

## SOCIAL SERVICES HELPDESK ON EU FUNDS



### Managing Authorities: Survey Analysis Report Greece

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*“The access and use of ESF+ and ERDF by social services<sup>1</sup> – Managing Authorities’ perspective and feedback”* survey was completed in the framework of the Social Services Helpdesk on EU Funds project.

Through this survey, the project’s consortium 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 the coordination and designing of social services were invited to reflect on the design and implementation of Operational Programs. This will assist to further identification of the leverages that exist to facilitate social services’ access to these funds. Finally, the expressed opinions will form the base on which the tailored activities to support, guide, and facilitate successful participation of social services in ESF+ and ERDF funding programs will be developed.

## 2. ANALYSIS AND REPORTING METHODOLOGY

Survey was developed in the frame of the project “Social services helpdesk for EU funding”, under the task 2.2. It provided sets of questions for two groups of respondents:

- 1. representatives of social service providers and public authorities in charge of design and coordination of social services on local/ regional/ national level, and**
- 2. representatives of national, sectoral, or regional managing authorities (or corresponding bodies in the EU funding cascade of the shared management).**

At the Steering Committee meeting, the Consortium decided to prepare national reports of EU member states for which representatives of ESF+/ERDF management bodies provide 5 or more responses. This target was achieved for 5 EU member states – Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Poland, and Spain.

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<sup>1</sup> A social services provider is any organisation 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.

Respectively, this report consolidates the analysis of responses given by the **representatives of Greek national, sectoral, or regional managing authorities** (or corresponding bodies in the EU funding cascade of the shared management).

Types of questions used in the survey were decided by the consortium respectively as:

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

Actual questions of the survey were agreed upon by the coordination of the Work package 2, task 2.2, namely European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), European Social Network (ESN), Social Services Europe (SSE), European Ageing Network (EAN), Union des entreprises à profit social (UNIPSO), and Asociace Poskytovatelů Sociálních Služeb České Republiky (APSS).

Survey *“The access and use of ESF+ and ERDF by social services – Managing Authorities’ perspective and feedback”* was launched on the [Jotform](#) online tool (external expert support was used to technically support the upload of the survey onto the platform) on the 28/09/2022 and was promoted via link with the cut-off date to receive the answers 15/10/2022.

Distribution of survey was done on two levels:

1. By **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), Comité Européen des Associations d'intérêt général (CEDAG), Asociace Poskytovatelů Sociálních Služeb České Republiky (APSS), Fundacion 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.) invested;
2. By the **consortium’s membership, networks, partners, and collaborators** (including the European Commission representatives).

Dissemination of the survey link and QR code by the above-mentioned actors was executed using following means:

- **E-mail** (sent by the consortium using the template email text with the adjustment possibility)
- **Newsletter** (number of consortium members are producing regular – weekly, monthly, newsletter shared via email with their membership and registered receivers)
- **Social network posts** (post including picture, short description and the survey link were shared as posts on LinkedIn and Twitter accounts of consortium members)
- **Website content** (consortium members prepared and published web articles to promote the survey to website visitors)

As consortium established the tracking of their efforts to contact the managing bodies in the EU members states, 780 individual contacts were established via email and 74 in total in Greece.

### 3. EU FUNDING CONTEXT (2021-2027) IN GREECE

In total, the Greek Partnership Agreement for 2021-2027 comprises 22 programmes: 13 regional and 9 national. The 13 regional programmes (combine European Regional and Development Fund – ERDF and European Social Fund Plus) and correspond to each administrative region in Greece.

Known as ESPA<sup>2</sup> funds, the support will come from the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF). Greece will receive a total of 26.2 billion euros (of which 21 billion euros comes from the EU and some 5.3 billion euros are national funds) to support projects that involve a green and digital economy; more social cohesion; a holistic approach to the fisheries, aquaculture and maritime sectors; and a digital society.

***As a complement to this information, the Helpdesk website provides further information about the architecture and the state of play of shared management funds in each EU member State, with a focus on ERDF and ESF+.***

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<sup>2</sup> ESPA - Partnership Agreement ref. to “Εταιρικό Σύμφωνο Περιφερειακής Ανάπτυξης” (ΕΣΠΑ)

## 4. QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

### 4.1 PART A: PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

In total **6 responses** were received in the frame of the survey from representatives of Greek national, sectoral, or regional managing authorities (or corresponding bodies in the EU funding cascade of the shared management).

