



# Ongoing evaluation of the implementation of the Operational Programme Research, Development and Education

Ministry of Education, Youth and  
Sports

## Evaluation of the Fulfilment of Horizontal Principles in the Implementation of OP RDE

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## Executive Summary

OP RDE calls are generally designed in such a way that **project applications must be in accordance with the horizontal principles in order to be considered and assessed**. The OP RDE cannot accept a project that is in a negative relation with the horizontal principles mentioned in the text of OP RDE. **Neutral relationship is not considered negative.**

### Sustainable Development


**OP RDE projects are realized in accordance with this horizontal principle and in some cases, they can contribute to its deepening. Contributions to the fulfilment of horizontal principles are evident especially in PA1 projects, which are focused on basic research in the environmental field. In PA2 and PA3 the principle is deepened especially by projects focused on improving the quality of teaching at schools, and when the quality of teaching focused on environmental issues is improving too. Projects in PA4 are neutral towards horizontal principles.**

In projects in PA1, PA2 and PA3, the rules of resource management are generally respected in the area of administrative and material implementation of projects. This means that, for example, all project documentation and communication is operated in electronic form (e-mails, teleconferences, etc.). Furthermore, shared document repositories are used, not only to save money, but also to work more efficiently.

#### **Priority axis 1: Strengthening capacity for high-quality research**

**PA1 projects are implemented in accordance with this HP. These projects partially contribute to the deepening of HP.** One third of the projects declared a positive influence (29%) or targeted focus (4%) on this HP. In practice, this means that, for example, when modernizing R&D infrastructure, they acquire an infrastructure that is environmentally friendly. In addition, projects with a targeted focus or a positive impact are projects that, by their material focus, aim at research and development in areas whose task is to reduce the negative impact of human activity on the environment (e.g. the development of new materials, devices, work procedures etc.).

The questionnaire survey among project beneficiaries in PA1 shows that according to less than three quarters (70.2%) of the respondents (beneficiaries in PA1), the activities of the OP RDE project/s contributed to sustainable development at the institutions. It follows from the focus groups with project beneficiaries in PA1 that the topic of sustainable development was not the primary goal of their projects, yet the projects contribute to it at least partially. One way is to consider sustainability when purchasing new equipment so that it is as light as possible in terms of energy consumption. Some projects deal with research topics that have the potential to contribute to the principle of sustainability in the future, provided that the research results are applied in practice. This is, for example, the topic of food security, reducing the use of inorganic (chemical) fertilizers, focusing on anti-erosion measures to achieve better water retention, more resistant plants against drought, wind and heat and thus greater yields from these crops. Or the topic of the process and energy industry, which should contribute to the minimization of the greenhouse, nitrogen, energy and water footprint. In the next project, it is to be determined in what ways it would be possible to optimize the processes of waste production, waste treatment and energy production, which would contribute to increasing the efficiency of the process and energy industry. In one project, current data on the health and attitudes of Czech children towards health is being collected, and the goal of the project is both to improve



knowledge about the health/attitudes of children, but also to improve data for decision-making in the territories of the individual countries involved.

### **Priority axis 2: Development of universities and human resources for research and development**

**PA2 projects are implemented in accordance with HP. Projects do not contribute significantly to deepening of the HP.** The vast majority of PA2 projects are HP neutral (96%). A minimum of projects (4%, i.e. 21) reported a positive impact on HP and only 1 project reported a targeted focus. In most cases, the projects of this challenge create R&D infrastructure, the construction of which is to be implemented in accordance with the principles of sustainability (e.g. the use of so-called brownfields), or the further operation of which is to be environmentally friendly. The deepening of HP may be partially contributed by the fact that, as part of the general improvement of teaching at universities, there will be an increase in the quality of teaching of subjects focused on sustainable development (in both technical and economic other social science fields, for example).

