

SESK – Social sErviceS helpdesk on EU Funds

Project number: 101052902



# EU HELPDESK SURVEY REPORT ON SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

Dissemination Level	
Restricted	
Public	X

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## Table of contents

1. Introduction .....	3
2. EU Funding context (2021-2027) – ESF+ & ERDF .....	3
EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND PLUS (ESF+) .....	3
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND (ERDF) .....	4
3. Analysis and reporting methodology .....	5
Characteristics of respondents.....	6
Limitations of collected data .....	8
4. Qualitative and quantitative data analysis .....	9
Part A - Design of calls to use the European funds.....	9
Part B - Writing and submitting the project applications for European funds .....	14
Part C - Project implementation .....	21
Annex - Results of the survey .....	30

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The questionnaire survey among social service providers was carried out within the Helpdesk project. The Helpdesk is a two-year (May 2022-April 2024) project funded by the European Commission to launch the building blocks for a Social Services Helpdesk.

The proposed Helpdesk will have two main priorities:

- to support social services in accessing and using EU funds (ESF+, ERDF and ReactEU in particular);
- to help managing authorities use EU funds (ESF+, ERDF and ReactEU in particular) to finance quality interventions in the field of social services.

The recruitment of respondents was done through representatives (partners) in each member country. They reached out to the target group through their contacts and arranged for the completion of the survey tool located on the web platform.

The survey was part of the evidence-gathering process and aimed at collecting information about the needs, challenges, and opportunities of social services in accessing and using the ESF+ and ERDF funds. It was designed to better understand what is needed, what is missing and what is essential for the social care sector to be able to develop solutions that would address the needs better.

**The survey data collection took place between September and November 2022.**

## 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.

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 Social Service Providers.

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

This report presents an analysis of the answers to the questionnaires. It 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.).

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).

## Characteristics of respondents

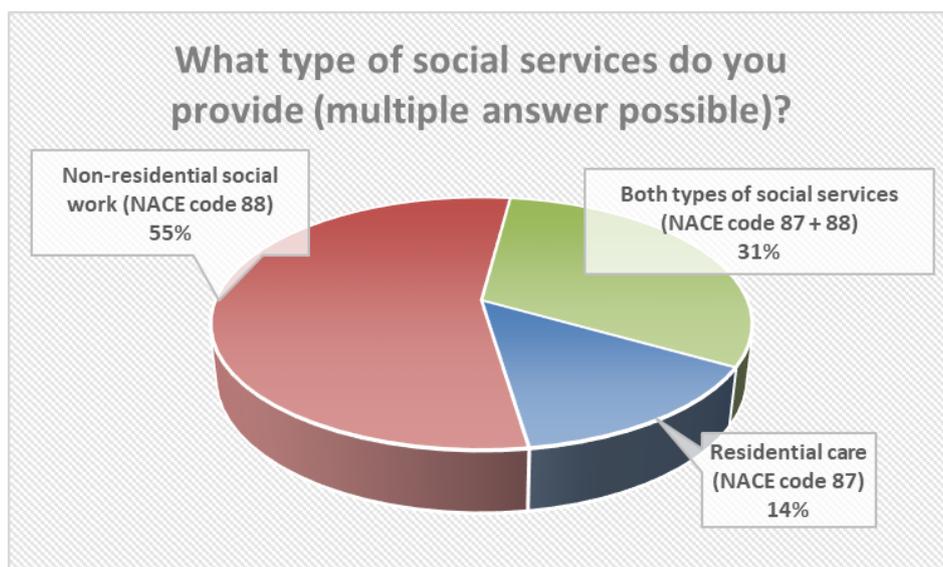
The survey involved 380 respondents from all 27 EU member states - Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

Whereas one can appreciate the responding rate as satisfactory (around 10% considering the more than 3.000 contacts reached out), results of the analysis hereby presented cannot be considered as a statistically representative sample. Any attempt of generalizing conclusions would not be conclusive but rather as indicative.

The highest number of completed questionnaires was obtained from Spain (21%), Belgium (17%), France (11%) and Italy (7%) - see Annex.

From the point of view of the type of services provided, the survey was mainly completed by providers of non-residential social services - see Chart 1.

Chart 1

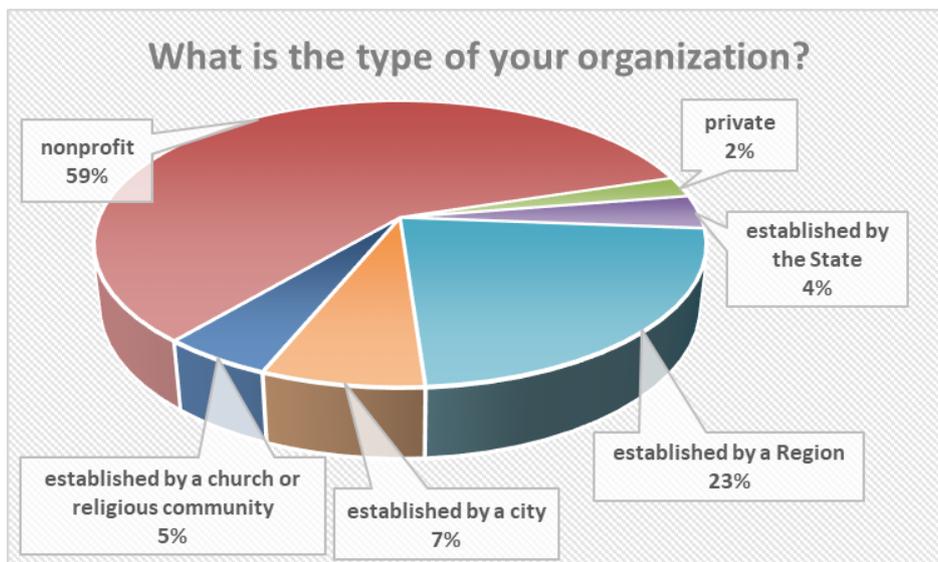


Most of the organisations surveyed provided services to multiple target groups. Most of them were social services that could be used by people with disabilities (36%), children (22%), seniors (20%), refugees (13%) or homeless people (11%). There was also a significant representation of services for people in need, socially excluded persons, families with children, (long-term) unemployed persons, minors, or dependent persons.

More than half of the organisations surveyed were non-profit organisations, and less than a quarter were established by the region - see Chart 2. However, considering the

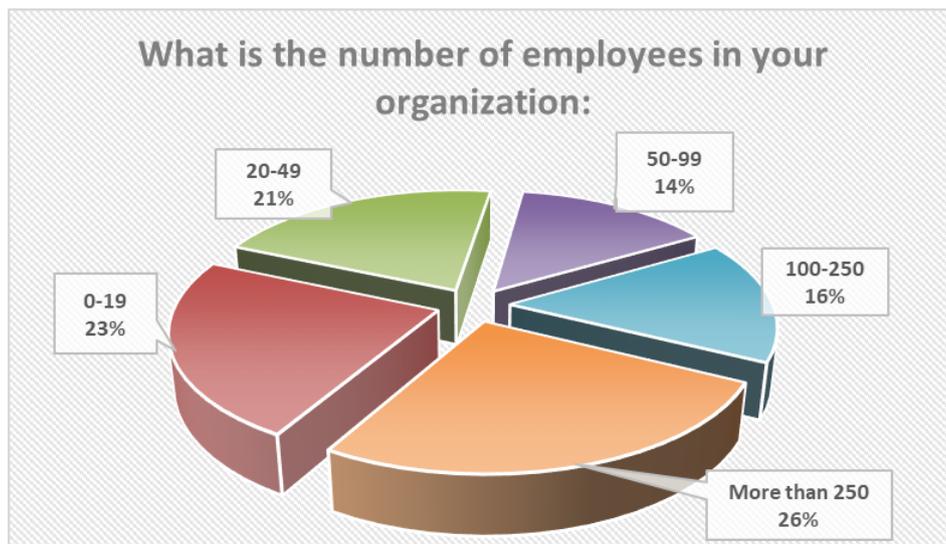
different categories as suggested, one cannot identify the profile of respondents, from the public/private sector nor their legal statute.

Chart 2



In terms of the number of persons employed in the surveyed entities, it can be stated that an evenly distributed sample was obtained - see Chart 3.

Chart 3

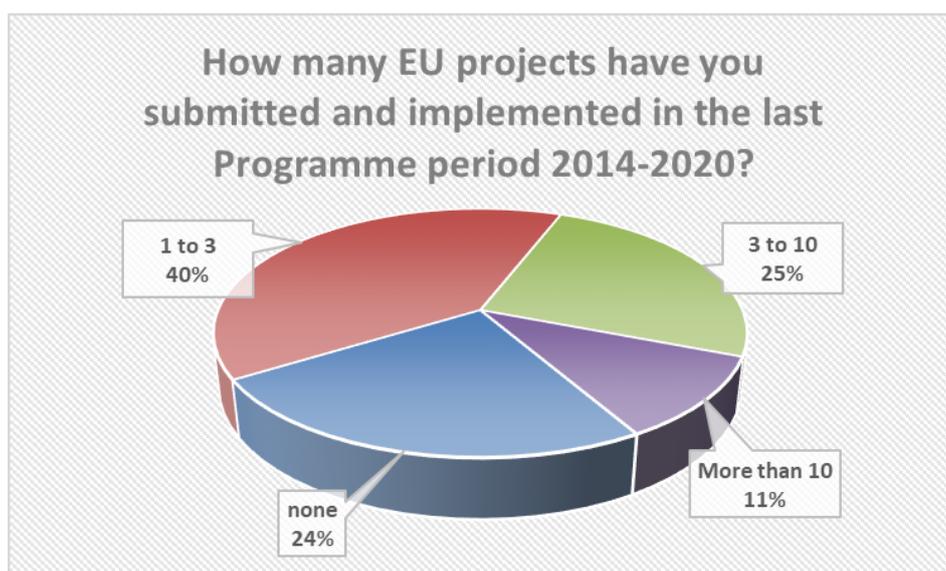


A majority (40%) of the responding social services providers to the survey have little experience in submitting and implementing EU projects, while 36% are quite

experienced by having at least 3 times submitted or implemented a EU project, and finally, 24% of the respondents have no experience with EU projects.

