

SESK – Social sERVICEs helpdesk on EU Funds

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EU HELPDESK SURVEY REPORT ON MANAGING AUTHORITIES AND INTERMEDIATE BODIES

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1. INTRODUCTION

A survey on managing authorities' perspectives on social services access and use of ESF+ and ERDF¹ was completed in the framework of the Social Services Helpdesk on EU Funds project.

Through this survey, the project aims to better understand the needs, opportunities, and challenges related to the use of ESF+ and ERDF funds by social services. Hence, managing authorities and authorities responsible for planning and coordination of social services were invited to reflect on the design and implementation of Operational Programmes. The results of the survey will help to further identify leverages to facilitate social services' access to these funds. Finally, the data gathered will form the basis to develop tailored activities to support, guide, and facilitate the successful participation of social services in ESF+ and ERDF funding programmes.

2. EU FUNDING CONTEXT (2021-2027) – ESF+ & ERDF

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND PLUS (ESF+)

The [European Social Fund Plus](#) (ESF+) is the European Union (EU)'s main instrument for investing in people and supporting the implementation of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#). With a budget of almost € 99.3 billion for the period 2021-2027, the ESF+ will continue to provide an important contribution to EU's employment, social, education and skills policies, including structural reforms in these areas.

The Fund will also be one of the cornerstones of EU socio-economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic has reversed gains in labour participation, challenged educational and health systems and increased inequalities. The ESF+ will be one of the key EU instruments helping Member States to address these challenges.

¹ Organisations whose main activity falls under Eurostat's statistical classification of economic activities (NACE codes 87 and 88). For example, social services include, but are not limited to the following activities: residential care with or without accommodation, including services for the elderly and disabled, temporary shelter for the homeless, refugees, childcare, and vocational training for the unemployed among others. Social services can be either public or private and can have a broader or a more restrictive definition in each Member State.

As part of cohesion policy, the ESF+ will also continue its mission to support economic, territorial and social cohesion in the EU – reducing disparities between Member States and regions.

The ESF+ brings together four funding instruments that were separate in the programming period 2014-20: the European Social Fund (ESF), the Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD) the Youth Employment Initiative and the European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI).

Support under the ESF+ is mainly managed by Member States, with the Commission playing a supervisory role. Funding therefore takes place through:

[The shared management strand](#) - implemented by Member States in partnership with the Commission. These resources have a budget of roughly EUR 98.5 billion for the programming period 2021-27

[The Employment and Social Innovation \(EaSI\) Strand](#) - implemented by the Commission with a budget of close to EUR 762 million for 2021-2027.

[The 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights](#) acting as recommendations for creating a strong social Europe that is fair, inclusive and full of opportunities. These are setting the framework of ESF+ and are channelled through its main objectives.

EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND (ERDF)

The [European Regional Development Fund](#) (ERDF) aims to strengthen economic, social, and territorial cohesion in the European Union by correcting imbalances between its regions. With a budget of 200,629 million euros for the period 2021-2027, the ERDF will enable investments in a smarter, greener, more connected, and more social Europe that is closer to its citizens. ERDF's social strand aims at supporting effective and inclusive employment, education, skills, social inclusion, and equal access to healthcare, as well as enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism.

The ERDF finances [programmes](#) through [shared responsibility](#) between the European Commission and national and regional authorities in Member States. Member States' administrations select which projects they wish to finance and take responsibility for day-to-day management.

3. ANALYSIS AND REPORTING METHODOLOGY

The survey was developed in the framework of the project “Social services helpdesk for EU funding”, provided sets of questions for two groups of respondents:

1. **representatives of public authorities responsible for managing social services at local/ regional/ national level**, and private social services providers;
2. **representatives of national, sectoral, or regional managing authorities.**

The project consortium decided to prepare the hereby summary report including all EU countries where more than one questionnaire was answered.

This report presents an analysis of the answers to the questionnaires given by **representatives of EU member States’ national, intersectoral national/ regional authorities, or regional managing authorities** (or corresponding bodies in the EU funding cascade of the shared management).

The questionnaire included various types of questions, such as

1. Multiple choice questions;
2. Rating scale questions;
3. Open-ended questions.

The questionnaire was launched on the [Jotform](#) online tool, was open between 28/09/2022 and 15/11/2022.

1. It was distributed by the **project consortium** (respectively 17 organisations: European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), European Social Network (ESN), Social Services Europe (SSE), European Ageing Network (EAN), Caritas Europa, Eurodiaconia, Federation of European Social Employers, European Network of Social Integration Enterprises (ENSIE), European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR), Fédération Européenne des Associations Nationales Travaillant avec les Sans-Abri (FEANTSA), Union des entreprises à profit social (UNIPSO), European council of associations of general interest (CEDAG), Asociace Poskytovatelů Sociálních Služeb České Republiky (APSS), Fundación Once para la Cooperación e Inclusión Social de Personas con Discapacidad (FONCE), Consorzio Nazionale Idee in Rete (IIR), Hubbie) among their membership as the organic reach (members) and additional efforts (corresponding contacts, partners, etc.) among their **membership, networks, partners, and collaborators** (including European Commission representatives).

The questionnaire, through a survey link and QR code, was disseminated by:

- **E-mail** (sent by the consortium using the template email text with the possibility for each consortium partner to adjust it and share it to their members/ partners);
- **Newsletter** (a number of consortium members are producing regular – weekly, monthly, newsletters shared via email with their members and registered readers);
- **Social network posts** in LinkedIn and Twitter;
- **Website content** (consortium members prepared and published web articles to promote the survey to website visitors).

Based on tracking of the consortium partners efforts to contact managing bodies in EU member States, 780 individual contacts were established via email, while the total answers received were 75 from the following countries:

Austria (1), Belgium (4), Bulgaria (7), Croatia (3), Cyprus (1), Czechia (11), Denmark (1), Estonia (1), Finland (2), France (2), Germany (3), Greece (6), Ireland (3), Italy (3), Luxembourg (1), Netherlands (2), Poland (9), Romania (4), Slovakia (1), Slovenia (2), Spain (7), Sweden (1).

LIMITATIONS OF COLLECTED DATA

It is important to emphasise certain limitations of the questionnaire. The reason for this is the fact that within this analysis and presentation of the results, the EU Member States are represented by voluntarily responses of employees (question built into the survey) of the national managing (implementing or intermediary) bodies, hence it is not clear if opinions expressed are behalf of the individuals or the authorities.

Additionally, it is necessary to consider that all information received in questionnaires are based on personal opinions, interpretations, points of view, emotions, and judgment of the authors. Also, barriers in translation were faced, where Google translate was used, limiting the effectiveness or obstructing the comprehension of data received. Further, general answers received and use of unknown acronyms, hindered the further in-depth analysis and understanding of the information provided.

Also, it is important to note that the analysed data represent all received responses, namely representing EU Member States for whose managing bodies submitted less than 5 responses, but also five EU Member States who provided more than 5 responses, for whom individual national reports have been produced, following the same structure.

Last and not least, the answers received reflect the perception of the persons who filled out the questionnaire, with noted limitations in terms of their understanding of the questions, knowledge of the field of work to which the question is related, as well as the

needs and challenges faced by the people who act as their colleagues, collaborators, superiors, beneficiaries, and target groups. Subjectivity in the expression of views must be considered.

4. KEY FINDINGS

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, the questionnaire has provided insight into the perception of management bodies in EU Member States with regard to social services as potential and existing beneficiaries of Operational Programmes financed from ESF+ / ERDF sources.

Key findings can be summarised as follows:

- Most EU Member State managing bodies (79%) assess social services as very active or somewhat active in using EU funds.
- Asked to reflect their satisfaction level with the efficiency of the Operational Programmes (ESF+/ERDF) to ensure the allocation of funds to social services, most (68%) managing bodies representatives rated the work of their Operational Programmes as “rather good” or “good”.
- The five most common topics on which project proposals submitted by social services for ESF(+) and ERDF financing were: social inclusion of vulnerable people, access to labour market (employment), poverty alleviation and prevention (material deprivation and homelessness), social innovations and deinstitutionalisation.
- Most EU Member State managing bodies representatives (49%) highlighted that implementation was most challenging phase of the Operational Programme lifecycle, versus the planning phase (36%) and post implementation phase (13%)
- The most common leverages available to help social services overcoming challenges in accessing and using EU funding are: information/knowledge sharing tools and channels (guidelines/ manuals, website content, consultations, meetings, informative events, webinars, workshops for applicants/ beneficiaries) and involvement of the relevant public bodies as intermediaries or in an advisory capacity.
- Most (72%) national ESF+/ ERDF managing bodies carry out the implementation of the Operational Programme without involvement of external experts, as they claim this is the most appropriate way to carry out their responsibility.
- Similar outcome is visible when it comes to the involvement of the intermediary bodies, where in 69% of cases respondents stated that the Operational Programme they represent does not delegate tasks to an intermediary body.