The questionnaire survey among university staff shows that less than half of the respondents (44.1%) encountered the possibility of upgrading their qualifications in the field of "Competences focused on sustainable development" during their time at the university. Less than half (45.3%) of the respondents said that during their time at the university they encountered specific activities contributing to sustainable development. More than two-thirds (69.8%) of the respondents who encountered the activities stated that the activities that mainly contribute to sustainable development at their university and in the surrounding area are pollution-reducing activities/modifications/measures (e.g. energy savings, electronic communication, printed outputs on recycled paper, purchases of energy-saving devices/devices and equipment, low-energy buildings, purchases of electric cars/hybrid cars, etc.). According to more than half (52.2%) of the respondents, the education of students in the field of sustainable development/creation of new subjects/fields of study focused on sustainable development contributes, and according to less than half (43.6%) of the respondents, activities/modifications/measures contribute to solving adaptation to climate change, i.e. for example modifications around buildings, planting trees, using rainwater, etc.


The participants of focus groups for beneficiaries in PA2 stated that the theme of sustainable development was not the primary goal of OP RDE projects, but in general the theme of sustainability is key in the strategic dimension of institutions. The case studies also show that the projects are neutral to this HP and contribute only partially to it.

### **Priority axis 3: Equal access to high-quality pre-school, primary and secondary education**

**PA3 projects are implemented in accordance with HP. Projects do not contribute significantly to deepening HP.** All PA3 projects are neutral to HP (100%). These projects do not have any specific activity to target the deepening of HP, or to directly help to improve the current situation.

From all three questionnaire surveys carried out among pedagogic and managerial staff of kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools/high schools, it appears that roughly three quarters of respondents perceive a positive shift in the area of sustainable development/support of this topic at their institutions in the last 5 years.

Among the main activities that have contributed to sustainable development at schools in the last 5 years are primarily the support and development of the topic of sustainable development in teaching



and education of children/pupils/students in this area, as well as education/training and development of the competences of school staff on the given topic leading to understanding of social, natural and technological systems and processes affecting the environment, or support in worker/pupil pollution reduction activities.

#### **Priority axis 4: Technical assistance**

**PA4 projects are implemented in accordance with HP.** All existing (100%) PA4 projects are neutral to the horizontal principle of sustainable development. Other PA4 projects are not expected to contribute significantly to the deepening of the horizontal principle. The OP RDE administration is managed completely electronically (in accordance with the horizontal principle of sustainable development), printed documents have been eliminated.

#### **Equal opportunities and non-discrimination**


**OP RDE projects are implemented in accordance with this horizontal principle. PA1 and PA2 projects contribute to its deepening partially. PA3 projects are aimed at eliminating barriers to participation of children and pupils with special educational needs in mainstream education, thus they significantly contribute to deepening the observed horizontal principle. PA4 projects are mostly neutral to the horizontal principle.**

#### **Priority axis 1: Strengthening capacity for high-quality research**

**PA1 projects are implemented in accordance with HP. These projects partially contribute to deepening the horizontal principle.** The majority of projects (59%) declared a neutral effect on HP and a smaller half (41%) declared a positive effect on HP. No PA1 project reported a targeted focus on HP. Both a positive and a neutral influence (declared projects) consist in the fact that research teams in PA1 projects should be assembled on the basis of objective professional prerequisites for the performance of the required position, i.e. without taking into account any other factor that could be considered discriminatory. Selection procedures are conceived as open, when determining objective requirements for workers. R&D centres have created career regulations to a large extent, which define the rules and criteria for the selection and evaluation of employees so that barriers are not created in the personnel processes of projects that would prevent equal opportunities. Also, access to the built R&D infrastructure is ensured on a non-discriminatory basis for the entire target group.

The questionnaire survey among project beneficiaries in PA1 shows that, according to less than two-thirds of respondents (65.4%), the activities of the OP RDE project(s) contributed to ensuring equal opportunities and to the prohibition of discrimination at their institution. According to more than half (57.7%) of the respondents, the setting of non-discriminatory conditions within the code of ethics/internal regulations/career regulations, etc., contributed to ensuring equal opportunities and non-discrimination; according to less than half of the respondents (47.1%), activities related to the recruitment of workers contributed on the basis of objective professional prerequisites for the performance of the required position, and according to more than a third (34.6%) of the respondents, the activities of education/training of workers on the given topic contributed.

From the focus groups and case studies with representatives of OP RDE beneficiaries, it follows that the principle of ensuring equal opportunities and non-discrimination was not the primary goal of the projects, but it is a principle that is generally included within R&D organizations in the Czech Republic and an effort to break down the barriers associated with it. Nevertheless, at some institutions, the projects partially contributed to their development, for example by obtaining and implementing the HR Award, thanks to more flexible access to employees and their duties, etc. Some representatives



said that thanks to the projects and the Covid-19 pandemic, the possibility of working from home was introduced, which subsequently remained. The projects made it possible to offer workers reduced working hours (for example, in connection with maternity/parental leave, etc.).