This observation should be taken with caution considering the survey results' lack of representativeness for social services providers in the EU. One could also assume that the experienced respondents could have been keener to answer to a survey considering their openness to and knowledge about EU project fundings.

Chart 4



## 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 national social service providers.

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.

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,

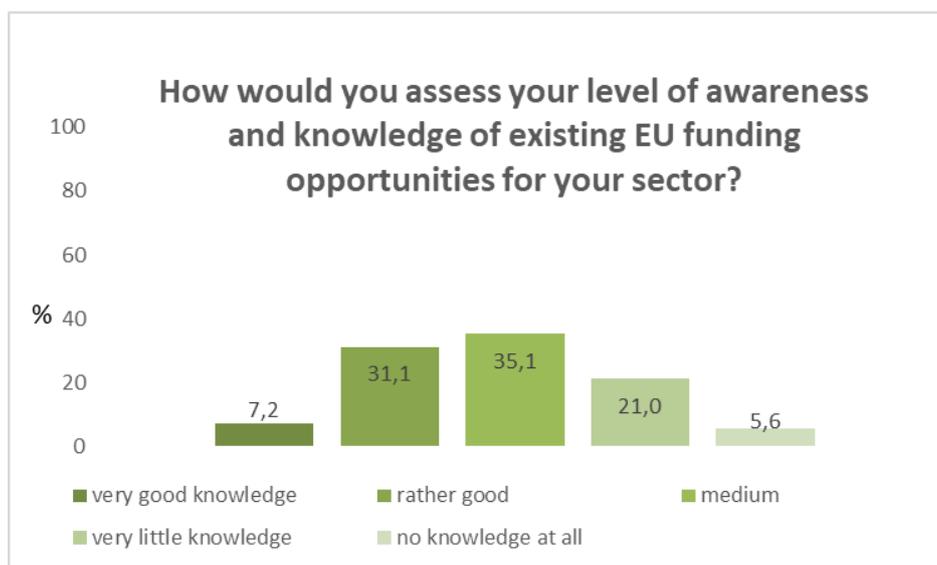
superiors, beneficiaries, and target groups. Subjectivity in the expression of views must be considered.

## 4. QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

### Part A - Design of calls to use the European funds

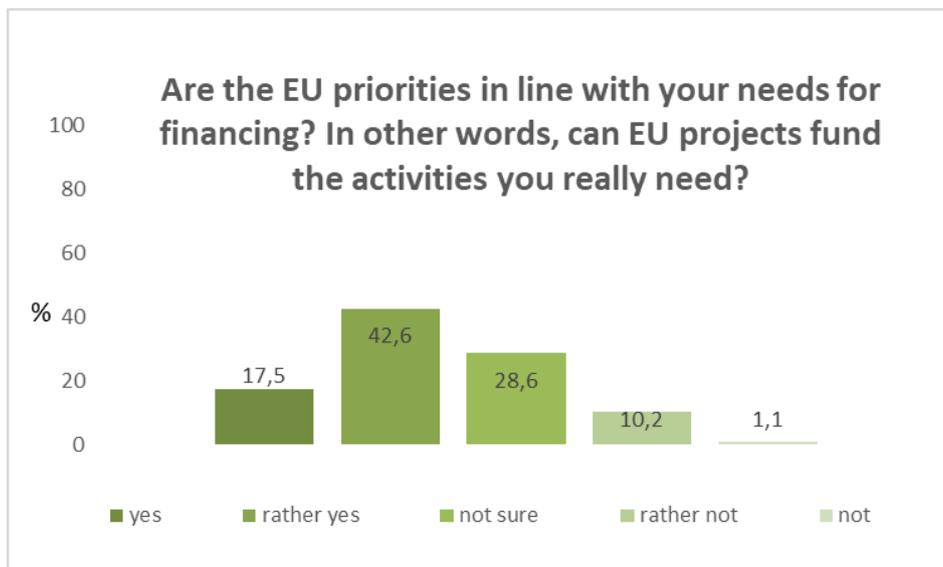
In line with the level of experience in dealing with EU funded projects, nearly 65% of the respondents have an average or rather knowledge of existing funding opportunities for social services; whereas less than 10% have a very knowledge and a quarter have very little knowledge or no knowledge at all.

Chart 5



For 6 out of 10 organisations surveyed, the priorities set by the EU are in line with the actual needs, i.e. EU project funding have the potential to support social services' needs. - see Chart 6.

Chart 6



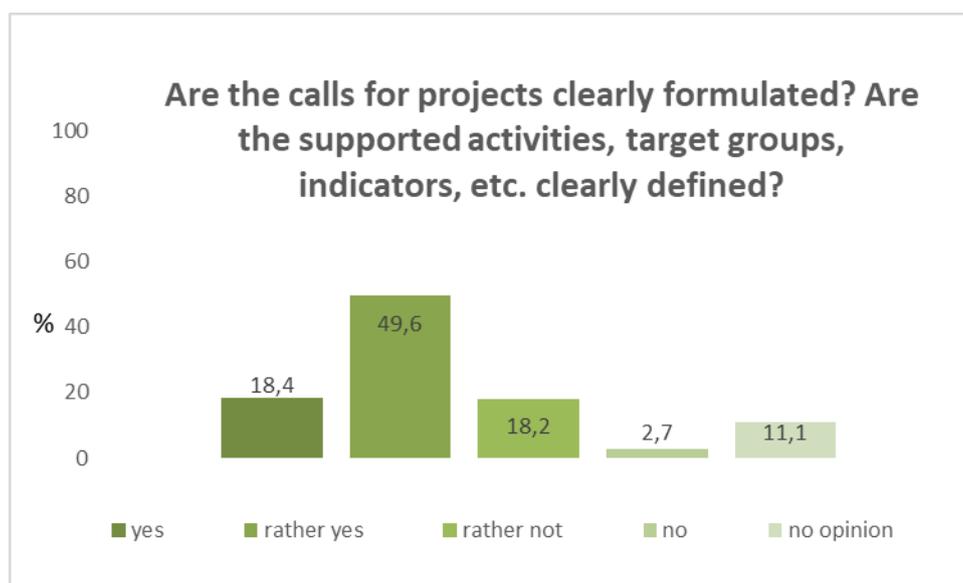
However, the additional comments state that while there is compliance, many other needs should be further covered. Many respondents point out that the challenges are mostly employment, labour market and vocational training oriented. And that the areas of social work and aftercare are being neglected in the support provided by EU grants.

There were also more general observations/suggestions within this question that were not entirely indicative of the observed compliance. Other criticisms included:

- extensive administration associated with documenting the project finances spent;
- funding directed mainly to State institutions (especially Bulgaria, Slovenia, and Italy);
- slow start-up of projects under the new programming period, which is a threat to existing actors (Croatia);
- little funding opportunities for the development of the organisation's infrastructure (mainly in Germany, and Hungary);
- the set-up of calls is directed more towards large organisations/stakeholders and not towards SMEs and small organisations (especially in Italy);
- the absence of challenges that combine the social and environmental domains, which promote social, economic and environmental sustainability (Italy);
- a low percentage of funding for project management, which is, however, essential to meet the objectives (Malta);
- the set-up of the calls does not allow the support of large-scale research (Malta);
- very low wages prevent the involvement of the necessary experts (Sweden).

Almost 7 out of 10 respondents are convinced that project calls are clearly and comprehensibly formulated - see Chart 7. In contrast, 21% of respondents feel that the supported activities, target groups, indicators, etc., are not clearly defined.

Chart 7



Respondents across all participating countries indicated that a more comprehensible and simplified language could be used for calls. Comments also referred to the fact that the focus of calls is unnecessarily narrow. In addition, it appeared that the indicators monitored did not always match the objectives pursued. For example, a respondent from Spain pointed out that some indicators are redundant and other key indicators do not appear.

A respondent from Belgium complained at this point that at the time of the survey (October 2022) they still do not have information regarding funding for the current programming. In addition, the respondent from the Czech Republic lacked support for residential facilities in the calls.