- Available simplifications (provided by the Common Provisions Regulation) for national ESF(+)/ ERDF managing bodies were rated mostly (61%) as “rather good” or “good” suggesting high usage of those in EU Member States.
- Among available simplifications – Simplified Cost Options (lump sums, standard scale unit costs and flat rates) – were the most preferred followed by the usage of IT monitoring tools and platforms.
- Most of respondents declared (45 out of 63 answers received) to use other types of operational interventions to improve efficiency of EU funding for social services, which are not derived from the EC regulation (see more details on [Table 13](#)).
- Most managing authorities (64%) representatives assess current readiness of project applicants to prepare and implement projects in the frame of the national (regional) ESF+ and ERDF, as “rather good” or “good”.
- Most ESF+ / ERDF managing bodies’ representatives consider human resources (experienced, skilful, knowledgeable, and dedicated people) as the most important internal factor to guarantee the success of social services implementing their project financed from EU sources.
- Fifteen common recurring problems faced by project applicants and managers were identified, around:
 - Administration issues (AT, BE, CZ, NL, SK)
 - Auditing issues (BE, NL, ES)
 - Budget & Co-financing issues (BE, BG, CZ, HR, IT, LU, PL, SK, ES)
 - Complexity of indicators (CZ, DE)
 - Complexity of procedures (CZ, EE, FI, DE, IT, LU, PL, SK, ES)
 - Complexity of regulations (DK, GR, ES)
 - Deadlines in project applications (BE, BG, ES)
 - Eligibility of expenditure (PL, RO)
 - Lack of knowledge & experience (BE, BG, CZ, FR, DE, GR, IT, PL, SK, ES)
 - National laws (CZ, SI)
 - Partnership issues (BE, IT, PL, RO, SI)
 - Public procurement procedures (CY, DE, PL)
 - Staff shortage (PL, SI)
 - Non-realistic timelines (BE, EE, IT)
 - Sustainability plan (DE, PL, RO)

However, 23 more issues mentioned, referred in detail on [Table 17](#)).

5. QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

5.1. PART A: ASSESSMENT OF ESF+ AND ERDF OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES' RELEVANCE FOR SOCIAL SERVICES

The objective of this survey section was to define a set of questions determining the view of respondents on the frequency and quality of involvement of social services in ESF and ERDF shared management funding. Regarding the quality of involvement of social services as project beneficiaries, several questions allowed respondents to reflect on their satisfaction level and perceived challenges in the process of EU funding allocation, their internal capacity and improvement ambitions.

Participation of social services in EU funding programmes managed by managing authorities

Respondents were asked to reflect on involvement of social services as project beneficiaries in EU Operational Programmes. The analysis of their answers gave the following overview of social services' use of EU funding, according to the best of respondents' knowledge and experience.

Table 1: Participation of social services in EU funding programmes managed by managing authorities

No.	%	Proposed answers	Answers per EU Member State
28	41%	Social services are very active in mobilising EU funds	4-Belgium, 3-Croatia, 1-Cyprus, 1-Germany, 1-Ireland, 4-Romania, 1-Slovakia, 1-Sweden, 1 - Bulgaria, 2-Czechia, 1-Greece, 5-Poland, 3-Spain
26	38%	Social services are somewhat active in mobilising EU funds	1-Estonia, 2-Finland, 1-Germany, 2-Italy, 1-Luxembourg, 2-Netherlands, 1-Slovenia, 4 - Bulgaria, 5-Czechia, 3-Greece, 3-Poland, 1-Spain
10	15%	Social services are less active than other beneficiary groups	2-France, 1-Italy, 2-Czechia, 1-Greece, 1-Poland, 3-Spain
2	3%	Social services are difficult to be distinguished among other types of beneficiaries	1-Slovenia, 1-Greece
2	3%	I am not able to identify social services as a distinctive group at all	1-Germany, 1-Austria

Out of 68 received answers, 28 (41%) respondents declared that social services are very active in the frame of the Operational Programme that they are representing. Twenty-six (38%) respondents declared that social service actors are somewhat active in using EU funds, while 10 respondents (15%) declared that social services are less active than other beneficiary groups. Finally, 2 respondents (3%) declared that social services are difficult to be distinguished among other types of beneficiaries, while 2 respondents (3%) were unable to identify social services as a distinctive group among OP beneficiaries at all.

Respondents from four Member States provided their unique answers to the question as presented in the table below (answers are paraphrased).

Table 2: Participation of social services in EU funding programmes managed by member States managing authorities - unique answers.

EU MS	Provided answer
Denmark	Danish ESF+ Programme is focused mainly at developing qualifications and enabling access to the labour market while in a small part is homeless.
Ireland	Irish ESF+ Programme is financing training of childcare workers as the only activity which could be interpreted as a social service according to the given definition. Education as priority funded by the ESF+ covers vocational training for the unemployed and is in the national governance structure separated from social services. The ERDF co-funded regional programmes that we manage (14-20 and 21-27) do not include actions that directly address social services, rather, these types of actions are typically delivered through other ESIF/CPR funds in our Member State.
Bulgaria	Providers of social services were not beneficiaries in the implementation of the Operational Program "Regions in Growth" 2014-2020.
Czechia	Social service providers are very active, but the involvement is often formal, as the amount and rules of funding are political decisions made beforehand. In addition, workers in social services are overloaded with their regular activities, poorly paid and lack the capacity to cooperate beyond the scope of their usual duties to prepare programs in their free time.

Satisfaction with the efficiency of allocation of EU funds (ESF+ / ERDF) to social services

Table 3: Satisfaction with the efficiency of allocation of EU funds (ESF+ / ERDF) to social services

No	%	Rating	Answers per EU Member State
23	31%	Good	2-Belgium, 3-Croatia, 1-Cyprus, 1-Denmark, 1-France, 2-Germany, 1-Ireland, 2-Italy, 1-Luxembourg, 1-Netherlands, 4-Romania, 1-Slovakia, 2-Slovenia, 1-Sweden, 5-Bulgaria, 5-Czechia, 6-Greece, 9-Poland, 3-Spain
28	37%	Rather Good	
4	5%	Weak	2-Belgium, 1-Estonia, 2-Finland, 1-Germany, 1-Italy, 1-Netherlands, 1-Bulgaria, 4-Czechia, 4-Spain
13	17%	Rather weak	
7	9%	I don't know	1-Austria, 1-France, 2-Ireland, 1-Bulgaria, 2-Czechia

Respondents' self-assessment on their satisfaction regarding the efficiency of Operational Programmes (ESF+/ERDF) in allocating funds to social services resulted in 85 answers, with 50% of respondents rating their allocation as "rather good" (28 or 37%) or "good" (23 or 13%). However, 17 or 22% of them rated their satisfaction as "rather weak" (13 or 17%) or "weak" (4 or 5%) while 7 (9%) of respondents could not provide an opinion. The result suggests the opinion on satisfaction is divided between respondents regarding their own work in allocating EU funding as representatives of Member States' managing bodies.

Relevant Social services' priorities to apply for in national ESF+ / ERDF Operational Programmes

To establish what thematic focus was given to projects proposals submitted by social services in the framework of EU Member States operated ESF(+) and ERDF, respondents were given the option to provide their answer in an open format. The analysis of their answers gave the following overview of keywords used:

Table 4: Social services' priorities to apply for in national ESF+ / ERDF Operational Programmes

Member State	Social services' priorities to apply for in national ESF+ / ERDF Operational Programmes
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty alleviation
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deinstitutionalisation • Socio-professional integration for the most vulnerable and remote groups (e.g., single-parent families, refugees, and migrants, with special attention paid to women) • Social inclusion
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable services • Social inclusion • Socio-economic integration • Development of infrastructure (refurbishment and reconstruction) in relation to social service provision • Consultations of end users (health, employment) • Childcare • Basic material support and distribution

Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging employment (e.g. young and hard-to-employ groups like women to care for the elderly and infirm) • Education and lifelong learning (especially for vulnerable groups) • Social inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalized groups • Equal access to health care and social services for all socially vulnerable groups • Social innovative actions • Suppression of material scarcity
Cyprus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for pre-school education and care • Measures to promote equal opportunities and active participation in society • Measures to upgrade equitable and timely access to quality, sustainable and affordable services • Measures for enhanced delivery of family and community-based care services
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social service facilities and infrastructure (equipment) • Residential social services • Staff costs (professional and administrative) • Housing • Employment • Social prevention • Outpatient care • Mobile services
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upskilling with the aim of obtaining and maintaining employment • Social inclusion • Help for the homeless
Estonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work centres • Development of new services - component-based services
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social innovations • Employment • Prevention of poverty and exclusion • Social inclusion
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational training for unemployed
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour market integration • Migration • Social innovation • Equal opportunities • Part-time qualification • Social inclusion (fighting loneliness and isolation) • Support for young people in difficult situations • Counselling for families in difficult life situations
Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combating poverty and social exclusion • Development and sustainability of social service structures