Respondents were, for the purpose of their identification, requested to share the name of the operational programme they represent. From received responses, following distribution can be concluded:

- 5 respondents decided to declare the level of authority of the organisation they represent and respectively 1 respondent was representing sectoral level authority, 4 represented regional, and 2 represented national level authority (two representing both regional and national level authority);
- Regarding their positions, 3 persons acted as mid-level management and 1 acting as Head of ESPA Executive Unit – Education Sector of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs ;
- ERDF managing structure was represented by 3 respondents and ESF(+) by 5 respondents (with overlapping of both funds in certain cases);
- operational programmes represented by respondents were as follows:
  - South Aegean Operational Program 2014-2020,
  - Coordination of all Programs that have ESF+ (and ESF) resources
  - Planning unit of the Human Resources and Social Cohesion Sectoral Program (covering education sector, basic horizontal actions)

### 4.2 PART B: ASSESSMENT OF THE ESF+ AND ERDF OPERATIONAL PROGRAMS' RELEVANCE FOR SOCIAL SERVICES

**Participation of social service providers in the EU funding programmes managed by the Greek managing authorities**

In order to establish the relevance of the individual respondent for the purpose of this survey, the respondents were asked to reflect on involvement of social service sector actors in the EU operational programme as project beneficiaries.

Out of six received answers, most (3 or 50%) respondents declared that social service actors are somewhat active in mobilising EU funds, while one respondent (17%) declared

that those actors can be considered as very active. Further, one (17%) respondent declared that social service actors are less active than other beneficiary groups in the frame of the operational programme they are representing, while one (17%) respondent stated that social services are difficult to be distinguished among other target groups.

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

Self-assessment of respondents for their satisfaction level with efficiency of the operational programmes (ESF+/ERDF) to operationalise allocation of funds resulted with 6 (100%) answers rating this segment as “good” (3 or 50%) or “rather good” (3 or 50%) suggesting high satisfaction with their own work among representatives of the Greek managing bodies.

### **Thematic priorities used by social services ESF+ / ERDF**

To establish what thematic focus was given to projects proposals submitted by social services actors in the frame of Greek ESF(+) and ERDF, respondents were given the option to provide their answer in the open (textual) format. The main themes mentioned are:

- Combating poverty and social exclusion
- Development and sustainability of social service structures
- Support for learning and social integration on vulnerable social groups (Roma, migrants, disability, etc.)

### **Challenges of ESF+/ERDF management authorities when funding social services**

Asked to assess comparatively their perception of challenge when faced with proposed phases of operational programme (ESF+/ ERDF) planning and implementation, respondents were able to select several options as “the most challenging”.

Implementation phase was most commonly chosen option (10 or 62% of respondents), where 3 respondents (19%) chose “defining the “rules” for applicants”, 1 (6%) respondent opted for “reaching and informing potential applicants (social service providers), 5 (31%) opted for “monitoring and assisting the project implementation and performance assessment and reporting” and one (6%) selected “formal and quality assessment and selection of incoming applications”. Planning phase of the Programme implementation was selected among provided options by total 5 respondents (31%), more specific, 4 (25%) respondents selected “setting priorities and allocating funds” as the most challenging, while one (6%) respondent pointed out “consultations and involvement of relevant stakeholders”. Post-implementation and “control and audit” was respectively selected among options by one (6%) respondent.

### **Main leverages at disposal to managing authorities to overcome challenges**

Respondents were given the option to elaborate their opinion on the leverages to use in their work to overcome the changes they marked as the most significant. Knowledge of those indicates the existence of capacity for solutions within the managing bodies of operational programmes (ESF+/ ERDF).

Of five respondents, only one expressed a negative response - not seeing or using a lever available to them, and the other 4 expressed different levers.

First, they emphasize the facilitation of direct and systematic communication with beneficiaries through the establishment of a department of directorates and horizontal instructions in the central bodies. In addition, the sectoral consultations (the EU funding structure being the Ministry of Education responsible for coordinating the work of primary and secondary schools, potential beneficiaries). Second, ad hoc surveys and problem-solving support.