### **Priority axis 2: Development of universities and human resources for research and development**


#### **PA2 projects are implemented in accordance with HP and partially contribute to deepening the HP.**

More than half (53%) of projects report a neutral impact on HP, less than half (43%) report a positive impact, and 4% of projects report a targeted focus on HP. From the analysis of the description of the projects, it follows that the positive and neutral influence (declared projects) consists in the fact that the projects are implemented in a non-discriminatory environment of universities. Project implementers and target groups have the opportunity to participate in projects without restrictions based on race, nationality, religion, gender, etc. Some institutions state that projects are implemented in buildings that are equipped with barrier-free elements. The targeted impact on HP usually consists in the fact that the projects implement support measures for students with SEN, or the projects were aimed at obtaining the HR Award.

According to findings from a questionnaire survey among university staff and from focus groups with university representatives, the scope and availability of university counselling and assistance services are being expanded and minimum service standards are being set for students with SEN, OP RDE projects have in some cases contributed to the centralization of these services and ensuring their widespread provision at institutions, to the development of the services provided and to the development of the workers providing these services. One of the essential areas of OP RDE support was also support aimed at university staff/environmental education, when methodological documents were created for working with students with CP, trainings, workshops and seminars were implemented to develop the competences of university staff when working with students with SEN. Focus group participants from among representatives of universities stated that there is still a need to support the development of university counselling and assistance services for students with SEN (e.g. by increasing the number of experts in centres for working with these students and individual work with students).

According to FG participants from among students with SEN, the support provided to students with SEN developed and improved during their time at the university, including the provision of compensatory aids. At the same time, they stated that they consider the main benefits of supporting students with SEN to be mainly that they have the opportunity to study at a university despite their disadvantage, although the support at different universities varies according to the participants.

According to the findings from the questionnaire survey and from the focus groups (FG), the study environment is also being revised and adapted for those interested in studying and students with an emphasis on people with SEN, from socio-economically disadvantaged groups and from ethnic minorities, thereby increasing their number at the university. At the same time, students with SEN mostly agreed that the infrastructural equipment of the university is adequate for the needs of students with SEN and, based on the individual needs of the students, the university further adjusts and adapts unsuitable educational spaces or less accessible spaces for the needs of students with SEN. FG participants from among representatives of universities agreed that not only OP RDE, but also other projects and funding contribute to expanding the scope and improving the availability of services for students with SEN, as well as to revising, adapting and opening up the study environment for those interested in studying. FG participants from among representatives of universities stated that there is still a need to support the adaptation of the environment for the inclusion of students with SEN, and at the same time, according to FG participants from among students, it is necessary to educate



teachers in this area, thus limiting the necessity of explaining/reminding students about the need for support.

### **Priority axis 3: Equal access to high-quality pre-school, primary and secondary education**

**PA3 projects are implemented in accordance with HP. These projects make a significant contribution to the deepening of the HP.** PA3 projects are directly focused on **equal access to education** and the removal of barriers to participation in education for children, pupils and students from a socio-economically disadvantaged background, on compensation for special educational needs and, in general, on the integration of children, pupils and students with SEN into the mainstream education. This corresponds to the fact that the vast majority of PA3 projects (96%) declare a positive effect on HP, 2% of projects declare a neutral effect and the same 2% declare a targeted focus.


It follows from the description of the projects/activities and their contributions to HP that the projects are aimed at removing barriers that prevent pupils at risk of socio-economic deprivation from participating in mainstream education. For pupils, the projects provide, for example, tutoring opportunities, which helps them to better manage the material covered at school, and clubs and circles are also organized that support the inclusion of at-risk pupils even outside of compulsory school attendance. New forms and methods of teaching are introduced in schools with the aim of diverting teaching from face-to-face teaching towards creative and experiential forms of learning. As part of these forms and methods, the key competences of pupils and students with SEN are developed, their better involvement in classes and better preparedness for further education or entry into the labour market. Projects introduce specialized teaching positions in schools (school special pedagogues, social pedagogues, school psychologists, school assistants, etc.). Workers in these positions contribute to the individualization of education and the opportunity to attend to all pupils according to their needs. Staff also communicate actively with pupils' families and thus ensure better support for pupils from the family. Project activities are also aimed at the parents of these pupils, for whom workshops and seminars are organized, the aim of which is to provide parents with such knowledge and competence that they are able to provide their children with a sufficient background for their successful inclusion.