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for learning and social integration on vulnerable social groups (Roma, migrants, NEET, disability, etc.)
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving access to employment and activation measures of all jobseekers • Promoting equal access to and completion of quality and inclusive education and training • Fostering active inclusion with a view to promoting equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and active participation • Support to the most deprived
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability • Early school leaving • Active social inclusion (job placement) • Gender-based violence • Active policies for vulnerable and disadvantaged people • Fight against poverty • Enhancing the supply of social housing • Slow tourism
Luxembourg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fight against material deprivation • Inclusion of disadvantaged persons • Raising employability
The Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active Inclusion • Among ERDF funds, policy objective 4 and more specifically the specific objectives below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 4.1 enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through developing social infrastructure and promoting social economy ○ 4.2 improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training, and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training ○ 4.3 promoting the socioeconomic inclusion of marginalised communities, low-income households and disadvantaged groups, including people with special needs, through integrated actions, including housing and social services; ○ 4.4 promoting the socio-economic integration of third country nationals, including migrants through integrated actions, including housing and social services

Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • day care homes for elderly • care services provided at the residence of a person in need; • day support programs in centres for children and youth (Act of 9 June 2011) • rental of care, rehabilitation, and support equipment (and training) for home care • development of care services, specialist care services, development of assistant services • support for the DI process of 24-hour facilities, operation of sheltered housing • Combating poverty and social exclusion, developing, and improving the quality-of-care services, developing assisted and sheltered housing • family support in crisis and foster care • care and assistance services in the local environment • professional activation for inactive persons
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment and administration of social assistance services - within the OP² 2014-2020
Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term care • Deinstitutionalization • Social inclusion (marginalized Roma communities)
Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting the availability of affordable, sustainable, and high-quality services, including health and social services of general interest • Investing in health and social infrastructure that contributes to development at national, regional, and local levels, reducing inequalities in health status, promoting social inclusion through easier access to social, cultural, and recreational services, and the transition from institutional services to community forms of services • Energy efficient renovation of social welfare institutions • Elimination of material deprivation - help in the form of food and accompanying measures
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment and occupational training of vulnerable groups • Fight against the gender gap and for equality between men and women • Day centres for elderly and people with disabilities • Social inclusion of vulnerable groups – migrants, Roma, people with disabilities, people at risk of poverty • Promotion of active inclusion, equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and active participation • Foster care for children and adolescents (NNA), transition to adulthood of NNA, family preservation, therapeutic care of NNA in the protection system • Child Guarantee implementation • Basic material support

² OP ref. as Programul Operational Capital Uman, POCU

Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for matching and transitions in the labour market • Promoting social inclusion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including the most disadvantaged and children • Development of other social infrastructure that contributes to social integration to society
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Challenges of ESF+/ERDF managing authorities when funding social services

Asked to assess the challenges they faced to allocate funding to social services in the various phases of the Operational Programme (ESF+/ ERDF) planning and implementation, respondents were able to select several options as ‘most challenging’. The following table provides the most relevant challenges for them presented in order from most answers to least.

Table 5: Challenges of ESF+/ERDF managing authorities when funding social services

No.	%	Proposed answers	Answers per EU Member State
29	21%	Planning – setting priorities and allocating funds	2-Belgium, 1-Croatia, 1-Cyprus, 1-Germany, 2-Italy, 1-Netherlands, 4-Romania, 1-Slovakia, 3-Bulgaria, 6-Czechia, 4-Greece, 3-Poland
25	18%	Implementation – defining the “rules” for applicants	1-Belgium, 1-Croatia, 1-Estonia, 1-Finland, 1-Germany, 1-Ireland, 1-Italy, 1-Netherlands, 3-Romania, 1-Slovakia, 1-Slovenia, 1-Sweden, 1-Bulgaria, 4-Czechia, 3-Greece, 3-Poland, 4-Spain
24	17%	Implementation – monitoring and assisting the project implementation and performance assessment and reporting	1-Austria, 2-Belgium, 1-Croatia, 1-Denmark, 1-Finland, 1-Germany, 2-Italy, 2-Romania, 1-Slovakia, 1-Slovenia, 1-Bulgaria, 2-Czechia, 5-Greece, 1-Poland, 2-Spain
19	14%	Planning – consultations and involvement of relevant stakeholders (including social services)	1-Austria, 1-Croatia, 1-Italy, 1-Luxembourg, 1-Slovenia, 1-Sweden, 3-Bulgaria, 1-Czechia, 1-Greece, 5-Poland, 3-Spain
18	13%	Post-implementation - Control and audit	2-Belgium, 1-France, 2-Germany, 1-Ireland, 2-Italy, 1-Netherlands, 1-Bulgaria, 1-Czechia, 1-Greece, 6-Spain
8	6%	Implementation – formal and quality assessment and selection of incoming applications	1-Croatia, 1-France, 1-Italy, 1-Bulgaria, 1-Greece, 1-Poland, 2-Spain
8	6%	Implementation – reaching and informing the relevant potential applicants (social service providers)	1-Luxembourg, 1-Sweden, 2-Czechia, 1-Greece, 1-Poland, 2-Spain
9	6%	Other*	1- Belgium, 1-Ireland, 1-Italy, 1-Luxembourg, 1-Netherlands, 1-Romania, 1-Slovakia, 1-Slovenia, 1-Poland

The implementation phase was the most commonly selected option, respectively selected by 65 or 49% of respondents. Among them 25 respondents (18%) selected “defining the rules for applicants”, 24 (17%) respondents opted for “monitoring and assisting the project implementation and performance assessment and reporting” including clarifying regulations, suggestions for potential project changes or verification of project reports; 8 (6%) selected “reaching and informing potential applicants (social services)” and 8 (6%) selected “formal and quality assessment and selection of incoming applications”.

The planning phase of the programme was selected by 48 respondents (35%) out of whom 29 (21%) selected “setting priorities and allocating funds” and 19 (14%) selected “consultations and involvement of relevant stakeholders, including social services”.

A significant number of respondents (18 or 13%) selected post-implementation – “control and audit” as the most challenging part of the OP implementation.

Nine respondents provided unique answers to this question with the views of national managing authorities regarding challenges when financing social services (answers are quotes):

Table 6: Challenges of ESF+/ERDF management authorities when funding social services - Individual answers

EU MS	Provided answer
Belgium	The administrative capacity (resources) of the partners for the implementation of co-financed projects over the entire chain (application -> MA ³ /AC ⁴ /AA ⁵ /EC ⁶ checks).
Ireland	The combined impact of the climate contribution, thematic concentration requirements, a limited set of intervention codes, and the selection of indicators and target setting at programme design stage is very restrictive when designing programmes.
Italy	The assessment of proposal and contracting the subsidies to the beneficiaries and the implementation of the projects is too long; conditions change, and the reference standards often leave too much room for interpretation.
Luxembourg	Disproportionality of the legislation for small programs with a restrictive budget envelope. Repetitive new constraints: i.e., child guarantee, ALMA ⁷ , Just transition fund.

³ MA – Managing Authority

⁴ AC - Audit Committee

⁵ AA - Auditing Authority

⁶ EC – European Commission

⁷ ALMA – Acronym not known.

Netherlands	Breaking through the way in which ESF+ is used in the Netherlands. This makes the connection between ESF+ and ERDF difficult in practice and more restrictive than the possibilities offered by the regulations. It is often not easy to get the EU level SCO applied in the member State itself (often doesn't fit the legal framework).
Poland	Disruptions in the smooth/effective flow of information/decisions from the EU to the national and national (ministerial) to the regional level. Decisions on defining the directions of intervention, which were important from the point of view of programming, were taken at the last minute / at the last stages. Events related to deadlines previously set by the European Commission or the ministry for the preparation of programs were changed (shortened) putting employees of managing institutions in uncomfortable and stressful working conditions. Challenges in standardising cost options while trying to adjust to the individual needs of the beneficiary.
Romania	It is difficult to implement the calls with complementary financing of hard/soft services (FSE+/FEDR), financial instruments - it will be the first time that an OP ⁸ will apply this type of instrument; there is no technical expertise. Uncoordinated approach by the beneficiaries of the project results - can lead to flawed quantification of the indicators related to the programs.
Slovakia	It is very difficult with the methodologies according to Art. 94 and 95 ⁹ of the general regulation to constantly align calculations with changes in the program proposal that result from successive negotiations with the EC.
Slovenia	The biggest challenge is the monitoring of the final recipients of aid, so in the next program period we will pay more attention to simplifications and upgrades of the IT system, which will make it easier for beneficiaries to monitor the final recipients and report on the achieved indicators.