Finally, what helps is the long experience in coordinating social partners and actors (ministries) in charge of political and procedural support.

### **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 perceived challenges in operational programme management, the respondents were able to provide their answer to the question about outsourcing of services covering parts or entire Programme planning or implementation process.

Received answers (5) reflected divided approach of Programme management in this respect. Two respondents carried out the implementation of the operational programme without involvement of the expertise of external actors, while one respondent lacked the knowledge to provide answer. Positive responses indicate the use of external advisory staff (experts) for project planning and implementation.

### **Involvement of intermediate bodies and assessment of their performance**

In order to divide the responsibility and involve more competent public authority into the allocation of EU funds to social services, managing authorities sometimes entitle secondary (intermediary) level of Programme management. This is a way for managing authorities to close the gap in capacity to serve the specific group of beneficiaries. Three respondents provided their answers to the question, out of which neither of respondents showed capacity (understanding, knowledge, et.) to answer the question in a way to support publicly available information on existing intermediary bodies in Greece.



### **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.

Out of 6 received responses to this question, 5 (83%) respondents rated their Programme as “rather good” while one (17%) responded with rating “good”.

Asked to comment their answer, respondents pointed out the reasons standing behind their ratings on the provided scale and two of the comments included simplified cost options as the most used in the operational programme they represent.

### **Preferences among simplifications**

Asked to express preferences of simplifications on their disposal (Regulation (EU) 2021/1060), 5 respondents provided their answers, out of which one expressed their inability to decide, or lack of relevancy of the question for the position they obtain. Out of answers with relevant content provided, use of simplified cost options was listed as significant simplification for all the respondents.

### **Operational interventions to improve efficiency of EU funding for social services**

Regardless of the Common Provisions Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2021/1060), EU Member States 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.) tasks and current state of capacity. Outsourcing of different services could add value, in short term, in described situations. Survey respondents were asked to list such efforts in their operational programmes, in case implemented in 2014-2020 financial period or planned for the 2021-2027 period.

Five respondents offered their answers, out of which four expressed the inability to decide or to provide answer due to their lack of knowledge. One respondent states that the operational programme includes plans to introduce capacity building and strengthening for vulnerable beneficiaries (NGO sector actors) for social inclusion, such as consultations with applicants to support quality of proposals

## **4.3 PART C: ASSESSMENT OF THE SOCIAL SERVICES CAPACITY TO MOBILISE 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 these assessments with self-assessments in the same segments given by the social service providers acting as beneficiaries in the national/regional ESF+ and ERDF financing structures.

### **Readiness of project applicants to write and implement EU projects**

Asked to rate the current readiness of project applicants to prepare and implement projects in the frame of the national (regional) ESF+ and ERDF, out of 6 respondents, 5 (83%) rated the readiness of applicants as “rather good” (4 or 67%) or “good” (1 or 17%). One (17%) respondent rated the readiness of project applicants as “weak”. The responses provided suggest the experience of current (past) applicants in the operational program for which some respondents provided responses.

Respondents explained their choice through textual comments. In their view, objective difficulties in accessing adequate work force and infrastructure lead to delays in projects and program. Also, experience must be combined with a readiness to make improvements. Finally, robust bureaucracy hinders the successful implementation of projects.

### **Internal factors as guarantee for the successful implementation of EU projects**

Respondents were asked to give their perception on the important internal factors to guarantee the success of social service providers implementing their project financed from EU sources. Possible answers were provided, and more than one could have been selected. 12 respondents provided answers to give their opinion, out of which answers were distributed to each from following:

- 1 (8%) - Good network and knowledge of available opportunities for the sector
- 5 (42%) - Institutional capacity: dedicated staff for EU funding programmes
- 6 (50%) - Experience in using EU funds (skills, knowledge, and the right people)

### **Recurring problems faced by project applicants and managers**

Representatives of ESF+ and ERDF Greek national management bodies were asked to list the most recurring problems which in their opinion (based on their perception) project applicants and managers face during project application and project implementation phase. According to 5 respondents, the most recurrent problems are

the lack of qualified staff, the complexity of the management rules and the lack of flexibility of the programs to respond to the need for changes in content and budget during project implementation.

#### **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. One respondent highlighted the need for the European Commission to develop guidelines and manuals to assist in the development of procedures for provision of beneficiary support.