It follows from all three questionnaire surveys carried out among pedagogic and managerial staff of kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools/high schools that the respondents perceive to a large extent that in the last 5 years there has been a positive shift in the application of the principles of equal opportunities and the prohibition of discrimination in their institutions. Among the main activities that, according to the respondents, contributed to the promotion of equality between men and women at institutions include education/training and the development of competences of school staff on the given topic, support and development of the topic of equal opportunities and non-discrimination in teaching/education, as well as direct support for the inclusion of pupils from socio-economic endangered or excluded and culturally different population groups.

From the focus group with representatives of independently established schools<sup>1</sup>, it appears that OP RDE projects and their activities are evaluated positively, as OP RDE enabled independently established schools to obtain financial resources and involve children and pupils from these schools in activities. The participants of FG evaluated positively mainly activities aimed directly at supporting children/pupils, such as tutoring, clubs (e.g. reading) and project days (in and out of school). The main benefit of these activities was that the children/pupils had the opportunity to get out of their usual environment and into contact with persons/activities, etc., with whom they usually do not come into contact. Some FG participants also appreciated the opportunity to use templates for staffing their

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<sup>1</sup> Note: these are schools/classes established in accordance with § 16 paragraph 9 of the Education Act - Act No. 561/2004 Coll., Act on Pre-school, Primary, Secondary, Higher Vocational and Other Education (Education Act)



institution. Among these positions are, for example, special pedagogues and assistants, which they were able to start using thanks to the projects.

From the focus groups with project representatives in calls for support in socially excluded locations, it follows that OP RDE projects, and their activities contributed to the support of interest-based and informal education for socio-economically disadvantaged children/pupils when they focused on a wide range of activities, namely for example, tutoring, clubs and leisure activities for children, suburban camps, holiday activities, preschool clubs and more. According to FG participants, one of the most frequent, most important for supporting children/pupils and also the best-rated project activities is tutoring (e.g. basic literacy topics – math, Czech language, English language, general overview, etc.). Other activities in the projects were leisure clubs and clubs, which were evaluated positively and there was interest in them. These were clubs beyond the usual school clubs, which were organized for these children free of charge. The participants of the FG stated that among the implemented circles are, for example, ecologically focused circles, a sports circle, a literary circle, etc. The projects also focused on the implementation of activities during the holidays, which include suburban camps, organization of trips, etc., the aim of which was to combine entertainment and partly education of children/pupils. Some FG participants stated that the projects also contributed to the development of cooperation between schools in the territories, as well as cooperation between schools and facilities/organizations focused on supporting children/pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged families. Part of the FG participants stated that the projects contributed to setting up and supporting the personnel background at schools, when it was possible to build and staff specific support positions - e.g. assistants, psychologists, inclusion coordinators, social workers, etc. Some participants also stated that, thanks to the projects, it was possible to introduce inclusion coordinators in the municipalities and set up methodical guidance, which contributed to setting up a unified system of schoolwork in the territory and their support for children/pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

#### **Priority axis 4: Technical assistance**


**PA4 projects are implemented in accordance with HP. Projects do not contribute to deepening this HP.** PA4 projects in most cases (70%) have a neutral effect on the horizontal principle. Another 30% have a positive effect. In most cases, these projects state that the project will apply a transparent and fair system of employee income, remuneration and redundancy, which, together with quality management, will contribute to stabilising the staffing. In a minority of cases, it is stated that the office spaces used by the OP RDE MA are barrier-free and therefore enable the employment of persons with physical disabilities.