Main leverages available to managing authorities to overcome challenges

Respondents were given the option to elaborate their opinion on the leverages they could use in their work to overcome the challenges they marked as the most significant. Knowledge of those leverages indicate the existence of capacity for solutions in the managing bodies of Operational Programmes (ESF+/ ERDF).

The following table provides a summary of the answers provided by the respondents.

⁸ OP ref. as Autoritatea de Management pentru Programul Operațional Capital Uman, AMPOCU

⁹ More information can be found on <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1060>, p. 79

Table 7: Main leverages at disposal to managing authorities to overcome challenges

Member State	Main leverages of managing bodies to overcome their challenges
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspection process which preventively integrates verification of the financial management of projects, including the risk of double subsidisation and/or implementation that does not comply with the rules of European Programmes (including public procurement); • Tool for planning and monitoring actions and budgets; • The implementation of OCS¹⁰ in order to facilitate and reduce process delays; • Assistance via computerised data exchange tools.
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good needs analysis; • Well-coordinated mechanism (informal meetings, etc.) for consultations with relevant stakeholders (thematic experts and non-government organisations) in the preparation and implementation phase; • Good communication with policy makers.
Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consulting and involving relevant stakeholders in setting priorities and defining rules for applicants; • User consultation, questions and answers; • Local independent unit with professional hired staff.
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Territorial consultations in the frame of working groups; • Lowering the administrative burden; • Sectoral consultations (EU financing structures and social care authorities).
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of idea descriptions for subsequent announcement of application rounds; • Dialogue with potential applicants; • Informing relevant organisations that calls are open for project applications.
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careful training and guidance of supporting authorities; • Networking.
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools making possible to anticipate the requirements of first-level control¹¹; • Beneficiaries' guide and announcements by theme (available on the "L'europe s'engage en Nouvelle-Aquitaine" website); • Standard models, in particular summary Statements of expenditure; • Guide for project leaders; • Webinars; • Awareness raising • Public consultation
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Bilateral contact • Funding guidelines • Funding principles • Special additional provisions • Grant notices • Thematic leaflets • Face-to-face training or via video conferences

¹⁰ Abbreviation not known.

¹¹ For more information: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/france>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch events • Best practice overviews • Networking between providers • Exchange of experiences • Individual advice by telephone, in person
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not applicable as the ERDF co-funded Regional Programmes that we manage (14-20 and 21-27) do not include actions that directly address social services, these types of actions are typically delivered through other ESIF/CPR funds in our Member State
Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of horizontal directions and instructions department in central bodies enabling direct and systematic communication with beneficiaries • Ad hoc investigation and support for resolution of problems • Long experience of social partners coordination and actors (Ministries) in charge for policy and procedural support • Sectoral consultations (EU financing structure being Ministry of education in charge to coordinate work of primary and secondary education institution a potential beneficiaries)
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling alerts and provisioning resources for specific projects • Territorial networks between local public authorities, public or private bodies that provide social services, the third sector as a whole, accredited private bodies specialized in the planning and management of projects co-financed by cohesion policy funds • Shared programming • Availability of additional resources
Luxembourg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESF+ digital management platform • Contact points established with MA
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear regulations • Clear dissemination of communication/information • The use of Simplified Cost Options • Control on content of calls for proposals • Approach target groups to participate
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programming the scope of intervention under the announced calls for proposals, taking into account the specificity of the region and the growing demand for services provided outside the institutional care system • Giving the opportunity for potential beneficiaries to participate in information meetings and individual consultations • Development of the mechanism of bonus criteria and targeting support to the so-called “white spots”, i.e. areas with the greatest deficit in access to given services • Creation manuals for beneficiaries, facilitating the process of implementing project activities

Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in consultations • Legislative proposals (the possibility to express the point of view/ proposals/ observations regarding draft normative acts for the approval of the National Strategies in the field of social assistance) • Participation in communities of practice aimed at the promotion and financing of social services • Organisation of information sessions • The establishment of easily quantifiable performance indicators defined as clearly as possible and in a much smaller number, which will facilitate their aggregation
Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication with potential applicants • Working groups (participatory approach to involve all relevant stakeholders) • Regional centres for communication with applicants/recipients and technical assistance
Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot testing of services in response to emerging needs in the field • Cooperation with the local agencies, centers for social work (responsible for social services)
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience in this type of work activity • Good internal coordination between departments such as employment, urban planning, education, social services, etc. • Established Social Inclusion Network (RIS) which allows all public social services and all public employment services (both regional and State) to exchange experience with private entities that work in the field of social inclusion • Existence and the articulation (at the relevant meetings of Operational Programmes) of entities in platforms (e.g., in the case of care for unprotected children and adolescents in Galicia, the Galician Platform of Children's Organizations (POIG)) • Advisory and provision of training by the intermediate bodies and the Management Authority to the social services as beneficiaries of the ESF
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation with municipalities and non-profit organisations

Outsourcing as an option to cover missing capacities and raise the quality of procedures

To assess the past and current capacity of managing bodies to find solutions for their perceived challenges in Operational Programmes management, respondents were requested to provide their views on outsourcing of parts or the whole programme planning or implementation process.

The 68 answers received reflected a divided view regarding this form of programme management. Forty-nine (72%) respondents carry out the implementation of the Operational Programme without involvement of external actors, while 17 (25%) respondents explained that parts of the process are managed externally, while 2 (3%) respondents lacked the knowledge to provide an answer.

The answers have been summarised in the following table:

Table 8: Outsourced programme management services

Member State	Outsourced programme management services
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hiring external services is good, but expensive
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A coordinating officer oversees implementation with other relevant officers, some of whom deal with processing the expenses to be certified In the Walloon Rural Development Program¹² co-financed by the EAFRD¹³, an external entity of the Walloon public services¹⁴ - the Walloon Paying Body, manages the financial operations and the execution of on-site project checks at the legal and financial level
Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) to respond to the needs of the local community Strengthening the capacity of CSOs for the active involvement of children and young people and the general population in the popularization of STEM¹⁵
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of the external expertise for development of integrated territorial investment strategy
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cooperation with the National Board of Social Affairs and Health (another public authority with jurisdiction over the area) in relation to initiatives to alleviate homelessness
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Ministry of Finance acts as the ESF+ administrative authority, and the financing of the programme and its supervision have been outsourced to intermediary bodies
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part of the first level verification is outsourced to a service provider (carried out under the supervision of the instructing services, which guarantees the reliability of the verification of the service carried out with regard to the rules of the managing authority and in accordance with European rules)
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, experiences are positive
Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of the external (expert) advisory staff for project planning and implementation
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducting evaluation studies Preparation of the methodology for estimating indicators (planning process) Expert study commissioned to define marginalization criteria in access to school education for children and youth in the Śląskie Voivodship

¹² Ref. as PwDR - Le Programme wallon de Développement Rural

¹³ EAFRD - European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

¹⁴ Ref. as SPW – Service public de Wallonie

¹⁵ STEM - Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Social Welfare (IRSSV) takes care of the creation and maintenance of various databases for social welfare services and programs, they monitor the implementation of various government laws and strategic documents, with the creation of special systems of indicators, instruments and protocols, the collection and analysis of data, and also for their informational support using ESF(+) and ERDF. For the needs of effective decision-making, they prepare professional bases for various government measures and advise the beneficiary
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of legality and eligibility verifications of selected operations

Involvement of intermediate bodies and assessment of their performance

To divide the MAs' responsibility of managing the development, implementation, and monitoring activities of the OPs, and involve more competent public authorities into the allocation of EU funds to social services, managing authorities sometimes set up a secondary (intermediary) level of Programme management, who act as Intermediate Bodies (IB). This is a way for managing authorities to close the gap in capacity to serve the specific group of beneficiaries.

Out of 64 answers received, 20 respondents answered this question positively. They reported and listed intermediary bodies and rated their work as follows (answers are paraphrased).