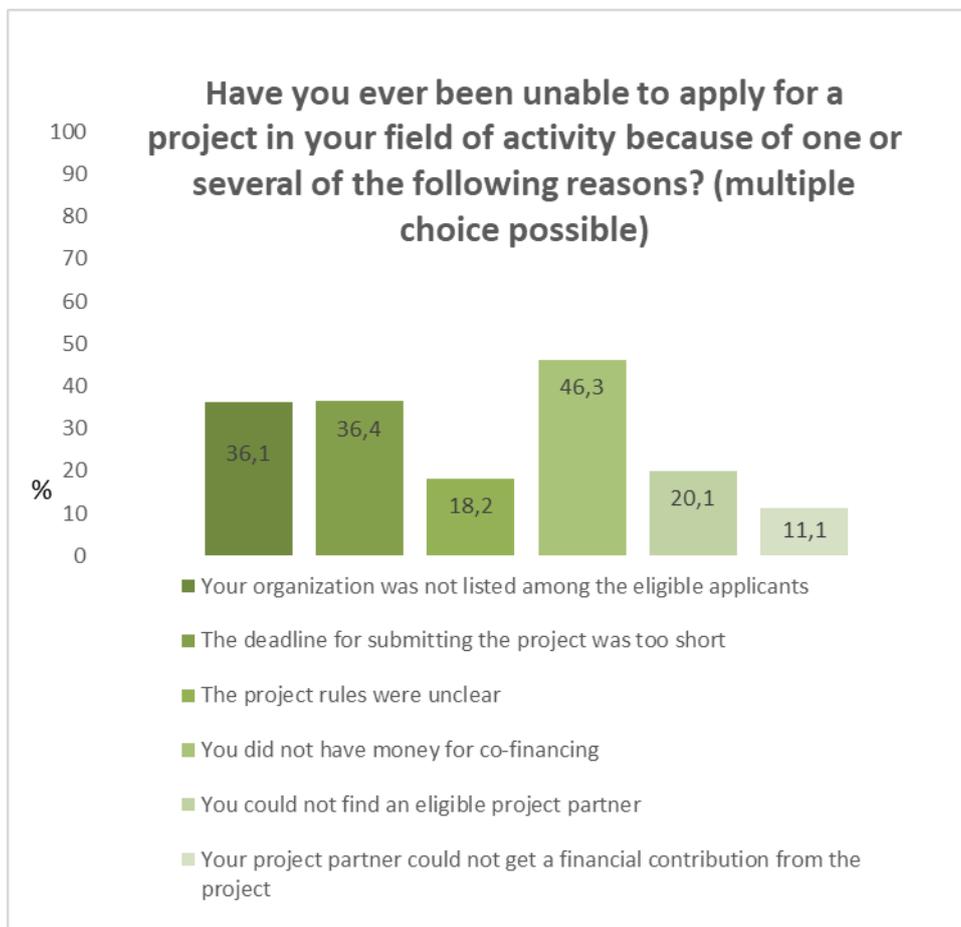
85% (325) of respondents had been unable to apply for a project for social service providers at some point in the past. The different reasons are shown in Chart 8.

The three most important barriers affecting the non-submission of projects are:

1. insufficient money to cover the required co-funding, including for the partners;
2. short application deadlines;
3. the impossibility of applying for a project because the organisation in question is not among the eligible beneficiaries.

To a less extent, the difficulties in finding eligible partners and in understanding the rules are other barriers faced by social service providers.

Chart 8

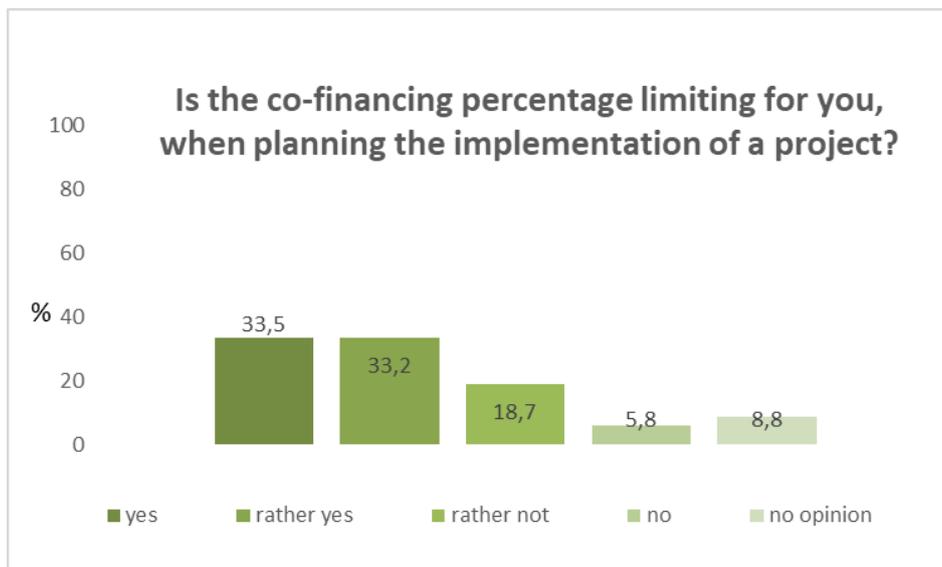


In addition to what was presented, the following answers were also more frequently given or added:

- lack of support from the managing authority;
- inappropriate conditions for tenders;
- lack of internal staffing for project preparation and subsequent management;
- lack of support from the organisation's legal representatives, which is necessary for the application.

When deciding whether to submit a project application, the level of co-funding is clearly a limiting factor for two-thirds of respondents - see Chart 9.

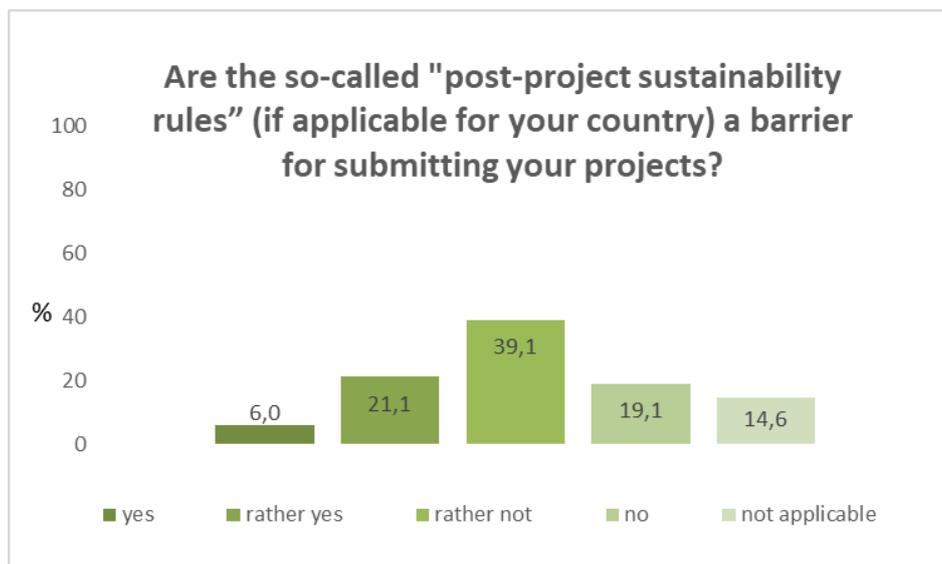
Chart 9



The budgets of State, regional and municipal budgets (subsidies), as well as income from the organisation's economic activities, income from sponsors, income from membership fees and donations, are used to co-finance the budgets of the surveyed organisations across member States.

The sustainability rules after the project's end does not represent a limit for nearly 60% of the organisations surveyed, whereas it is a barrier for 27% of them - see Chart 10.

Chart 10

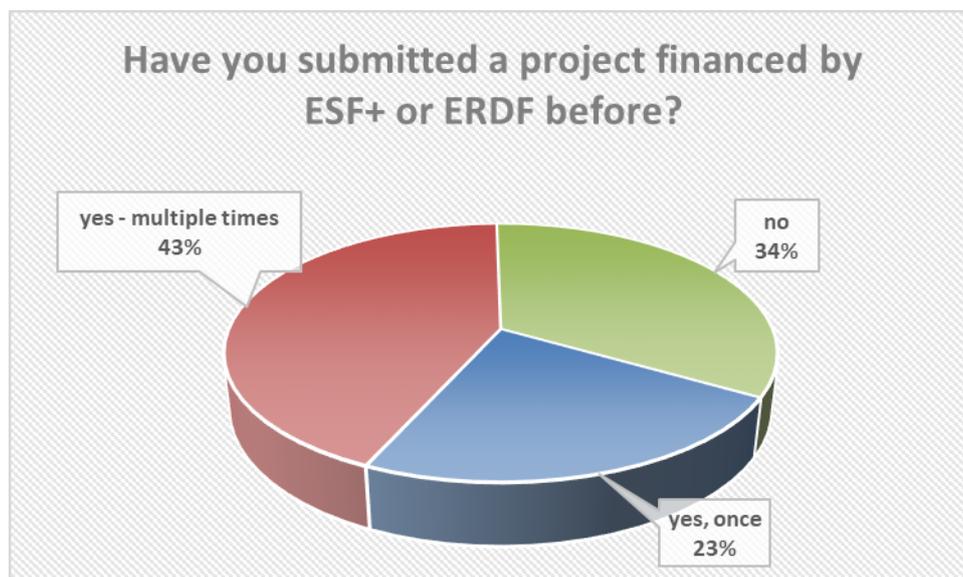


From the provided information, it was found that the continuation of the activities set by the project does not occur in most cases without further financial support from the EU. This is due to the non-functional set-up of national resources and non-alignment of EU-national fundings and priorities for social service providers. The answer of the representative from Spain is: "If there is no consistency between the European funds and the national bodies, then in most cases the set activities have to be supported only by the organisation's resources, which are not available".

## Part B - Writing and submitting the project applications for European funds

Two-thirds of the surveyed organisations had submitted a project for funding from European funds (ESF and ERDF) at some point in the past. It should be added that 43% of all surveyed entities had submitted more than one project.