#### **Equal opportunities between men and women**

**OP RDE projects are implemented in accordance with this horizontal principle. PA1 and PA2 projects contribute to its deepening partially. In most cases, PA3 projects do not have activities that are directly aimed at strengthening HP. PA4 projects are implemented in accordance with this horizontal principle, but do not significantly contribute to its deepening.**

#### **Priority axis 1: Strengthening capacity for high-quality research**

**PA1 projects are implemented in accordance with HP. Projects partially contribute to the deepening of the HP.** Most projects then declared a neutral relationship (59% of projects). 41% of projects declared a positive impact on HP. One PA1 project reported a targeted focus on HP. Both the positive and the neutral influence (declared by the projects) consist in the fact that the personnel policy of the projects should be set in a non-discriminatory manner with regard to the gender of the worker. At the same time, the target groups of the projects should not be discriminated on the basis of their gender.



PA1 projects state in the case units that their institution has a system for the return of female scientists to R&D activity after maternity leave. Some projects offer opportunities to balance the work and family life of employees.


More than half (55.6%) of the respondents to the questionnaire survey among project beneficiaries in PA1 stated that they do not know/cannot assess whether the activities of the OP RDE project(s) contributed to ensuring equality between men and women at the institutions. More than a third (36.1%) of respondents said that the activities of the OP RDE project/s did not contribute to ensuring equality between men and women, and less than a tenth (8.3%) said that the projects rather contributed. Also from the focus groups with representatives of PA1 recipients, it appears that the principle of equality between men and women was not the goal of their projects, but at the same time FG participants stated that, in general, higher education institutions in the Czech Republic have principles of operation set in such a way that the principle of equal opportunities for men and women is observed - i.e. workers are selected based on objective criteria and without discrimination based on any factor/criterion. Some participants stated that the projects at the institutions partially contributed to the development of HP, mainly thanks to more flexible options for access to employees and their working hours, the possibility of remote work, etc.

### **Priority axis 2: Development of universities and human resources for research and development**

**PA2 projects are implemented in accordance with HP. In part, projects contribute to the deepening of this principle.** More than half (60%) of projects declare a neutral impact on HP and less than half (38%) declare a positive impact and 2% (i.e. 10) of the projects mention a targeted focus on HP. From the analysis of project descriptions, it follows that the positive and neutral influence (declared by projects) consists in the fact that the projects are implemented in a university environment, which, according to the project descriptions, is considered to be an environment operating on the principle of non-discrimination, especially in the area of student admission and own studies. For admission to a higher education institution, as well as for the successful completion of studies, there are general criteria that must be met, regardless of factors such as gender. Some projects focused on setting up the strategic management of a research organization in accordance with the terms of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers in order to receive the "HR Award". Within the framework of some projects, education of pedagogues in the field of gender/equal opportunities for men and women took place.

The questionnaire survey among university staff shows that half of the respondents (50.3%) encountered the possibility of increasing their qualifications in the area of "Improving awareness of the principle of equal opportunities" during their time at the university. Less than four fifths of the respondents (78.6%) stated that equal access to men and women is ensured at their university. Only 6.4% of respondents stated that they disagree with the statement that equal access to men and women is ensured at universities. More than two-thirds (69.1%) of the respondents stated that the setting of non-discriminatory conditions within the framework of the code of ethics/internal regulations/career line etc. contributes to ensuring equal access to men and women at their university, and according to less than two-thirds (61.3%) of the respondents contributed to the recruitment of workers on the basis of objective professional prerequisites for the performance of the required position, and according to more than half (53.2%) of the respondents, the possibility of part-time work contributes to the reconciliation of family and work life. Less than two-thirds of the respondents (62.8%) said that their university focuses on reconciling work and family life - i.e. by supporting part-time jobs, etc. About 15% of respondents said they agree with the statement "The university focuses on reconciling work and family life about half". More than a tenth of respondents (11.3%) said that they disagree with the statement that the university focuses on reconciling work and family life.





The participants of the focus group from among representatives of universities agreed that OP RDE contributed to the management of human resources and career development with an emphasis on the integration of principles of equal opportunities, or at least to the initiation of solutions to related topics at institutions. At the same time, however, the majority of FG participants stated that OP RDE rather contributed to the creation of related methodological and other documents (e.g. career regulations, ethical codes, evaluation systems, etc.) and to the formal setting of rules, which, however, is perceived positively, but is needed for these activities follow up and implement them in practice. The activities that helped this development include, for example, the implementation of the HR Award at some institutions, within which documents had to be created and this issue taken into account.