Table 9: Intermediary body involved in programme management

Member State	Intermediary body involved in programme management
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of OP 14-20, an IB¹⁶ was selected. The collaboration and implementation went relatively well. We have, however, had to manage budget underspending and reallocate funds to other projects. This requires significant management. The monitoring of the chains of custody (CoC¹⁷) was quite heavy (the IB is also AA¹⁸ for another region)
Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Foundation for the Development of Civil Society – acts as implementing body of the 2nd level - there is a lot of room for improvement in cooperation There is and our relationship with them is correct
Cyprus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Intermediate Body entrusted with the responsibility of selecting and monitoring the projects is the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, with whom we have always had excellent cooperation
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Board of Social Welfare

¹⁶ Intermediate Body (IB)

¹⁷ Chain of Custody (CoC): In legal context, is the chronological documentation or paper trail that records the sequence of custody, control, transfer, analysis, and disposition of materials, including physical or electronic evidence. (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chain_of_custody)

¹⁸ Auditing Authority (AA)

Estonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An intermediary institution participates, as it is better aware of the challenges in the social field and can allocate funds to cover to local issues
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, ESF+ funds five intermediary institutions NGOs - i.e. 3-sector organizations in some respects
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, we foster a good relationship, the social services mostly have the necessary know-how regarding grants
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, IB is operating a budget envelope for social services; relationship is very good, and no issue appeared so far with their performance
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The option was not activated in the 2014-2020 cycle. The activation of an intermediate body for the phases related to the management of project implementation and their reporting is being evaluated for the 2021-2027 cycle An intermediate body could be considered a local public body of a vast area that has funds (indirect and national) to support pilot interventions in the health sector
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Labour Office in Rzeszów (IP WUP) Intermediary Body for Integrated Territorial Investments (IP ZIT) Voivodeship Labour Office Ministry of Family and Social Policy Voivodship Labour Office in Katowice Silesian Centre for Entrepreneurship and Integrated Territorial Investments (ZIT) / Regional Territorial Investments (RIT)
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Intermediate Bodies that operate under the authority of the MA, effectively manage the OP¹⁹ measures related to this field
Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Office for the Implementation of Cohesion Policy operates under our authority, which coordinates the programming, implementation and evaluation of European cohesion policy funds and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Vulnerable, reporting on them and monitoring them. It is the contact point of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and equal opportunities for all matters related to the implementation of European funds; we consider the relationship to be successful
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UAFSE Once Foundation La Caixa Foundation

Assessment of the current State of simplifications implemented

The Common Provisions Regulation for the financial period 2021-2027, after a comprehensive consultation, stipulates the obligation or possibility for Operational Programmes to use several simplifications for the implementation of the national ESF+ and ERDF Operational Programmes. Therefore, respondents were asked to assess the application those simplifications in their Operational Programmes.

¹⁹ OP ref. as Programul Operational Capital Uman, POCU

Table 10: Assessment of the current State of simplifications implemented

No.	%	Rating	Answers per EU Member State
14	19%	Good	1-Cyprus, 1-Denmark, 1-France, 1-Italy, 2-romania, 1-Slovenia, 1-Sweden, 2-Bulgaria, 1-Greece, 1-Poland, 2-Spain
33	44%	Rather Good	3-Belgium, 2-Finland, 3-Germany, 1-luxemburg, 2-Netherlands, 1-Slovakia, 2-Bulgaria, 5-Czechia, 5-Greece, 7-Poland, 2-Spain
11	15%	I don't know	1-Austria, 1-Croatia, 1-Finland, 2-Ireland, 1-italy, 1-Romania, 3-Bulgaria, 1-Poland
13	17%	Rather weak	1-Belgium, 1-Estonia, 1-Ireland, 1-Italy, 1-Romania, 1-Slovenia, 5-Czechia, 2-Spain
4	5%	Weak	2-Croatia, 1-Czechia, 1-Spain

Out of 75 received responses, most of the respondents 33 (44%) rated the application of simplifications in their Operational Programme as “rather good” and 14 (19%) rated application of simplifications in their programme as “good”, while 13 (17%) rated it as “rather weak” and 4 (5%) as “weak”. Total of 11 (15%) respondents stated that they don’t know how their Operational Programme stands with the application of simplifications.

Asked to comment their answer, respondents pointed out the reasons supporting their ratings on the provided scale as follows:

Table 11: Perception of current State of simplification among ESF+ / ERDF Operational Programmes in EU Member States

Member State	Perception of current State of simplification among ESF+ / ERDF Operational Programmes in EU Member States
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplification and funds are in contradiction
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expenditure eligibility rules are simpler at ESF+ level • The qualitative requirements from one programme to another are often accompanied by relatively complex processes with several levels of stakeholders involved • It is necessary to popularise simplification for partners/beneficiaries. This requires training
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National legislation does not leave space for further simplification to their Operational Programme • Use of simplified cost options is the most significant simplification
Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At this point, we are pretty much excluded from the planning of OP ESF+ activities • The activities planned for the current period (2021-2027) are still in the planning phase and have not been specifically defined

Cyprus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For most projects, simplified cost options are promoted
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplification of the mandatory content for the feasibility studies in the Czech ERDF The funding scheme does not meet the specific needs of the actors in the region Less formal errors occurrence rate Bureaucratic burden remains on the high level
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESF+ made possible more simplification for applicants to the programmes
Estonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is difficult to understand the purpose of simplification
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The evaluation is challenging at this stage, but the standardised introduction of lump sums will simplify programmes implementation
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The managing authority has decided to apply administrative simplification using simplified cost options by type of action to ease administrative burdens for beneficiaries, using flat rates
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SCOs facilitate access to the funds and the willingness of other local partners to participate in the project Simplification is offered through simplified cost options, however due to the high co-financing rates, the beneficiaries cannot participate in EU funding Extension of the simplified cost options
Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Usage of the simplified cost options.
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned simplification measures are not within the control of the MA, a lot of simplification measures rely on external factors in implementation.
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The simplification of the procedures was defined based on a very articulated partnership comparison of practices There has not yet been a simplification of the reporting standards
Luxembourg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of a centralised digital platform, use of simplified cost options, digitisation of procedures
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This mainly concerns Simplified Cost Options (SCO), which have been already used in the ESF 2014-2020 period. Where real improvement would be possible, an SCO is aimed at/suitable for the target group(s) (e.g. municipalities, the benefit recipients/people further the labour market.) Fund-wide simplifications have been worked on, but there are still many differences due to the way in which ESF+ and ERDF are implemented differently

Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase of the budget size binding the Programme to use SCOs to 200.000 EUR (with risk of higher irregularity rate) • Usage of the electronic form of applying for co-financing (co-financing applications) • Separation of allocations for supporting non-governmental organizations in terms of capacity building for the implementation of social services in the local environment • Coordination projects of regional social policy (service)centres will be implemented as a of one stop shop (planned in collaboration with regional authorities to reflect their specific needs) • Simplified cost options: unit rates, increased project value threshold for lump sums (the simplified method of settling expenses will now be available to more entities in the field of social services than before) • Adaptation of the documentation to "plain language" favourable to the Applicants (as response to the known obstacles: complicated national regulations, frequent external inspections, changing recommendations, e.g. the requirement to collect certificates and not declarations in the case of projects where the target group was unemployed or professionally inactive people)
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The implementation system has been simplified compared to the previous programming period
Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2014-2020: flat-rate expenses for indirect costs (simplified administration), the possibility of using integration actions within the framework of ITMS2014+²⁰ for submitting an application for a non-refundable financial contribution²¹ and Operational program Environment²²; additionally planned in 2021-2027: creation of regional centres for communication with applicants/recipients and technical assistance, prioritisation of electronic communication
Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplification of procedures has not been implemented In the period 14-20, we have already established a simplification system, which will be upgraded in the period 21-27 by simplifying the monitoring and reporting procedures (upgrading IT systems) and simplifying the costs of technical assistance
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplified procedures were already introduced in 2014-2020.
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to the funds is disabled to many by imposing very strict access conditions (1.5 SMI) without evaluating the economic situation of the territory in particular • Most of the operations are justified by applying one of the available simplified cost options, thus the administrative burden on the beneficiaries is reduced and they can concentrate to a greater extent on the qualitative part of their actions • No special simplification is detected • The Management Authority has decided to promote the use of justification to a greater extent through simplified costs, even increasing its scope with respect to the 2014-2020 period, in which it has already been very high

²⁰ <https://www.itms2014.sk/>

²¹ Ref. as ŽoNFP, ŽNFP (Žiadosť o nenávratný finančný príspevok) – Application for a non-refundable financial contribution

²² Ref. as ŽP (ref. to the Operačný program Životné prostredie) - Operational program Environment

Preferred simplifications

Asked about their preferred simplifications (Regulation (EU) 2021/1060), 33 respondents provided theirs in an open text format. The following table provides a summary of the answers with relevant content provided:

Table 12: Preferred simplification within ESF+ / ERDF Operational Programmes

Member State	Preferred simplification within ESF+ / ERDF Operational Programmes
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Billing arrangements
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The focus on cost simplification (OCS) is a significant step forward in the implementation of the funds –at the non-financial level (indicators) would be useful as it remains a very complex management process using sensitive data among others (GDPR, audit trail, etc.).
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified cost options
Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified cost options represent a significant simplification
Cyprus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The budgeting methodology developed for the individual actions
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified forms Simplified cost option – 40% lump sum
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly satisfied with standard rates and overhead percentages; it greatly simplifies the projects' administration and authority resources in relation to control set-up
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standardized lump sums make the implementation much easier
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanding the use of SCOs and flat rates make it possible to reduce the administrative burden for project leaders and therefore make European funding more accessible and reduce errors in declared expenditure.
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified cost options Shortened terms due to the necessary withholding of the flexibility amount²³
Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified cost options
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approval process for SCO/SSUC²⁴ as part of the 2014-20 programme period was much more straightforward For the 2021-27 simplification measures are subject to different interpretation by the bodies involved in the cascade for Article 94 SCO/SSUC submissions The 'off-the-shelf'²⁵ simplified cost options should be made more accessible for implementation Risk based management verifications and the option to use employer documents setting out fixed percentage allocation of time ("mission letters") rather than timesheets are very welcome

²³ Not able to identify a reference to a definition of the “flexibility amount” and to what this consists.