Chart 11



The next question analysed the reasons that reduce respondents' interest in project implementation. The possible barriers presented by the questionnaire were rated on a five-point scale, where 1 meant "no influence" and 5 meant "strong influence". The severity of each (possible) barrier was then assessed using the average values obtained.

As the results of the evaluation of the presented potential barriers that discourage respondents from implementing projects showed, the most important ones include

insufficient internal staff resources for the development of the application and the complexity of the project form - see Chart 12. Most of the aspects presented proved to be a minor or major barrier for the organisation to submit projects for implementation (average values higher than 3).

In terms of the variance of responses, it can be stated that for all the barriers studied, there was a relatively strong disagreement of opinions, but this was not caused by the variable "State". This means that significant variability in responses was also observed within member States.

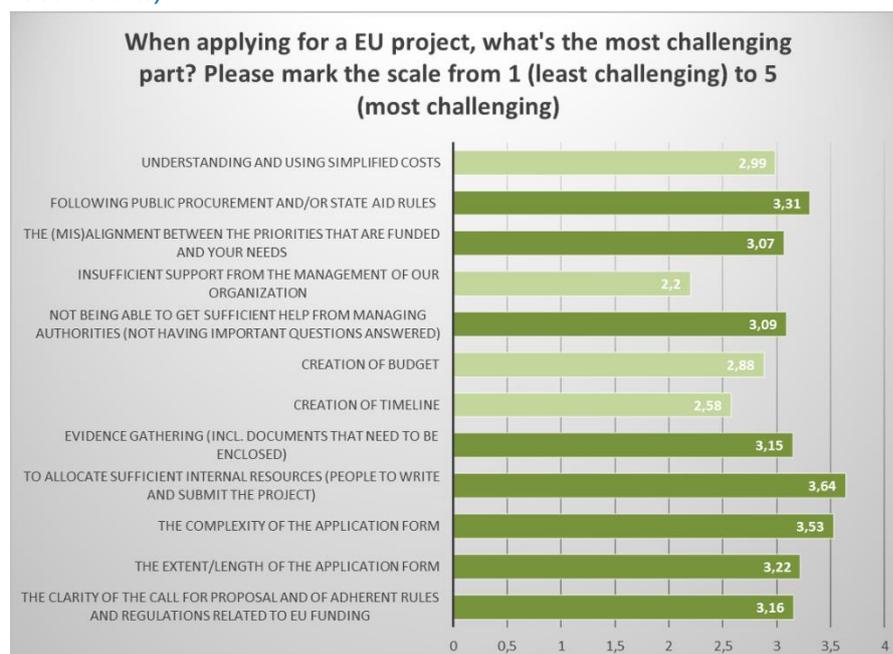
*Note: The standard deviation indicates the extent to which the cases in the set of values examined typically differ from each other. If the standard deviation is small, the elements of the set are usually similar to each other, while a large standard deviation indicates large differences.*

Looking at the averages achieved, the top 3 reasons for not submitting projects are:

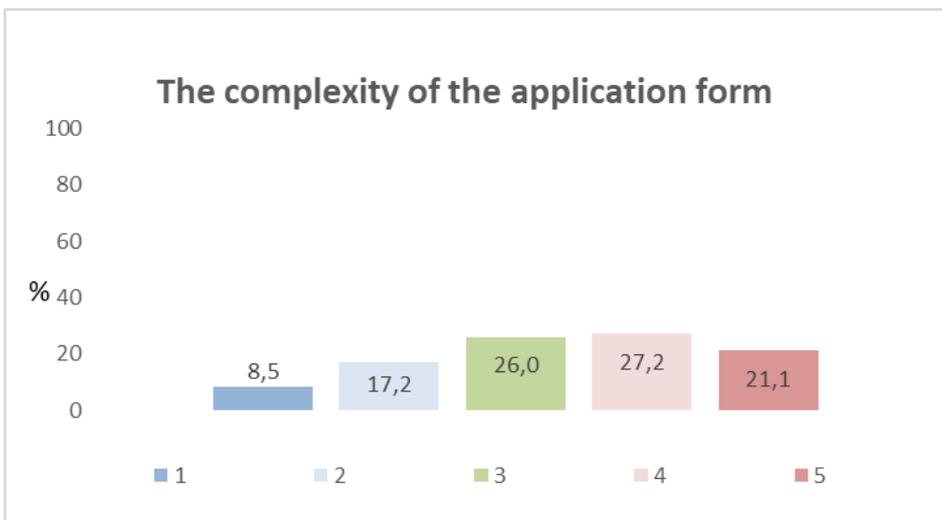
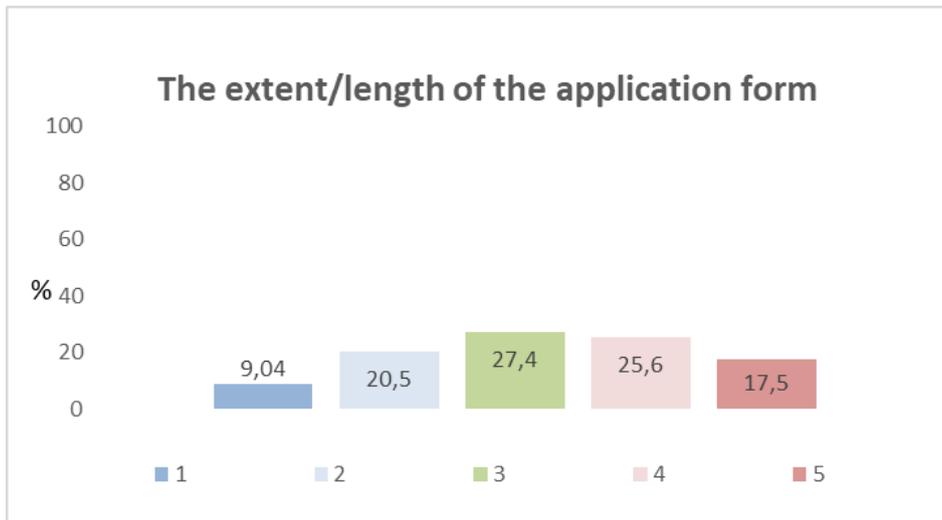
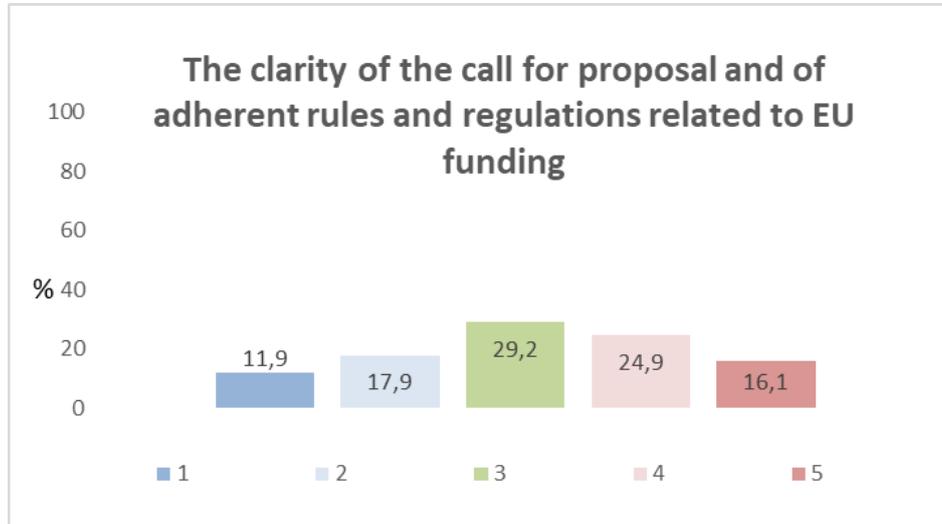
1. To allocate sufficient internal resources (people to write and submit the project).
2. The complexity of the application form.
3. Following public procurement and/or State aid rules.

