

# SOCIAL SERVICES HELPDESK ON EU FUNDS



## Managing Authorities: Survey Analysis Report

### Spain

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**Date:** 06/10/2022

**Version:** 0.1

| Dissemination Level |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Restricted          |   |
| Public              | x |

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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 Spanish 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), 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.) 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 13 total in Spain.

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

In 2021-2027, Spain will benefit from €37.3 billion in Cohesion Policy funding to accelerate the country's green transition, finance innovation and digitisation, increase the employment rate and improve local social services. The strategy and details for these investments are set out in the Partnership Agreement between Spain and the Commission.

The strategy will mainly focus on less developed regions: 50% of the funds will be allocated to investing in Andalusia, Extremadura, Castilla-La Mancha, Ceuta, and Melilla. For its part, the Canary Islands, as an EU Outermost Region, will receive an additional allocation of €673 million to tackle the socio-economic consequences of its remoteness from the EU mainland.

€11.3 billion under the [European Social Fund](#) (ESF) will be invested in social cohesion and employment. The ESF will particularly focus on the employment of women, young people, low-skilled people and people with a migrant background in line with the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#). For instance, employment incentives will encourage the recruitment of the long-term unemployed and people from vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, and the conversion of apprenticeships to open-ended contracts in support of Spain's new labour market reform.

Investments in Public Employment Services will improve the profiling and counselling for jobseekers to provide adapted skills training for the green and digital transitions, in

particular for young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs). Support for Dual Vocational Education and Training (VET) offerings will also encourage more involvement of employers in education and open up better employment opportunities for VET graduates.

More than €4 billion will help improve the living conditions of vulnerable people by providing comprehensive integration pathways and strengthening social services. Around €1 billion will be specifically used to fight poverty and safeguard children's rights to education and access to social services in line with the [European Child Guarantee](#). The Fund will improve the wellbeing of vulnerable children, for example by integrating children with disabilities in mainstream education and strengthening pedagogic support to prevent early school leaving.

The funding will also improve the quality and effectiveness of primary care. It will support the construction, renovation and upgrading of health centres and hospitals, and allow Spain to invest in equipment required for specialised care<sup>2</sup>.

***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+.***

## 4. QUANTITATIVE & QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

### 4.1 PART A: PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

In total **7 responses** were received in the frame of the survey from representatives of Spanish 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 and other relevant information. From received responses, following distribution can be concluded:

- 6 respondents decided to declare the level of authority of the organisation they represent and respectively 3 respondents represented national level authorities, 2 respondents represented regional level authorities and 1 represented local level authority;
- Regarding their positions, 2 persons acted as top-level management, 2 acting as mid-level management and 1 as implementing officer;
- ERDF managing structure was represented by 2 respondents and ESF(+) by 7 respondents (with overlapping of both funds in certain cases);

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<sup>2</sup> Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_22\\_6964](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_6964)

- operational programmes represented by respondents were as follows:
  - POISES
  - POEJ
  - FEAD
  - FSE+ (21-27)
  - FSE (14-20)
  - FEDER (14-20)

## **4.2 PART B: ASSESSMENT OF THE ESF+ AND ERDF OPERATIONAL PROGRAMS' 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 service providers (and corresponding actors) in EU funding under shared management in Spain, mainly focusing on ESF(+) / ERDF Spanish experience. Regarding the quality of involvement of social service providers as project beneficiaries, several questions allowed for respondents to reflect on their satisfaction level and perceived challenges in the process of EU funding allocation, as well as assessing their internal capacity and ambitions for improvements.

### **Participation of social service providers in the EU funding programmes managed by the Spanish 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 seven received answers, three (43%) respondents declared that social service actors are very active in the frame of the operational programme they are representing, while three respondents (43%) declared them to be less active than other beneficiary groups. One (14%) of respondents declared that social service actors are somewhat active in mobilising EU funds.

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

Self-assessment of respondents reflecting their satisfaction level with efficiency of the operational programmes (ESF+/ERDF) to operationalise allocation of funds resulted with 4 (50%) answers rating this segment as “rather good” (2 or 25%) or “good” (2 or 25%). Four (50%) respondents rated their satisfaction as “rather weak”. The result is

suggesting divided opinion on satisfaction of respondents with their own work among representatives of the Spanish 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 Spanish ESF(+) and ERDF, respondents were given the option to provide their answer in the open (textual) format.