²⁴ SSUC - Standard scales of unit costs

²⁵ file: [///C:/Users/eleni.kefallinou/Downloads/KE-02-18-843-EN-N%20\(2\).pdf](///C:/Users/eleni.kefallinou/Downloads/KE-02-18-843-EN-N%20(2).pdf)

Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard costs • Online registration of data into the IT monitoring system
Luxembourg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of a centralized digital platform and digitization of procedures • Use of simplified cost options
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single hourly rate for ERDF • Standard scale for salary costs in ERDF - Interreg programs in which NL participates
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific Programme guidelines identifying minimum standards for social services • Simplified cost options: unit rates, lump sum, flat rates • E-cohesion – usage of the IT monitoring system
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within priority P1 - the component supported by the ERDF simplification is reflected on coherent legislative framework (significantly improved compared to previous financial exercises)
Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flat rates for indirect costs - recipients do not have to document individual items of costs directly connected to the project (reduced administrative burden on the part of recipients and MAs²⁶) • Use of the ITMS2014+²⁷ system and e-box - reduction of document delivery times, reduced administration
Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard unit cost • Flat rate costs
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit costs for staff and participants (the challenge is that they are actual costs for project implementation)
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of a reference for access when it comes to beneficiaries and measuring the level of income to use the purchase parity price for calculation of the necessary level of income to access the benefit • Simplified cost options

Operational interventions to improve efficiency of EU funding for social services

Regardless of the Common Provisions Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2021/1060), national governments can establish procedures to close the gap between the required or planned quality of management and administration (e.g., to achieve better transparency, create inclusive and beneficiary friendly environment, etc.) and current State of capacity. Outsourcing of different services could add value, in short term, in above-described situations. Questionnaire respondents were requested to list these efforts in case they were implemented in 2014-2020 financial period or planned for the 2021-2027 period.

²⁶ MAs Ref. as RO (Riadiaci orgán)

²⁷ <https://www.itms2014.sk/>

Answers received by respondent under this question were organised to reflect national status of operational interventions implemented, and their answers have been summarised per country in the following table.

Table 13: Operational interventions to improve efficiency of EU funding for social services

Member State	Operational interventions to improve efficiency of EU funding for social services
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic objective for social integration in the Interreg programmes is defined without having a specific evaluation framework • An operation on the principle of "continuous improvement" is in place within our managing authority, so that we continuously improve the data exchange tool on the overall management of the files (selection -> implementation -> financial/non-financial reporting -> MA²⁸/AC²⁹/AA³⁰/CA³¹ control -> SFC³² reporting) • Educational video clips will be made available to partners/beneficiaries. • Simplification of control procedures (based on SCO) to reduce processing times
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing the "evaluation of effectiveness, efficiency and added value of the Programme" at the mid-term of the financial period.
Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External assessment of projects • Organization of information/educational events for users • Extended application deadlines • Profiles on social networks for communication between users of the same call • Information days for users will be organized
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational Programme includes the "social work methodologies" to be followed by all beneficiaries financed for the Programme to unify the indicator achievement • Operational Programme recognises the national control system for social service providers to avoid unnecessary waste of time and human resources for the control tasks
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduced simplifications in relation to standard rates and overheads • Training options in relation to administrative set-up and reporting • External evaluation of all projects
Estonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a steering committee for social services
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information and training events organised by the administrative authority
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drafting of calls for projects with more restricted criteria
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of an ESF authority committee (in addition to the ESF monitoring committee provided for by the regulation) where economic and social partners are also represented

²⁸ MA – ref. as AG (l' Autorité de Gestion)

²⁹ AC - Audit Committee

³⁰ AA - Auditing Authority

³¹ CA – Certifying Authority

³² SFC - [System for Fund Management in the European Union](#)

Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The activation of capacity building measures is envisaged
The Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up experiments to promote active inclusion in collaboration with the actors involved, including public services, service providers (e.g., social services, social workers/youth workers, case managers) and social economy and community actors organizations • Improving the exchange of information between service providers, for example by setting up a common database • Improving access to affordable and quality social services necessary for the activation and rehabilitation of the disadvantaged – detainees, victims of crime and violence to be considered in this context, improved outreach, on the needs tailored services, integrated pathways and individualized support, counselling, guidance, enhanced outreach, as well as access to regular services, including quality education and training (see also section 2.1.1.1.1. ‘Support from the funds’ of the Program Document ESF+ 2021-2027³³).
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building and strengthening for vulnerable beneficiaries (NGO sector actors) for social inclusion • Training and consultations for beneficiaries during announced calls for proposals to support quality of proposals • Promotional and information meetings providing access to materials • Development of a regional program for the deinstitutionalization of social services. An appointed team, working on the creation of a Regional Plan for the Deinstitutionalization of Social Services to guarantee that social services’ needs will be taken into consideration and included in Reg5ion's policy • Project steering committee created, with participation of experts, to determine the directions of the projects, but also their cooperation and exchange of experience • Further development of the potential of beneficiaries implementing projects in the field of social services (especially NGOs) by strengthening their institutional potential, staff training and information meetings • Longer /rational timeframe for announcing calls for proposals (adequate to the amount of allocation, and extended if the situation required) • Introduction of non-competitive mode (agreed based on level of preparedness of projects)

³³ <https://www.executionvanbeleidszw.nl/subsidies-en-regelingen/esf/documenten/publicaties/subsidies/esf/regulations/programme-document-esf-2021-2027>

Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects, internally assessed through regularly submitted monitoring reports by the recipients, where the fulfilment of the MI³⁴ as well as the qualitative aspect of the project is evaluated • The evaluation of the OP is also carried out through external companies; • Working group composed of representatives of the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of the Slovak Republic • Organized informational and educational seminars for applicants/recipients • Appendices are published as part of the calls/challenges for the purpose of simplifying filling in the application for the provision of a non-refundable financial contribution³⁵ • Potential applicants are specified within the call/challenge
Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal and external project evaluations to improve efficiency; • Upgrading the IT system and strengthening the capacity and training of beneficiaries.
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing Authority will launch open calls to private non-profit entities for training, job search assistance, etc. of people at risk of social exclusion; • Wide-range call is planned for third sector entities that act in the field of social inclusion – where projects with a long execution period will be selected in order to achieve a more lasting impact; • Informative events are planned and will take place for the entities selected to carry out projects managed with ESF+; • Close collaboration with social services, employment services, local entities and the third sector is going to continue within the framework of the Social Inclusion Network (RIS).

5.2. PART B: ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES CAPACITY TO USE ESF+ AND ERDF FUNDS

The ESF+ and ERDF Operational Programme managing authorities were given the opportunity in the frame of the survey, to express their perception on the capacity of Programme beneficiaries to comply with Programme requirements. The intention of the consortium is to compare the answers with self-assessments made by social services who answered a separate questionnaire to determine differences in perceptions between managing authorities and social services.

³⁴ MI - Measurable Indicator ref. as MU (Merateľný ukazovateľ)

³⁵ Application for the provision of a non-refundable financial contribution – ref. as ŽonFP (Žiadosť o poskytnutie nenávratného finančného príspevku)

Readiness of project applicants to write and implement EU projects

Table 14: Readiness of project applicants to write and implement EU projects

No.	%	Rating	Answers per EU Member State
32	43%	Rather Good	3-Belgium, 1-Croatia, 2-Finland, 1-Germany, 1-Ireland, 1-Luxemburg, 1-Netherlands, 1-Romania, 1-Slovakia, 1-Sweden, 3-Bulgaria, 2-Czechia, 4-Greece, 7-Poland, 3-Spain
16	21%	Good	1-Belgium, 2-Croatia, 1-Cyprus, 1-Denmark, 1-Netherlands, 3-Romania, 1-Slovenia, 3-Bulgaria, 1-Czechia, 1-Greece, 1-Spain
16	21%	Rather weak	1-Estonia, 1-France, 2-Germany, 1-Italy, 1-Slovenia, 6-Czechia, 2-Poland, 2-Spain
7	9%	I don't know	1-Austria, 1-France, 2-Ireland, 1-Italy, 1-Bulgaria, 1-Czechia
4	5%	Weak	1-Italy, 1-Czechia, 1-Greece, 1-Spain

Asked to rate the current readiness of project applicants to prepare and implement projects in the frame of national and regional ESF+ and ERDF Operational Programmes, out of 75 respondents, 32 (43%) rated the readiness of applicants as “rather good” and 16 (21%) as “good”. However, 16 (21%) respondents rated the readiness of project applicants as “rather weak” and 4 (5%) also selected “weak”.