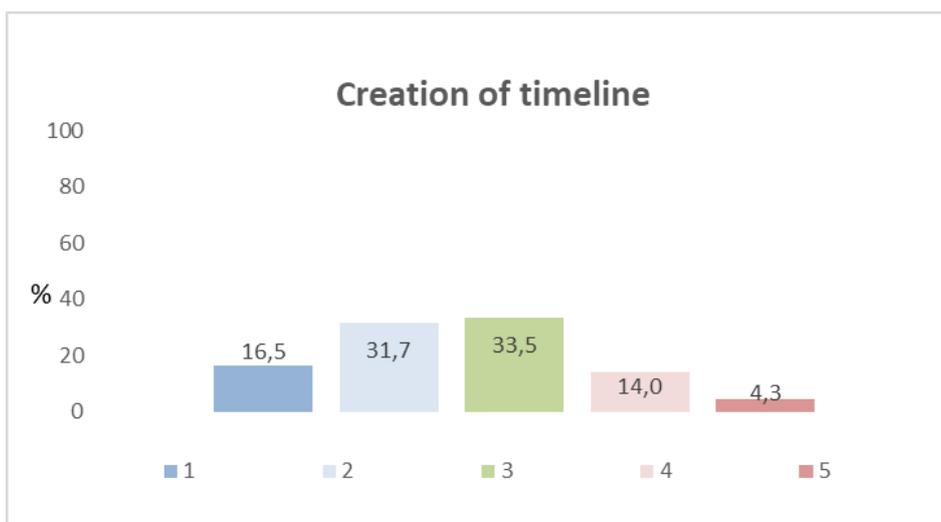
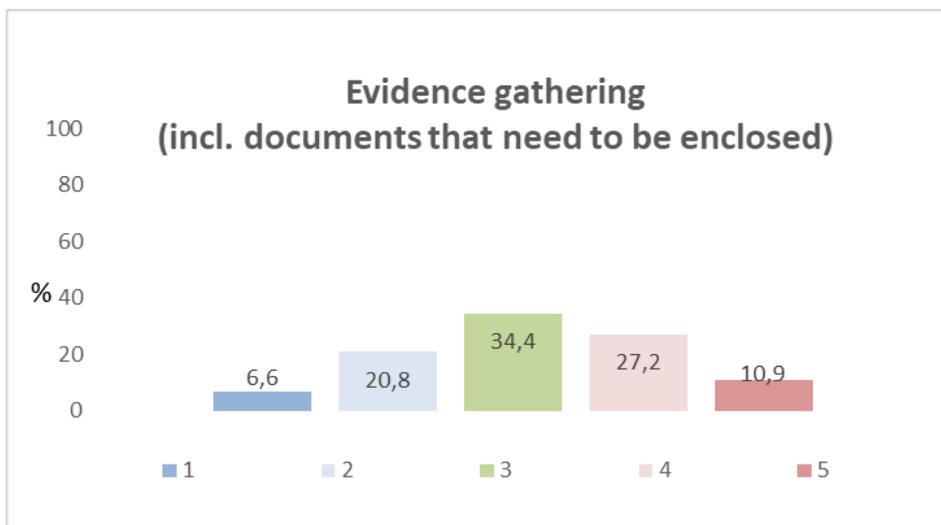
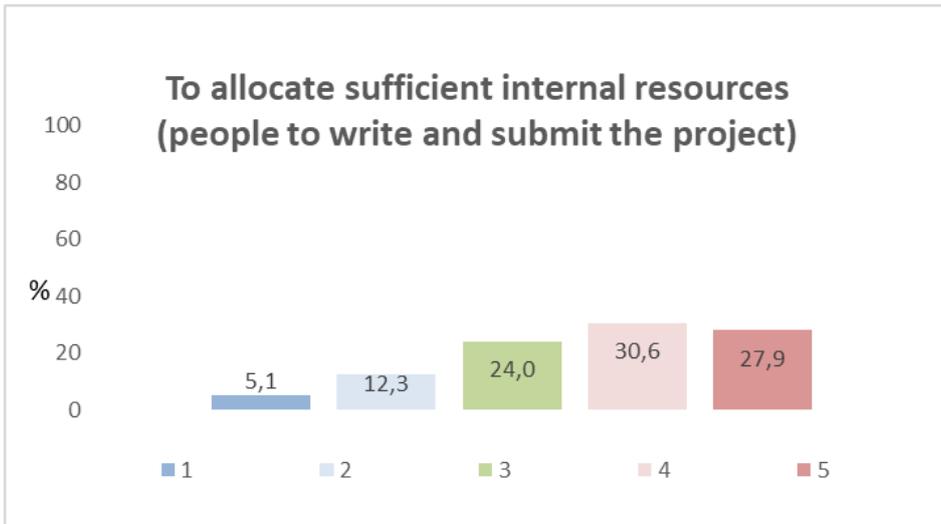
Additional barriers that could be highlighted also point to the lack of clarification of the calls and of related national regulations, the discontinuity of priorities and fundings between EU and national levels, and the lack of guidance and help from managing authorities.

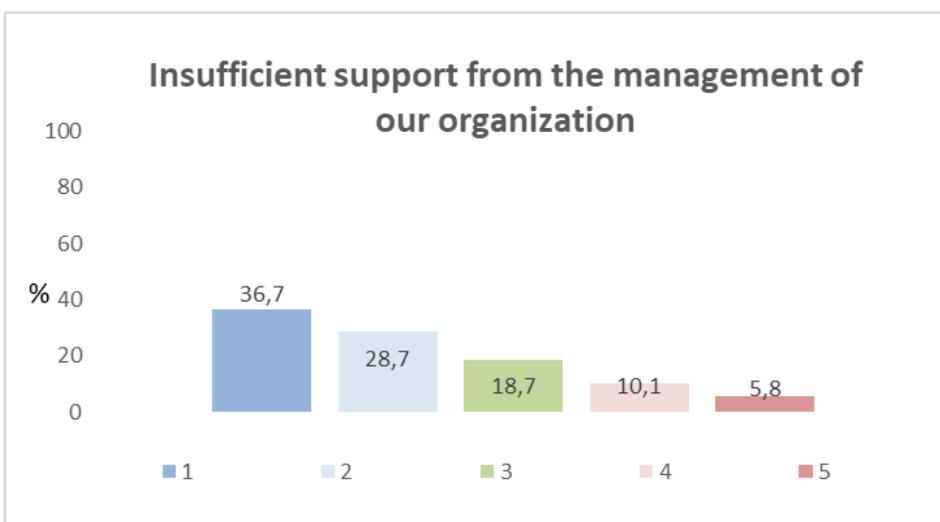
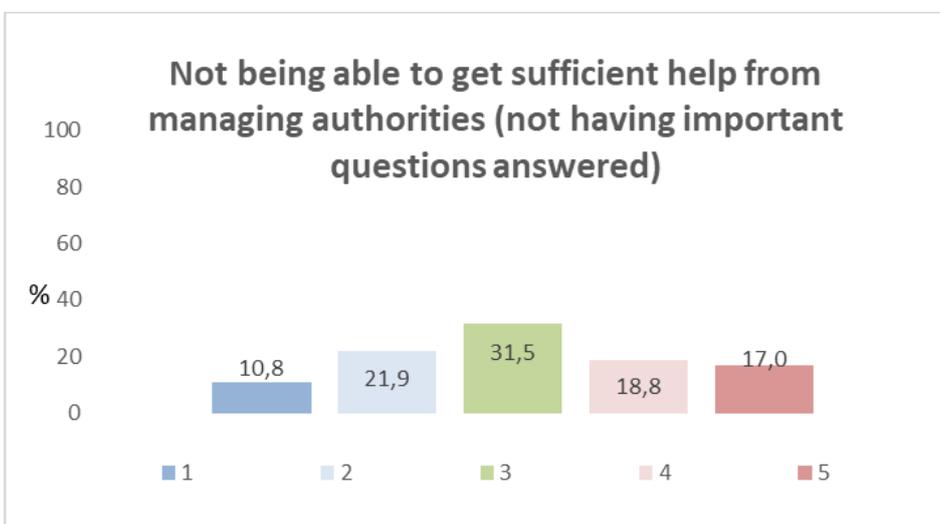
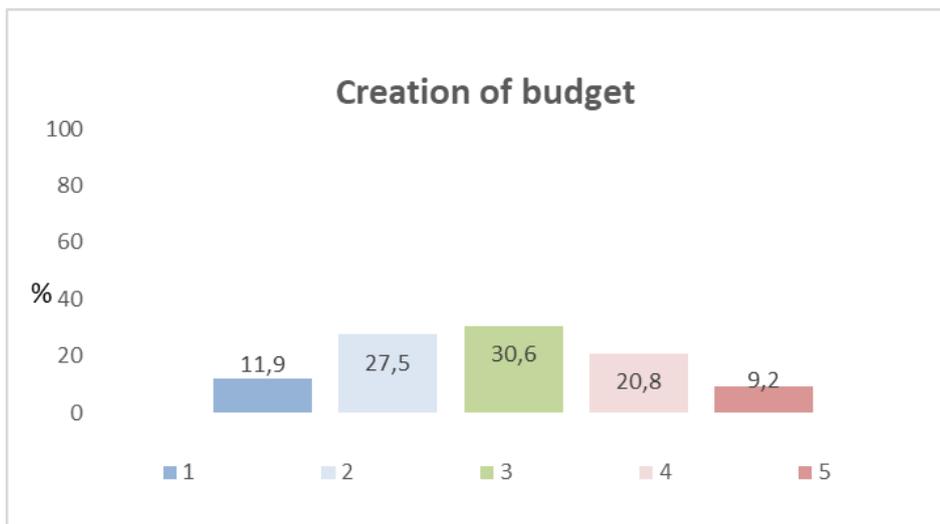
Chart 12 (contains sub-charts)