Analysis of answers gave the overview of key words (phrases) used as follows:

- Employment and occupational training of vulnerable groups;
- Fight against the gender gap and for gender equality;
- 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<sup>3</sup>): transition to adulthood, family preservation, therapeutic care in the protection system;
- Child Guarantee implementation
- Basic material support

### **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 50% of respondents), where 4 respondents (20%) chose “defining the “rules” for applicants”, 3 (15%) respondents opted for “monitoring and assisting the project implementation and performance assessment and reporting”, 2 (10%) selected “reaching and informing potential applicants (social service providers)” and 1 (5%) selected “formal and quality assessment and selection of incoming applications”. Planning phase of the Programme was selected among provided options by total 3 respondents (15%) selecting “setting priorities and allocating funds”. Significant number of respondents (7 or 35%) selected post-implementation – “control and audit” as the most challenging.

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

Respondents were given the option to elaborate their opinion on the leverages to use or used in their work to overcome the changes they marked as the most significant.

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<sup>3</sup> NNA - Children and adolescents ref. to Ninas, Ninos y Adolescentes



Knowledge of those indicates the existence of capacity for solutions within the managing bodies of operational programme (ESF+/ ERDF).

The main leverages mentioned by the respondents were:

- Pre-existing 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<sup>4</sup>) 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.

### **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.

Out of the received answers (7), five respondents carry out the implementation of the operational programme without involvement of the expertise of external actors; while out of two respondents who provided positive answers, one provided further detail on the outsourced services subcontracted, which were regarding the assessment of legality and eligibility verifications of selected operations.

### **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.

Eight respondents provided their answers to the question, out of which four of the respondents stated that the operational programme they manage does not delegate tasks to the intermediary body. Among other respondents, and in line with the

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<sup>4</sup> RIS - Social Inclusion Network ref. as Red de Inclusión Social

management cascade of ESF(+) in Spain, intermediary bodies were listed (as examples) as follows:

- CEPES
- Once Foundation
- IMSERSO

All managing bodies expressed their satisfaction with the role and work of intermediary bodies in the EU funding cascade.

### **Assessment of the current state of simplifications implemented**

Since Common Provisions Regulation for the financial period 2021-2027, after the comprehensive consultation process with the interested stakeholders, stipulates the obligation or possibility for operational programmes to use number of simplifications, respondents were asked to assess their operational programme when it comes to the application or planning of those simplifications.

Out of 8 received responses to this question, 3 (38%) respondents rated their Programme as “rather good” while two (25%) responded with rating “good”, two (25%) with “rather weak and one (13%) with “weak”.

The main simplifications mentioned are:

- Too rigid access 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;
- 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.

### **Preferences among simplifications**

Asked to express preferences of simplifications on their disposal (Regulation (EU) 2021/1060), 6 respondents indicated the following:

- 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) 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.

Four respondents offered their answers by which they state that their operational programme implemented or plans to introduce:

- Open calls to private non-profit entities for training, job search assistance, etc. of people at risk of social exclusion;
- Wide-range call 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 for the entities selected to carry out projects managed with ESF+;
- Close collaboration with social services, employment services, local entities and the third sector within the framework of the Social Inclusion Network (RIS).

### **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 8 respondents, 3 (38%) rated the readiness of applicants as “rather good” and one (13%) as “good”. Comments support that 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.

Two (25%) respondents rated the readiness of project applicants as “rather weak” and two additional selected “weak” as an option. Comments indicate the lack of experience and training possibilities (for the increasing EU funds available). They emphasize that 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 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. 21 responses were received providing answers to give their opinion, out of which answers were distributed to each as follows:

- 7 (33%) - Institutional capacity: dedicated staff for EU funding programmes;
- 6 (29%) - Experience in using EU funds (skills, knowledge, and the right people);
- 4 (19%) - Good network and knowledge of available opportunities for the sector;
- 3 (14%) - Financial capacity: solid financial management and available cash flow;
- 1 (5%) – Ability to recruit staff quickly in local administration.

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

Representatives of ESF+ and ERDF Spanish 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. Answers could have been submitted as text entry.

In total, 6 respondents provided answers to elaborate their perception which paraphrased state as follows:

- Ignorance of European regulators regarding access, conditions, and justification of funds received by the member states;
- Complexity of justification of the expenses (necessary on the other hand);
- The burden deriving from the numerous instances of verification and controlling of operations;
- Ignorance of management details (separate accounting, advertising...);
- 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).

### **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. None of the respondents was open to raise a point not covered by the survey.