other factors, study field does not seem to be for failure rate significant aspect. Female scholarship holders score statistically significant lower probability of failure in studies than scholarship holders – males.
- In addition, also based on the qualitative part of evaluation research at sample of involved Czech higher education institutions, besides students' motivation and their quality, the most important factor influencing success of scholarship holders in accomplishment their studies represent a language of the study programme. At some of the investigated faculties are present specific actions to cope with difficulties that Government scholarship holders have in Czech study programmes (e.g. students can take part of their study in parallel study programme in English; if possible scholarship holders choose to study programmes in which substantial part of compulsory lectures is given in English; some faculties require passing a special exam of Czech and overall higher level of knowledge of Czech language).

Evaluation criterion sustainability

Sustainability, i.e. probability that positive implications of the Programme will continue, is closely linked to effects and impacts. Positive effects are sustainable from the students and universities' point of view (university can ensure study for foreign students; scholarship holders can study at universities). With respect to these target groups, sustainability can be thus assessed as high. On the other hand, there are only a few positive effects proved at the level of the Czech Republic and developing countries that

would be sustainable and thus also could be assessed. The provable and sustainable effect at the level of the Czech Republic is internalisation of universities, economic remittances will probably continue from the perspective of developing countries.

Important provable non-intended Programme effects are brain drain at the level of developing countries and brain gain at the level of the Czech Republic. This negative effect influences many other effects and should be eliminated or at least mitigated through dealing with the issue of return of scholarship holders back to their home countries or through modification of supported study programmes. There is no objective data concerning the share of Programme alumni who came back to their home countries. Based on questionnaire survey, half of 137 former scholarship holders (117 successful graduates and 20 failed former scholarship holders) stayed in the Czech Republic and started working here (on average three and half years since their scholarship was finished). Less than one third of scholarship holders came back to the home country and one fifth lives abroad. Although former and many current scholarship holders contribute to the system of economic remittances, this effect cannot compensate the fact that qualified people have been leaving the developing countries. The following factors can influence return rate: job opportunity, length and conditions of scholarship and study in the Czech Republic, field of study, political and security situation in the home country or macro-region, economic and labour market situation, or personal and family relationships. Sustainability was also viewed from the perspective of processes in terms of their practical operation (sustainability of the system).

Conclusion

The evaluation findings have proved the need of modification of Programme's parameters (see also previous evaluations of the Programme – Jelínek et al 2004, Horký et al 2011). The Programme is financed from the Czech FDC sources but the effects for the developing countries are disputable, though the Programme contributes to the personal development of scholarship holders. There are some discrepancies between the declared objectives of the Programme and its real effects on particular target groups. The setting of Programme is probably a result of 'historic inertia' and it does not reflect accurately the transformation of tertiary education in the Czech Republic and in developing countries. This critical review cannot be interpreted that the Programme and its activities are not needed and inappropriate. The Programme might bring long-term effects that could not have been captured by this evaluation. Nevertheless, there is definitely potential to obtain more positive Programme effects.

Main recommendations

- To undertake a cost analysis of the Programme and to compare Programme efficiency and its added value to other forms of support for foreign students to study at Czech higher education institutions;
- To prepare a succession strategy of Government Scholarship Programme according to the principles of strategic planning and programme cycle;
- To set and keep narrower geographic concentration of the Programme support;
- To set and undertake ongoing monitoring of the Programme and to ensure necessary data base for Programme assessment;
- To enhance capacities of Programme administrators;
- To set appropriate conditions for Programme evaluations;
- To increase key stakeholders' awareness of the way how health care is provided to scholarship holders;
- To take a stand on field concentration of Programme support;
- To proceed comprehensive process analysis and to increase the efficiency of process management.

Evaluation team

The core evaluation team has included Dr. Marie Feřtřová and Dr. Lucie Jungwiertová of EDREO company and thematic experts Assoc. Prof. Josef Novotný (Faculty of Science, Charles University in Prague) and Dr. Lenka Gulová (Faculty of Education, Masaryk University in Brno). The team members also included evaluators Kateřina Gregorová and Tamara Zykanová and expert on electronic survey Eva Safrtálová. To contact evaluation team please mail to: marie.fertrova@edreo.cz.