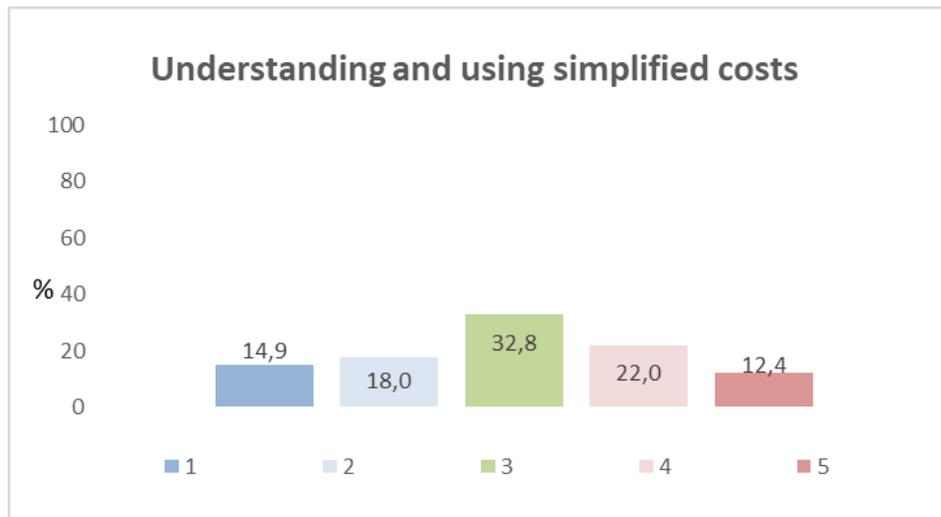
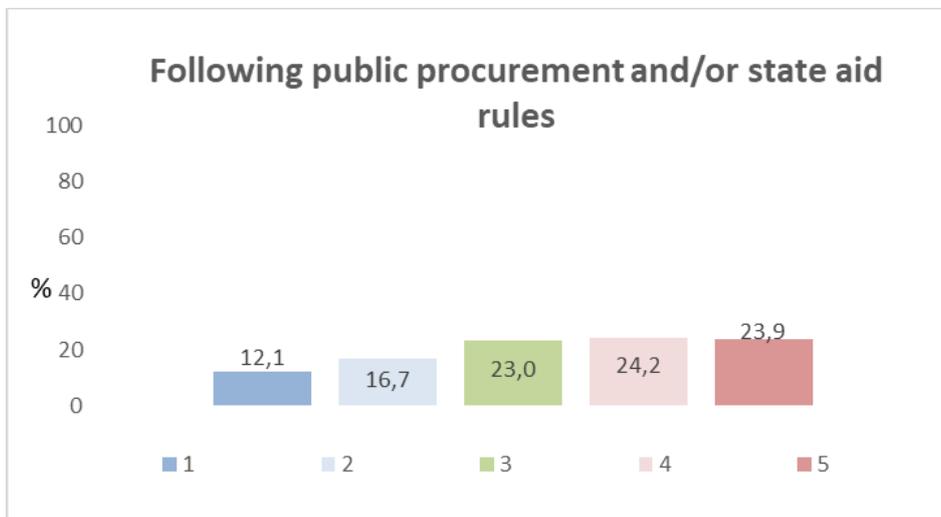
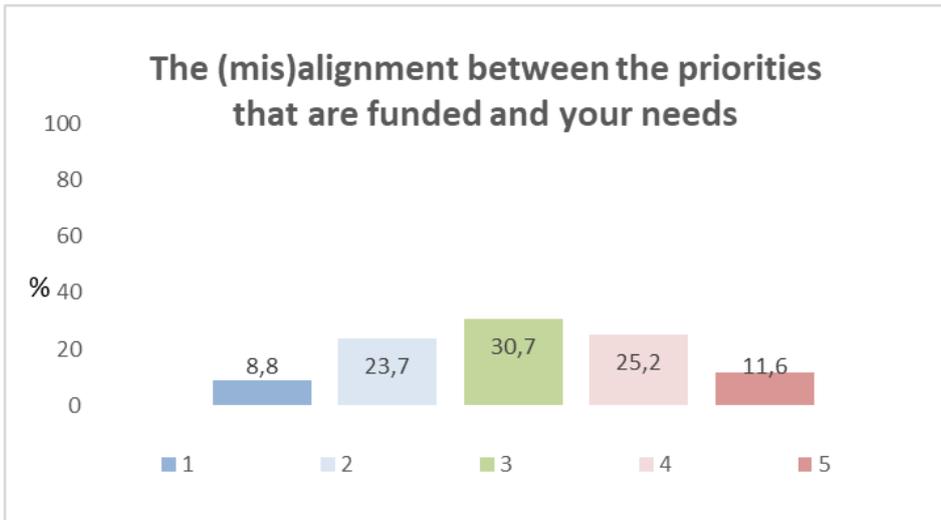


Graphical processing of individual answers:



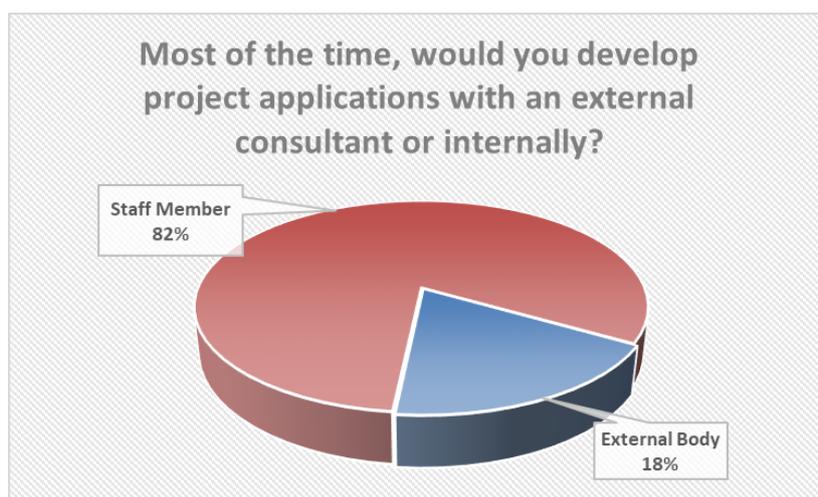






The development of project applications in most organisations is mainly carried out by internal staff. The use of primarily external staff was recorded in less than a fifth of the surveyed entities - see Chart 13.

Chart 13



Only 37% of the respondents from social service organisations are convinced that they have sufficient financial resources for educational activities in which their employees can be educated on the issues of project application preparation or the implementation of projects within the EU funds - see Chart 14.

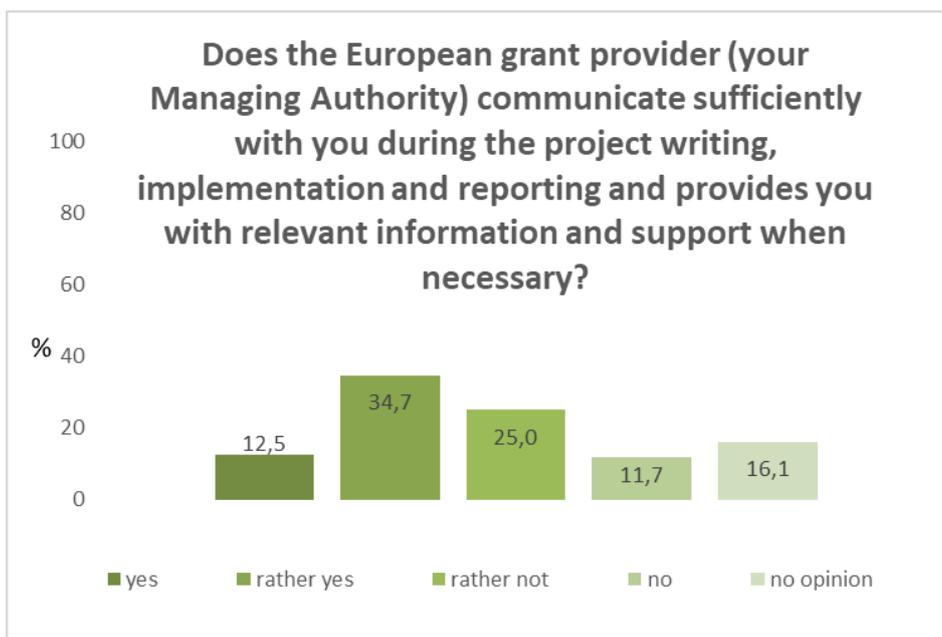
Chart 14



## Part C - Project implementation

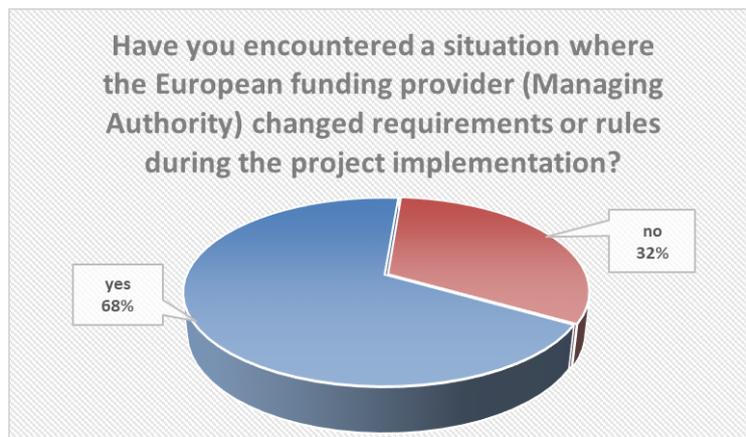
Of those who have experience with communication with the grant provider (managing authority) during the project implementation, 47,2% consider this communication to be sufficient. On the other hand, 11,7% consider this communication to be completely insufficient - see Chart 15.

Chart 15



In the questionnaire survey, more than two-thirds of the European project promoters indicated that they had experienced a situation where the requirements or rules had changed during the project implementation - see Chart 16.

Chart 16



The clarifications then showed that in many cases it was not a change in the rules, but an additional refinement, tightening or addition of further requirements. It also happened that the rules were set only based on a query from the applicant/implementer. It should be added that the change of rules was usually applied in case of possible control by the managing authority, not because it reflected a problem in practice.

Most important for organisations is the tightening of the rules/additional requirements in reporting eligible project costs. Changes of public procurement rules are also perceived negatively. This is particularly discouraging for project partners who often do not foresee an increase in administration and thus do not have sufficient capacity allocated for this activity. Respondents also highlighted the problem of applying simplified costs and subsequent control by auditors.

Many of the changes during project implementation, as seen in the survey results, have been due to the low competence of the staff of the managing authorities who make the rules and make them ambiguous. This then gives room for the inconsistency of interpretation, and different managing authority staff may understand and interpret them differently. In addition, staff changes at the managing authority may lead to other undesirable problems.