Respondents were allowed to qualify their answers by providing additional comments. Forty-two filled in an open text box with the reasons behind the ratings they gave. Answers have been summarised per country in the table below.

Table 15: Readiness of project applicants to write and implement EU projects - Comments of respondents

Member State	Readiness of project applicants to write and implement EU projects
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CPAS and associations (asbl) that we support are generally proactive in obtaining information and submitting requests for assistance when they have matured a project
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the moment the readiness of the candidates to write and implement European projects is good, given their activity in publishing draft documents for public discussion Our OP finances only infrastructure which is mainly municipal property and hence beneficiaries are municipalities The beneficiaries already have extensive experience from the previous programming periods with regards to writing projects, but they still have some problems with implementation
Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil society organizations are high-quality implementers of a range of social services and depend on project financing Applicants have experience in implementation compared to the previous period

Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of personnel capacity and complex administration associated with the project • NGOs in social services do not have the capacity and resources for such workers for such workers • Applicants are additionally burdened by the problems of the energy crisis and inflation
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project expertise is at a high level in Finland
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mobilization of European funds requires that the project applicants and managers receive in-depth support from the instructors (outsourced expert and Programme management services) on the specific rules to be respected that social services do not meet with other public co-financiers
Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delays in implementation are often observed due to objective difficulties in finding personnel and suitable premises • In general, there is readiness and experience, but there is considerable room for improvement • Due to the special bureaucracy of the NSRF (ESPA), systematic support is required for the timely and correct implementation of the projects
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive pressure on the same operators • Lack of time and specificity of the sector in which it is not easy to find external experts able to support the services
Luxembourg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The application form is standard (provision of template), and the information days are organized prior to project calls
The Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The set-up of the ESF+ structure in the Netherlands requires willingness on the part of project applicants to write and implement EU projects • Labour market regions make good use of the ESF+ resources • Person never engaged with EU funds has a threshold to overcome or will experience the administrative burden in practice
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional program of ROP Pomorskie 2014-2020³⁶ show the enormous human resources/personnel and institutional potential, including financial, of beneficiaries in applying for and implementing projects financed from EU sources • Events of recent years force the beneficiaries to react flexibly and adapt to the existing situations, and to constantly invest in training their own human resources to effectively implement social policy in the area covered by the intervention • After the experience of the 2014-2020 perspective, entities applying for support have basic knowledge and experience enabling them to effectively apply for EU funds • Insufficient potential of non-governmental organizations and local governments to provide social services in specific local communities in the region; • Experience in project implementation in previous financial perspectives allowed for dissemination of knowledge in the field of submitting applications for project co-financing and the implementation of support itself;

³⁶ Regional Operational Programme of Pomorskie Region for 2014-2020

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intermediate Body always prepares detailed documentation of the competition, including its regulations, and answers the questions of potential beneficiaries.
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social services have experience of applying for EU funds from previous operational programme periods.
Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recipients are re-engaging in published calls to support social services and are actively informed about their announcement; Flat rates³⁷ for project management allows recipients to involve the project team; Creation of regional centres also aims to ensure their technical readiness and assistance even if the applicant connects for the first time.
Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The applicants were ready to respond to the deinstitutionalization projects, but there are problems with the initial implementation (that is why the projects are mostly prepared with external contractors); Applicants are well qualified to prepare and implement projects, as they have experience from the current program period.
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient experience (lack of training possibilities) for the increasing EU funds available; Public social services have long experience in project preparation, as well as private entities (especially those at the State level) have also acquired significant experience in the use of the ESF, since they act throughout the State; It would be advisable to have a strategic vision of social services that determines which of their projects are essential for financing within the ESF.

Internal factors as guarantee for the successful implementation of EU projects

Respondents were asked to give their perception on the internal factors that are most important to guarantee the success of social services implementing project financed with EU funding. Responses were received with the following distribution:

- 50 respondents (32%) - Experience in using EU funds (skills, knowledge, and the right people)
- 47 (31%) - Institutional capacity: dedicated staff for EU funding programmes
- 34 (22%) - Financial capacity: solid financial management and available cash flow
- 19 (12%) - Good network and knowledge of available opportunities for the sector

³⁷ For more info:

<https://ec.europa.eu/esf/BlobServlet?docId=458&langId=en#:~:text=Flat%20rate%20financing%20can%20be%20used%20to%20calculate%20any%20category%20of%20costs.&text=For%20ESF%3A%20flat%20rate%20of,other%20costs%20of%20the%20project.&text=For%20ETC%3A%20flat%20rate%20of,calculate%20the%20direct%20staff%20costs.>

- 4 (3%) – Other*

Table 16: Internal factors as guarantee for the successful implementation of EU projects

No.	%	Rating	Answers per EU Member State
50	32%	Experience in using EU funds (skills, knowledge, and the right people)	1-Austria, 3-Belgium, 2-Croatia, 1-Cyprus, 1-Denmark, 2-Finland, 3-Germany, 2-Ireland, 1-Italy, 1-Luxembourg, 2-Netherlands, 2-Romania, 1-Slovakia, 2-Slovenia, 1-Sweden, 4-Bulgaria, 4-Czechia, 6-Greece, 6-Poland, 5-Spain
47	31%	Institutional capacity: dedicated staff for EU funding programmes	3-Belgium, 1-Croatia, 1-Cyprus, 1-Denmark, 1-France, 2-Germany, 2-Ireland, 3-Italy, 1-Luxembourg, 1-Netherlands, 4-Romania, 1-Slovakia, 2-Slovenia, 4-Bulgaria, 4-Czechia, 5-Greece, 5-Poland, 6-Spain
34	22%	Financial capacity: solid financial management and available cash flow	1-Austria, 2-Belgium, 3-Croatia, 1-Estonia, 2-Finland, 2-France, 2-Germany, 2-Ireland, 1-Luxembourg, 3-Romania, 1-Sweden, 4-Bulgaria, 4-Czechia, 3-Poland, 3-Spain
19	12%	Good network and knowledge of available opportunities for the sector	1-Croatia, 1-Denmark, 1-Finland, 1-Germany, 2-Italy, 3-Romania, 1-Slovakia, 4-Bulgaria, 1-Czechia, 1-Greece, 3-Spain
4	3%	Other*	1-Germany, 1-Czechia, 2-Poland

Additional information from respondents

Respondents had the opportunity to share with the project consortium any other thoughts on the proposed topic, which in their opinion, was not covered by the survey. Answers have been summarised per country in the table below:

Member State	Additional comments of respondents
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secured financing, lowest possible co-financing rate for providers, use of simplified cost options, good IT systems.
Czechia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NGOs in social services do not have resources for co-financing. NGOs are not allowed to make a profit, so they can only get co-financing from donations. Donations are not high enough to co-finance an investment project. So, they have to choose which of the necessary upcoming projects is the most important and discard the rest. The obligation of co-financing is set by the State, and for NGOs in social services in the Czech Republic this is limiting, as such an obligation does not make sense.

Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All the indicated factors are very important. To achieve the best results, it is necessary to combine them; • I believe that it is not possible to choose one most important factor to achieve the goal. All factors must be present for the implementation of the EU fund to be effective for social services. Both the institutional capacity and dedicated staff in the institution are needed, as well as the financial capacity and the right people on the part of the Applicants. Institutional capacity without efficient financing will not contribute to the successful implementation of EU funds, just as financial readiness without a properly prepared Applicants will not support the effectiveness of projects within social services.
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Recurring problems faced by project applicants and managers

Respondents were asked to list the most recurring problems, which according to them project applicants and managers face during project application and implementation.

In total, 74 respondents provided their answers through an open box format. Their answers can be summarised as follows.

