

SESK – Social sErviceS helpdesk on EU Funds

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HELPDESK

SOCIAL SERVICES HELPDESK ON EU FUNDS

Key Findings – The Use of EU Shared Management Funds by Social Services in CZECH

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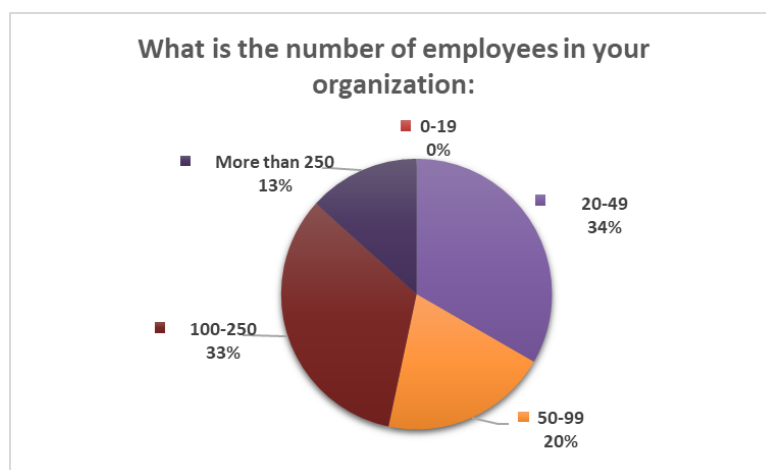
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1) Introduction - identification of country and respondents

There were 15 responses from social service providers. 4 respondents are from non-profit organisations, 2 are established by a region, 4 by a city and 5 by a church or religious community.



2 organizations provide non-residential social work (NACE code 88), 4 Residential care (NACE code 87) and 9 organizations provide both types of social services (NACE code 87 + 88).

More than half of these organizations (8) consider their knowledge in the area of the possibility of drawing EU funds for the social services sector to be average. Representatives of 4 organizations reported good knowledge, while representatives of 3 organizations reported very little knowledge. None of the organizations reported complete ignorance! The achieved result is certainly a reflection of the fact that the 4 interviewed organizations did not implement any EU project within the last program period 2014-2020.

2) Calls for project proposals

For the majority of respondents (11), the project challenges are clearly and comprehensibly formulated. Representatives of 4 organizations are convinced of the opposite. Deficiencies are mainly seen in the vocabulary used and in the set indicators.

3) Application

According to the respondents, the main factors that made them unable to apply for a project in their field of activity are the following:

- Too short deadline for submitting the project (6 responses)
- The organization is not listed among the eligible applicants (4 responses)
- The project rules were unclear (3 responses.)

We asked respondents about "post-project sustainability rules" (if applicable in their country) to find out if this was an obstacle in submitting their projects. Responses were mixed, with 6 answering "yes" or "somewhat yes", and 8 "somewhat not" or "not". For those who consider it as an obstacle, they explain it by the fact that after the end of the European funding, there are no financial resources to continue the activity.

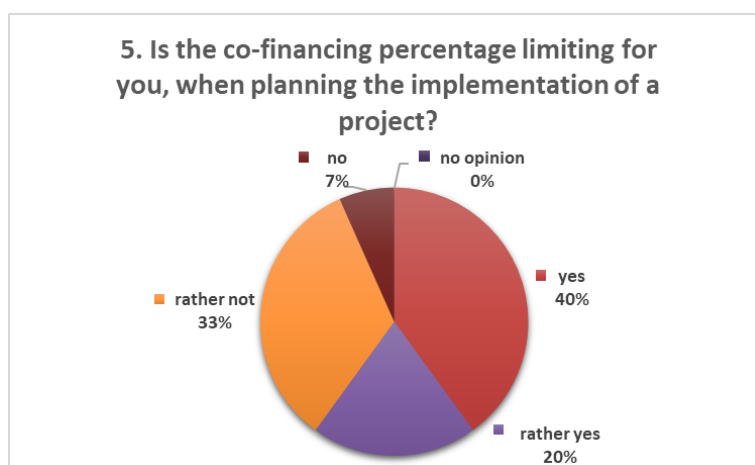
For them the most challenging part when applying for a EU project are:
(average values from 1 to 5 scale, with 1 = no challenging and 5 = most challenging):

1. The allocation of sufficient internal resources
2. The complexity of the application form
3. Following public procurement and/or state aid rules.

The majority (14 out of 16) indicated that they use internal staff members to develop project applications. However, it appears that those organizations do not have enough means to train or educate their own staff to better apply for these funds.

4) Co-financing

Most respondents (60 %) consider the percentage of co-funding to be a barrier to the implementation of a project.