The changes to the rules with the new programming period were also perceived negatively. Respondents said that implementation manuals are often published very late, and projects must be prepared according to the "old" rules. If these are changed, then potential project applicants must make considerable efforts to revise their work.

The responses also showed that 6 out of 10 respondents with experience in project implementation have no problems assembling an implementation team with the required expertise. In contrast, 1 in 10 of these respondents indicated that they were unable to create a team with expertise - see Chart 17.

Chart 17



As reported by respondents, the project implementation teams are mainly composed of core staff. If they perform activities in the project that they also perform in the real organisation (project beneficiary), then they are not replaced by anyone. If they perform a different activity, then the performance of their original work is delegated to another employee (even a newly recruited one). For a larger project, there is a combination of internal, existing staff and new hires. Salary depends on internal pay systems (which are adapted to EU requirements).

As supplementary answers showed, finding new employees is not simple. The experience in the Czech Republic demonstrates this well: "The ESF does not allow the use of employees over 1.0 time. It is very difficult to find workers. Moreover, the new ESF period requires so many "ideal qualifications" for workers that it will be unrealistic to get them. For example, a community worker is supposed to have two years of experience working in a community centre, while in the Czech Republic community centres are just emerging from the previous programming period. That is, there are very few people who can meet the required qualifications and they work in centres established in the previous period".

The survey also asked respondents to indicate what changes they would recommend, based on their experience to date, for the production and monitoring of interim reports on project implementation. This option was used by 241 respondents, i.e. 63% of all respondents. As such, the recommendations were repeated across countries.

Specifically, the recommendations were:

- simplify the language of the requirements for writing interim and final reports on project implementation, as the only way to make it clear to everyone what is required from project implementers.
- make the required data more explicit to eliminate duplication in reporting - very often answers provided are overlapping.
- reduce the number of documents required to assess performance. This results in an excessive burden on staff and clients (e.g. compared to the information that the social service obtains for its regular activities).
- not request data that are not and cannot logically be readily available - especially when the organisation is aiming at a specific target group where progress is not detected immediately but only over a longer period.
- set up appropriate, in line with practice, demonstration of achievement of soft indicators in relation to the project objectives.
- reduce the number of supporting documents required for proving that events took place (attendance list, presentations, photos, videos, etc.).
- set the required cost structure of the project in coherence with the structure(s) financing.
- abolish the obligation to produce and submit detailed (hourly) time sheet of work.
- provide flexible, professional communication in case of questions from individual project implementers.
- ensure the stability of the managing authority's control team, in terms of its quality, to avoid issues of different interpretations of the required documents and their requirements.
- provide feedback on (interim) reports.
- provide examples of good practice on standard problems.
- ensure from auditing authorities that the subsequent audit does not question the report received.
- proceed, in the case of financial control, according to the project objectives and not unnecessarily jeopardize the achievement of the set objectives, e.g. because of irregularities of 10 cents, deviations from the technical design of the investment project, etc.

In addition, respondents used this question to draw attention to the complex, time-consuming communication process in obtaining the necessary documents for submission, both from the project partners and from various cooperating entities. Similarly, the issue of the strict public procurement regulations imposed, very often causes delays in project implementation.

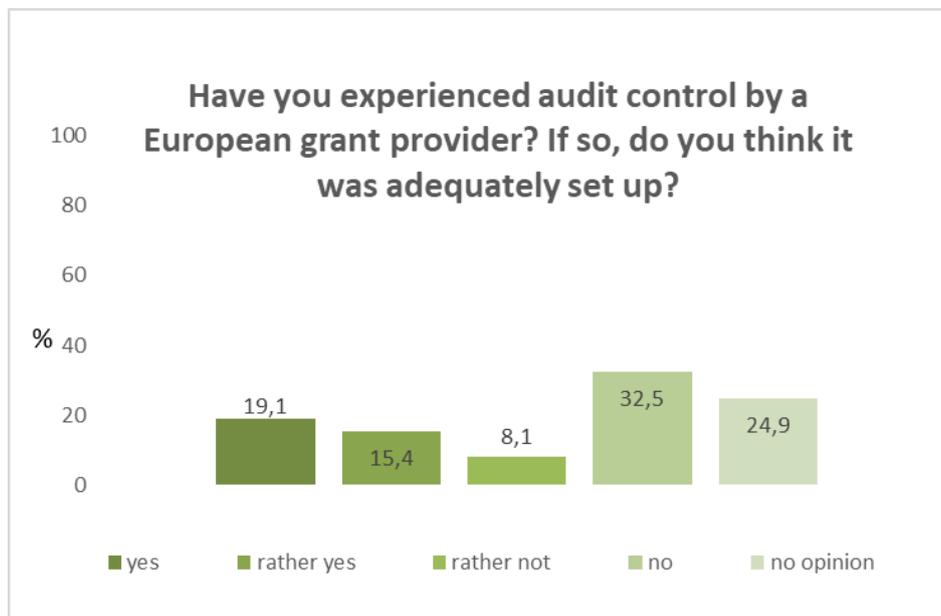
Respondents were also asked about their experience with the average length of the approval process for interim reports on project implementation and the subsequent request for payment; i.e. the length of time from the submission of the interim report to the receipt of the relevant amount of funding. 208 respondents (more than 50 % of the sample) took the opportunity to provide a response. The responses showed that it is not possible to establish one average time, as it varies from one project to another depending on the scope, number of key activities, implementation of investments or tendering procedure, etc. This is also reflected in the responses of the country representatives, where it is not uncommon for the variance of responses within an EU member State to be more than one year. However, the periods obtained ranged from 1-2 weeks to 3 years.

Those who believe that the average length of the approval process for interim project implementation reports and subsequent payment requests is disproportionately long, were asked in the questionnaire survey to communicate the impact on the beneficiary organisation or project partners.

133 responses were collected (more than one-third of respondents) to assess the impact on their organisation. These related mainly to the financial inability to cover the costs of the implementation team (staff) and project activities, i.e. the threat to the organisation's cash flow. As a result, the organisation must resort to finding free funds. If the organisation is larger, then in most cases it can cope with the problem of late payment with its resources, especially if it has other economic activities. In the case of smaller organisations, most of which do not have spare funds, external resources are sought. As the responses showed, the main avenues of financing used are through sponsors, donors and bridging, short-term loans. However, in relation to loans, it is pointed out that recently interest rates have been rising, making credit dangerously expensive. Considering this, for organisations that rely mainly on EU funding for their very existence, delays in payment are liquidating.

Three quarters of the respondents have experience of an audit by a European donor. Of those who have experience, 34,5% described their experience as (rather) good - see Chart 18.

Chart 18



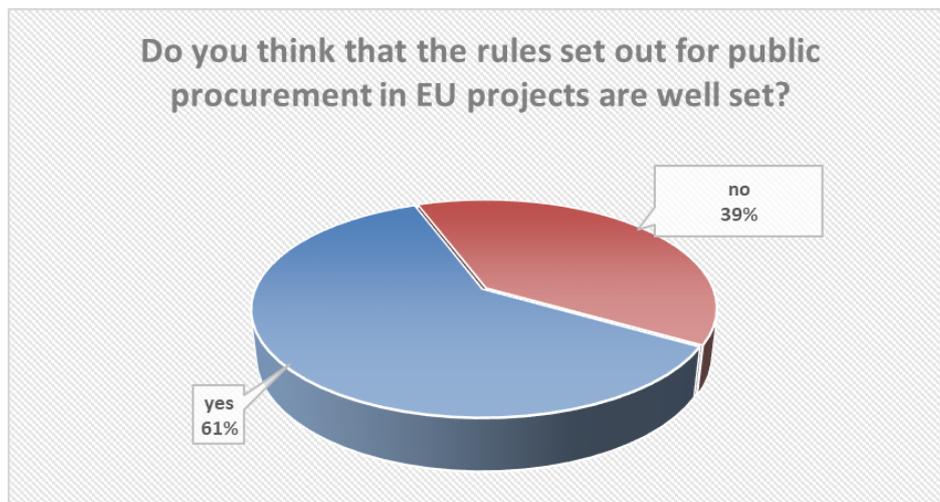
The dissatisfaction was mainly due to the fact that audits were carried out with a long-time lag from the project implementation, when there is often a change of staff involved in the project. In addition, audits are often conducted with the suspiciously assumption that funds were spent illegally, looking only for errors.

It was also pointed out that large amounts of information were requested, and over relatively long periods. In addition, short delivery times, often of one day, are set for the submission of more and more documents.

Respondents also pointed to the low competence of the officials conducting the audit. Another negative perception is that auditors do not focus on assessing the achievement of project objectives but focus on details without being able to assess the project in its entirety, in the necessary context.

6 out of 10 respondents are convinced that public procurement rules are set appropriately within EU funds projects – see Chart 19 below.

Chart 19



The following criticisms or recommendations were made in the comments:

- the rules are very rigid, complex and complicated.
- the rules also need to be applied to the selection of a very specific service for which only 1 or 2 providers are available. We then have major problems in securing the required cost estimates.
- public procurement should only deal with investments or services up to a certain amount, otherwise people who carry out a public interest mission are unreasonably burdened - the rules even apply to the smallest purchases.
- the rules are not adapted to urgent needs, e.g. generated by a recent social situation, where a social service needs to be implemented immediately.