Table 17: Recurring problems faced by project applicants and managers

Member State	Recurring problems faced by project applicants and managers
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient documentation
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay in starting new schedules - submission and selection deadlines, good knowledge of the stages and rules of the process, the mobilisation of partners who meet the requirements, and finally the assurance of co-financing from the public authorities • The time between the submission of the project and the approval of the project • Administrative capacity • Cumbersome monitoring of audits (ability to quickly implement recommendations during inspections)
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of a good monitoring system (IMIS) deducted largely the number of mistakes programme staff was previously facing • Inappropriate timeframe set in the project applications for the activities planned • Insufficient financial liquidity of projects derived from the inappropriate timeframe of activities and aligned payment forecasts (which do not enable a budget turnover in case of delays and lack of co-funding) • Difficulties of project beneficiaries to recruit experienced and skilled staff for project management

Czechia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-financing rates for non-governmental sector actors (which could be provided on local and regional level, as those authorities (and target groups living there) are benefiting from the activities of non-governmental organisations) • Ambiguities in project forms (application, reporting) • Non-existence of preliminary eligibility checks of applications disqualifies not only the organisation applying for funds, but also the target groups supposed to receive social services • National laws allowing social services to develop project activities out of the scope of the Operational Programme • Official notes (documents) produced very often to justify the real situation deriving the project activity from its initial plan • Complexity of administration • Lack of qualified personnel • Complex system of indicators • Lack of comprehensive interpretation of indicators • Aversion of target groups to get involved and stay involved into project activities
Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-up-to-date handling of second level implementation body (PT2) - National Foundation for the Development of Civil Society • Different approaches of bodies in the management system of EU funds • Finances (minimum wage in the Republic of Croatia increases from year to year)
Cyprus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public tender procedures
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of EU regulations for the Programmes
Estonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeframe • Irregularities • Rigidness of rules around reporting
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigidity and complexity of financial reporting
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When submitting applications for funding, project leaders have not necessarily contacted the responsible body before they submit their application and are not aware of the specific rules related to projects financed by European funds; then they are confronted with the request for substantial additional supporting documents which require support from the instructing services • Incentive requirements on certain aid schemes or public procurement procedures can constitute obstacles

Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring transferability and sustainability • Complexity of the procedures - provision of national co-funding, TN³⁸ data collection on site, IT systems too complex designing basis of funding claims • Compliance with procurement • Compliance with non-financial indicator requirements • Steep learning curve for CPR funds³⁹
Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of qualified personnel • Management rules are incomprehensible • Insufficient flexibility of Programmes to respond to the needs for modification of content and budget during the project implementation
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective response to needs • During the presentation phase difficulties concern supervision of the partnership and financial aspects, during implementation the reporting aspects • Knowledge of Programmes • Contacts with possible foreign partners • Time devoted to the project to achieve the objectives (compared to 'normal' workload)
Luxembourg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of public national co-financing • Complexity of European procedures compared to national procedures
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative burden of conducting ESF project (administrations and audit burden)

³⁸ Acronym not known.

³⁹ Shared management funds that share [common provision regulations](#): European Regional Development Fund, Cohesion Fund, European Social Fund Plus, European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, Just Transition Fund, Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, Border Management and Visa Instrument and Internal Security Fund.

Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient knowledge of the basic program documents and the recruitment rules • Inability to apply procedures related to the selection of contractors/service providers based on the principle of competition and public procurement law • Failure to meet the applicable deadlines at the stage of submitting reimbursement claims, which results in delays in verifying payment applications and disbursing subsequent tranches • Failure to comply with the rules resulting from the Act on the Protection of Personal Data when providing documentation confirming the eligibility of project participants • Lack of will and awareness of cooperation within the project team and inter-institutional cooperation • Inconsistency within the provisions of the programming and specifying documents (interpretation problems) • Questionable eligibility of expenditure • Changes of the staff working on the design of the Programme • Lack of appropriate mechanisms to ensure continuity in the implementation of social services after the end of financing from EU funds • Implementation of the project contrary to the assumptions of the project • Lack of sufficient potential to apply for EU funds (e.g. problem with ensuring own contribution to the project) • Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are very often applicants in competitions for social services, where a repeated reported problems are maintaining sustainability in projects, insufficient staff, lack of substantive and often highly specialized knowledge required to write, implement and settle the project • Difficulty in obtaining appropriate staff for the project, as limited contracts can be provided • Increase in the number of companies that write applications for EU funding - for a fee, on behalf of Applicants - there are cases where a social service provider (Applicant) receives an application/project for implementation that does not meet its expectations and is a major implementation problem
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability of developed social services, subsequent financing • Development of partnerships between local actors • Eligibility of the target group and the expenses that can be settled • Restriction affecting the target groups as a result of the COVID pandemic • Socio-economic difficulties that can affect the achievement of targets

Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive administrative burden (planned more intensive use of electronic submission of documentation with the aim of reducing this burden) • Unclear wording of manuals/supporting documents leading to a high error rate in submitted application for a non-refundable financial contribution⁴⁰/ request for payment⁴¹ by applicants/ recipients • Lack of experience with project management on the part of the recipients, or failure to provide a flat rate by the MA for the project team (see POS call 2014-2020) • Incorrect setting of solutions for employee fluctuations on the RO side as well as on the recipient side (necessary project changes leading to further administrative burden)
Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process until the fulfilment of indicators targets (e.g. purchase / construction of a building) • Dependence on external factors • Coordination of national regulations with the real situation on the real State market (due to inconsistency) • Mutuality of cooperation of stakeholders (dependency of project implementation on the ability and understanding of management) • For managers, the most recurring problem is the lack of tool to sanction non-performance by contractors • Lack of personnel to work with a demanding target group
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignorance of European regulators regarding access, conditions, and justification of funds received by the member States • The requirements of justification of the expenses (necessary on the other hand) • Complexity • The burden deriving from the numerous instances of verification and control of operations • Ignorance of management details (separate accounting, advertising, etc.) • Deadlines for submission of proposals for the open Calls for proposal are too short • Shortage of projects of wide scope and volume (very fragmented projects)
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anchoring the project idea

Additional information from respondents

Respondents had the opportunity to share with the project consortium any other thoughts on the proposed topic, which in their opinion, was not covered by the survey.

⁴⁰ Ref. as ŽoNFP, ŽNFP (Žiadosť o nenávratný finančný príspevok) – Application for a non-refundable financial contribution

⁴¹ Ref. as ŽoP (žádost o platbu) – Request for payment

Eleven respondents were open to provide their answers in the form of short text paraphrased as follows:

Table 18: Additional comments of respondents

Member State	Additional comments of respondents
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The succession of health, migration, and energy crisis (with its social repercussions) have had a strong impact on services which are generally in need of technical assistance; • There is an echo of suffering at the level of social workers and their position needs to be re-evaluated (in terms of income and status, as they are often characterised as precarious jobs). There is a need of restructuring their job roles, which is more than aiding users and more in a position to provide a front-line service <p>Hence, a multidisciplinary approach is necessary to be considered, as issues have been raised and adaptation measures need to be taken</p>
Czechia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential social services, although needed, are not supported by the EU funding Programmes • Perception of project management suggests that programme officers, in addition to development and provision of project relevant forms, impose the strict attitude and unsupportive environment • Significant negative impact of the economic crisis to the social services (workload, capacity and quality) affects their ability to undergo complex application process
Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement of vehicles that would facilitate the users' needs
Estonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time is required for preparation to assess the needs, to use EU financial support, which is crucial
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is very difficult to find a partner in the public service because the bureaucracy is too burdensome • Too high national co-financing rates
Greece	European Commission should develop guidelines and manuals to assist the development of procedures for provision of beneficiary support
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtaining a subsidy is relatively easy, but being reimbursed and sustaining the allocated funds after implementation of a tight project plan for the continuation of services is a real challenge
Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive research

5.3. PART C: PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Seventy-five questionnaires were received from representatives of member States' national, sectoral, or regional managing authorities.

Respondents were requested to share the name of the Operational Programme they represented and other relevant information like the level of their intervention. The responses per country and level of governance can be grouped as shown in the following table.

Table 19: Level of intervention (national, regional, cross-sectoral etc)

No.	%	Level	Answers per EU Member State
29	48%	National	1-Austria, 3-Croatia, 1-Cyprus, 1-Denmark, 1-Estonia, 1-Finland, 1-Germany, 1-Ireland, 1-luxemburg, 1-Netherlands, 1-Romania, 2-Slovenia, 1-Sweden, 7-Bulgaria, 2-Czechia, 1-Poland, 3-Spain
24	39%	Regional	4-Belgium, 2-France, 2-Germany, 2-Ireland, 2-Italy, 3-Czechia, 3-Greece, 5-Poland, 2-Spain
7	11%	National/ Regional	1- Netherlands, 3-Romania, 1-Czechia, 2-Greece
1	2%	Local	1-Spain

- 61 respondents mentioned the level at which their authority worked. Twenty-nine respondents represented national level authorities, 24 respondents represented regional level authorities, 7 represented intersectoral national/regional authorities and 1 local authorities;
- Regarding their positions, 18 respondents were from top-level and 18 from middle-level management positions, while 28 respondents represented advisors and implementing officers;
- The ERDF managing structure was represented by 32 respondents and ESF (+) by 63 respondents (with overlapping of both funds in certain cases);
- Respondents' experience with shared EU funding programmes included the:
 - European Social Fund & European Social Fund plus (ESF & ESF+);
 - European regional Development Fund ERDF (2014-2020) & ERDF (2021-2027) & INTERREG (within ERDF);
 - European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD);
 - Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF);
 - Just Transition Fund (JTF);
 - Social Inclusion and Employment Operational Programme (POISE);
 - Operational Programme for youth employment (POEJ);

- Some of the respondents referred to having experience also with the following direct managed EU funds:
 - ERASMUS+;
 - Employment and Social Innovation (EaSi);
 - Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV);
 - European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).