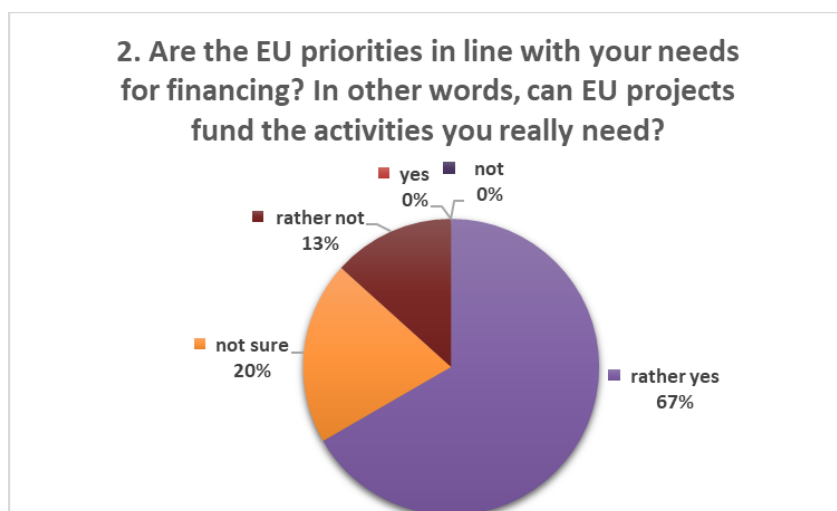
Regarding the source of their co-financing, it is mainly internal funds linked to their economic activity, donations, fundraising or state budget.

5) Funding

The priorities set by the EU are for the majority of organizations (10 out of 15) in line with real needs, i.e. those activities that are really needed can be financed through EU projects. 2 organizations are convinced that this is not the case. 3 organizations failed to assess compliance. In additional comments, the respondents stated that even though they usually manage to fit the activities into EU projects, there are areas that are outside, for example provision of material aid to persons in need along with

social work with these persons. In addition, according to them, the calls for proposals are mostly oriented towards employment and the labour market.

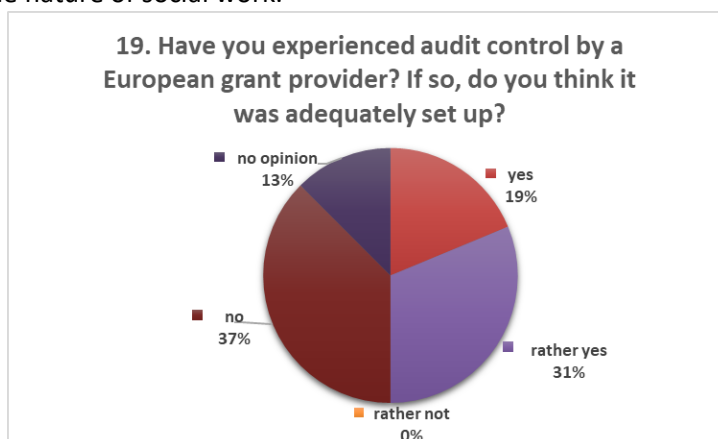
Here is one quote for a practical example: "Sometimes the definition and focus of calls are too narrow, we perceive positive changes in relation to the wider possibilities of using subsidy options for field and ambulatory services, in contrast we find it difficult to find answers to our needs in the area of residential services, in addition as a contribution organization of the region".



6) Collaboration with Managing Authorities

The majority of the responding organizations (9 out of 15) consider that Managing Authorities communicates sufficiently with them during the drafting, implementation and reporting of the project and provides them with the relevant information and support. However, this same majority has already encountered a situation where Managing Authorities has changed requirements or rules during projects implementation. In most cases, this was due to a personnel change of the manager of the governing body. It was also pointed out that the rules are defined after a request is made. i.e. during the time of project implementation.

Roughly half of the respondents have had experience with an audit by a European grant provider. These organizations express through various comments that the teams conducting these audits are not competent in the nature of social work.



60 % of the respondents (9) think that the rules defined for public procurement in EU projects are well established. However, organizations report that they prefer to hire external collaborators for public contracts. In addition, the organizations point out that some rules, such as competition for travel costs, are completely meaningless and cannot be realistically followed. In general, the unit cost system, which is now used by many international projects, is better.

7) Implementation of the project

For the majority of respondents (11), it is not a problem to assemble a project implementation team. Despite this, organizations draw attention to the fact that it is a problem to involve regular workers beyond their working hours. Searching for new employees is very time-consuming. Moreover, now the new ESF period demands so much "ideal qualifications" for workers that it will be unrealistic to obtain them. For example a community worker should have 2 years of experience working in a community centre, while in the Czech Republic community centres have only been established since the previous program period. So there are very few people who are able to meet the required qualifications and they work in centres established in the past period.



8) Evaluation

The respondents would recommend shortening the approval time of monitoring reports and simplifying the administration, especially the time sheet reports.

Between the submission of the project progress report and the receipt of the reimbursement money, most respondents say that 1 – 3 months pass. The duration of the approval has an impact on the available finance, which can negatively affect the progress of the project implementation.