National rules, which are stricter and more rigid in some member States, also referred as “gold plating”, also contribute to dissatisfaction. "The need to implement Polish rules for public procurement makes it difficult to implement the project. We must choose staff based on rules that favour price. We have no way of avoiding the rules if we want to work with staff we have worked with for years. That's a waste of resources."

A respondent from the Czech Republic commented similarly on the issue of public procurement: “National rules are much tougher than EU rules. They automatically put the applicant in the role of a fraudster and burden him with a lot of paperwork. In addition, some rules, such as tenders for travel costs, are completely nonsensical and cannot realistically be complied with. Public procurement needs to be made transparent, not be based on providing large amounts of documentation. ”

The negative impact of national rules is also reported by the respondents from Slovakia, Hungary, Estonia, Italy and from Malta.

The questionnaire survey also allowed respondents to provide insights that they considered as important and were not given sufficient space in the questionnaire. The most important comments are quoted as follows:

- We feel it is important that EU-funded projects are provided with an appropriate lump-sum for additional costs. This will make the billing process enormously easier and reduce bureaucracy. There are also personal costs that are incurred but cannot be financed (e.g. voluntary social benefits). Here, too, a flat rate should be accepted.
- The topic of communication, information and training on the possibilities and settings of EU funds to help use them is not addressed. Examples of good practice of field teams give the possibility of a different perspective, sharing of experiences and procedures, possibility of testing other forms of support.
- It is not always easy to identify activities that can be funded by the ESF within organisations already partly funded by public money - we have not been able to include professional integration activities carried out in our project currently submitted to the ESF. The ESF considered this to be part of the core mission of our type of enterprise. We had difficulties to demonstrate that we were offering a complementary service and therefore had to remove this part of the activities from the funding application. This complicates the financial and operational management of the integration service, where one part is subject to ESF requirements and the other is not.
- Project organisers face great difficulties in collecting large amounts of data, especially personal data of participants. The contribution to the evaluation cannot be verified and the data collection involves a huge amount of administrative work for the project promoter.
- There is a lack of personal contact between the project manager and the governing body. There is no designated administrator on the part of the managing authority, so the answers to the questions sent sometimes contain contradictory information.
- The principle of partnership is a forgotten issue. The creation of partnerships should be one of the areas to which much greater importance should be attached by the EU. The problem we have encountered in writing and drafting the proposal is that it is very difficult to find partners who have experience with European projects. The main beneficiaries of the project would benefit from a portal where it would be possible to find partners related to all areas, not just disability. Under each organisation there could be a brief description of the activities they do together with the projects.

- A problem we find in practice is that app portals are not suitable for people with disabilities, especially because of the small text size and the many cluttered windows that take up more than half the screen. Another problem is the maximum word count, where it is very difficult to write everything that is needed. It would be much more helpful if the minimum number of words were specified.
- Funding is very important for the implementation of social projects. It may happen that the approved funds for a project are not enough. Therefore, we recommend the possibility of increasing the eligible costs even after the project has been approved. The same applies to the project objectives - the situation may change, especially when it comes to social cases.
- I have already noted the method of calculating the outcome indicators. They produce false numbers that are not the actual reality of the project. Results indicators often rely on non-existent causality. Outcome indicators are somewhat more realistic, but only to a limited extent.
- The increase in administrative duties reduces the motivation to act. In my 17 years of work in obtaining EU funding, I had hoped that there would come a time when (especially administrative) requirements would be minimised. Unfortunately, there is no sign of this. Evaluation by results is still applied. The literal clinging to the provisions of applications and budgets, the lack of flexibility in introducing changes to increase the chance of optimal effect, make the job very difficult. The ossification of procedures, excessive bureaucracy, waiting for papers without real results - discourages further activity and obtaining EU funding.
- We believe that it is better to reach fewer people for longer, but the challenges are aimed at engaging the maximum number of people in the shortest possible time. It's just that a life history of exclusion is not 'solved' in six months, or even a year. It takes time, integrating concepts, self-reflection, changing habits, etc. This setting is not appropriate for social services.
- Emphasise the greater complexity of projects that are developed in rural areas, as quantitative evaluation in most cases is too misleading for the reality of the area. More emphasis should be given to qualitative assessment.

## ANNEX - RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

### Part A

Design of calls to use the European funds (coherence between the design of EU funds and the reality of social services providers)

#### 1. How would you assess your level of awareness and knowledge of existing EU funding opportunities for your sector?

very good knowledge	27
rather good	117
medium	132
very little knowledge	79
no knowledge at all	21

#### 2. Are the EU priorities in line with your needs for financing? In other words, can EU projects fund the activities you really need?

yes	65
rather yes	158
not sure	106
rather than	38
not	4

#### 3. Are the calls for projects clearly formulated? Are the supported activities, target groups, indicators, etc. clearly defined?

yes	68
rather yes	183
rather than	67
from	10
no opinion	41

#### 4. Have you ever been unable to apply for a project in your field of activity because of one or several of the following reasons? (multiple choice possible)

Your organization was not listed among the eligible applicants	117
The deadline for submitting the project was too short	118
The project rules were unclear	59
You did not have money for co-financing	150
You could not find an eligible project partner	65
Your project partner could not get a financial contribution from the project	36

**5. Is the co-financing percentage limiting for you, when planning the implementation of a project?**

yes	122
rather yes	121
rather than	68
from	21
no opinion	32

**7. Are the so-called "post-project sustainability rules" (if applicable for your country) a barrier for submitting your projects?**

yes	21
rather yes	74
rather than	137
from	67
not applicable	51

**Part B**

Writing and submitting the project applications for European funds

**8. Have you submitted a project financed by ESF+ or ERDF before?**

yes, once	85
yes - multiple times	156
from	122

**9. When applying for a EU project, what's the most challenging part? Please mark the scale from 1 (least challenging) to 5 (most challenging)**

The clarity of the call for proposal and of adherent rules and regulations related to EU funding

**MEAN = 3.16**

1	39
2	59
3	96
4	82
5	53

The extent/length of the application form

**MEAN = 3.22**

1	30
2	68
3	91
4	85
5	58

The complexity of the application form

**MEAN = 3,53**

1	28
2	57
3	86
4	90
5	70

To allocate sufficient internal resources (people to write and submit the project)

**MEAN = 3,64**

1	17
2	41
3	80
4	102
5	93

Evidence gathering (incl. documents that need to be enclosed)

**MEAN = 3,15**

1	22
2	69
3	114
4	90
5	36

Creation of timeline

**MEAN = 2,58**

1	54
2	104
3	110
4	46
5	14

Creation of budget

**MEAN = 2,88**

1	39
2	90
3	100
4	68
5	30

Not being able to get sufficient help from managing authorities (not having important questions answered)

**MEAN = 3,09**

1	35
2	71
3	102
4	61
5	55

Insufficient support from the management of our organization

**MEAN = 2,20**

1	120
2	94
3	61
4	33
5	19

The (mis)alignment between the priorities that are funded and your needs

**MEAN = 3,07**

1	29
2	78
3	101
4	83
5	38

Following public procurement and/or state aid rules

**MEAN = 3,31**

1	40
2	55
3	76
4	80
5	79

Understanding and using simplified costs

**MEAN = 2,99**

1	48
2	58
3	106
4	71
5	40

**10. Most of the time, would you develop project applications with an external consultant or internally?**

External Body	66
Staff Member	294

**11. Do you have means to train or educate your staff so that your organization can better apply for European funds?**

yes	38
rather yes	97
rather than	124
from	102
not needed	1

**Part C**

Project implementation

**12. Does the European grant provider (your Managing Authority) communicate sufficiently with you during the project writing, implementation and reporting and provides you with relevant information and support when necessary?**

yes	45
rather yes	125
rather than	90
from	42
no opinion	58

**13. Have you encountered a situation where the European funding provider (Managing Authority) changed requirements or rules during the project implementation?**

yes	233
from	110

**14. Is it easy for you to put together a professional team for successful project implementation?**

yes	48
rather yes	164
rather than	98
from	34
no opinion	16

**19. Have you experienced audit control by a European grant provider? If so, do you think it was adequately set up?**

yes	66
rather yes	53
rather than	28
from	112
no opinion	86

**20. Do you think that the rules set out for public procurement in EU projects are well set?**

yes	189
from	121

**Part D**

Now we would like to ask you to fill in a few details about you, to help us better understand and evaluate your answers:

Austria	13
Belgium	62
Bulgaria	16
Croatia	11
Cyprus	1
Czech Republic	15
Denmark	2
Estonia	4
Finland	2
France	39
Germany	14
Greece	18
Hungary	14
Ireland	1
Italy	24
Latvia	2
Lithuania	4
Luxembourg	4
Malta	9
Netherlands	5
Poland	3
Portugal	7
Romania	1
Slovakia	9
Slovenia	3
Spain	77
Sweden	6

**What type of social services do you provide (multiple answer possible)?**

Residential care (NACE code 87)	49
Non-residential social work (NACE code 88)	186
Both types of social services (NACE code 87 + 88)	107

**For which target group do you provide social services (multiple answer possible)?**

Seniors	135
Children	146
Persons with disabilities	245
Refugees	89
Homeless	72

**What is the type of your organization?**

non-profit	203
private	8
established by the State	13
established by a Region	78
established by a city	25
established by a church or religious community	17

**What is the number of employees in your organization:**

0-19	85
20-49	76
50-99	52
100-250	58
More than 250	95

**How many EU projects have you submitted and implemented in the last Programme period 2014-2020?**

none	89
1 to 3	144
3 to 10	91
More than 10	39