### **Priority axis 3: Equal access to high-quality pre-school, primary and secondary education**

**PA3 projects are implemented in accordance with HP. Projects are not significantly focused on the deepening of this HP.** In the vast majority of projects, the projects declared a neutral impact (97%), and in part they reported a positive effect (3%). 0 % projects (32 projects) declare targeted impact on HP. It follows from the descriptions of the projects and their contribution to this HP that the implementers consider the regional education in which the PA3 projects operate to be gender-neutral in principle from the point of view of the children/pupils/students who participate in the education. The positive and neutral influence therefore lies in equal access to men and women in the project implementation team, as well as to the project's target groups. Some projects partially strengthen the awareness of pupils in the area of gender equality and transferred, can deepen this HP. Thus, in most cases, the projects do not explicitly suppress the inequality between men and women with their activities. But they are set up in such a way that they do not intentionally or thoughtlessly deepen this inequality.

Questionnaire surveys carried out among teaching staff and managers of kindergartens, primary schools and upper secondary schools/high schools show that primary school workers and upper secondary schools/high schools perceive more that there has been a positive shift in the implementation of equality between men and women at their institution in the last 5 years than this is the case among kindergarten workers.


Among the main activities that, according to respondents to questionnaire surveys, have contributed to the implementation of equality between men and women in the last 5 years, are primarily the possibility of access to project activities for all target groups regardless of gender, as well as the possibility of part-time workers to reconcile family and work life, recruitment workers on the basis of objective professional prerequisites for performing the required position or developing the topic of equality between men and women in the education/teaching of children/pupils/students.

### **Priority axis 4: Technical assistance**

**PA4 projects are implemented in accordance with HP. These projects do not significantly contribute to deepening HP.** A total of 81% of PA4 projects have a neutral relationship to the horizontal principle. 19% of projects registered positive influence. In these projects, a transparent and fair system of employee income and remuneration is applied according to the MS2014+ records, which will contribute to the support of the administrative capacity of the Managing Authority of the OP RDE.

### **Incorporation of recommendations from the last report and HP settings for the new program period**

Access and HP settings within P JAC is based on the MRD (Ministry of Regional Development) methodological document, which regulates the HP area. Within P JAC (in the program document),



there is no separate HP chapter compared to OP RDE. Nevertheless, the entire P JAC must not be in conflict with the HP, and it is also not possible to support a project that would be in conflict with any HP. In contrast to OP RDE, P JAC does not include HP "Sustainable development", and at the level of projects, P JAC will not monitor their contribution to this HP. P JAC was assessed as a whole and it was stated that it fulfils this principle and contributes to its development.

The recommendation from SR HP 2019 "01\_HP\_02 - establish a methodology for determining the nature of the contribution of projects to HP" was perceived positively by the representatives of the MA OP RDE and was considered as a long-term task that needs to be implemented. The recommendation was not implemented within OP RDE but was considered when preparing/setting up P JAC.

The recommendation from SR HP 2019 "02\_HP\_02 - discuss the inclusion of HP as qualitative evaluation criteria of project applications" was taken into account, and during the preparation of P JAC calls, HP topics were included in the evaluation criteria (e.g. call no. 02\_22\_008 Top research, where HP/gender topics are determined as an evaluation). At the time of the report, this challenge was in pilot testing and verification of how these criteria will work in practice. No negative feedback on these criteria has yet been obtained from the field. After the pilot verification, it is also planned to use evaluation criteria related to HP in R&D calls in the future.

In calls aimed at universities, it cannot be expected that evaluation criteria aimed at HP would be used. HP should be included in the calls through mandatory optional activities, which would then be evaluated if the projects include them in their activities. Within the framework of regional education, all projects and activities must be non-discriminatory and must not have a negative impact on HP. For that reason, it is not appropriate to set HP as a scored evaluation criterion. The criterion will remain only in the control of formal requirements and the acceptability of projects (meets/does not meet). In P JAC it is planned to announce calls focused on various topics, and projects will be able to decide whether they will focus on certain HP topics as part of their activities. For the announced calls, specific data items (SDI) will be determined, from which the projects will select the ones they will implement. HP-related topics may also be included within the SDI. Subsequently, as part of the implementation reports, the projects will show what has been implemented specifically within the given SDI and what the progress is.

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