TECHNICAL GUIDANCE ON EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS IN SOCIAL SERVICES

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRACTICAL STEPS FOR SOCIAL SERVICES

THE HELPDESK PROJECT

The "**Social Services Heldpesk on EU Funds**" (HELPDESK) project aims to reach the main European and national stakeholders involved in EU funding (shared management) and social service providers to work more efficiently in distributing and using the European Social Fund+ (ESF+) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for social inclusion projects. The partnership has developed several tools during the project, to facilitate this process based on the collected knowledge on the needs and challenges, as well as good practices of using ESF+ and ERDF for social services projects in EU member states.

The project lays the foundation of a Social Services Helpdesk with two main priorities:

- To support social service providers and local/regional coordinators for social services in accessing and using EU funds (ESF+ and ERDF in particular);
- To assist national Managing Authorities (or similar bodies) efficiently allocate EU funds (ESF+, ERDF in particular) to finance quality interventions in the field of social services.

The HELPDESK Project works towards three main objectives:

- Promoting capacity building and awareness raising on how EU funds (in particular ESF+ and ERDF) can better support effective social services interventions.
- Facilitating the simplification of the access and use of EU funds for social services.
- Facilitating the exchange and cooperation between Managing Authorities, social services providers and coordinators, and the European Commission to ensure that funding priorities are based on an assessment of needs and target effective evidence-based social services interventions.

As visible from the priorities and objectives of the project, main target groups can be defined as:

- European Commission.
- Managing Authorities and intermediate bodies (or corresponding national / regional / local authorities).
- Social Services (local / regional / national).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Technical Guidance on Effective Interventions in Social Services offers a comprehensive tool for Managing Authorities (MAs) and social services to optimise the utilisation of European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) resources.

The development of this guidance involved a multifaceted research approach, beginning with desk research to create Country Profile Sheets for each EU Member State. These sheets provided crucial insights into funding priorities, amounts, and managing bodies at the national level. A European survey targeting both MAs and Social Services across the 27 Member States was conducted to assess needs, challenges, and opportunities in accessing and utilizing ESF+ and ERDF funds. Additionally, National Evidence Gathering Fora (NEGF) facilitated in-depth discussions among stakeholders, confirming emerging trends and providing qualitative insights. Existing literature was reviewed to further supplement findings, and a series of cross-sectoral and thematic workshops were held to elaborate on effective intervention strategies.

The Technical Guidance addresses critical gaps and challenges faced by MAs and Social Services alike. From streamlining fund management processes to maximising social impact, this guidance offers actionable strategies to foster collaboration and innovation in the delivery of social services according to the different types of stakeholders, whether social service providers, MAs (implementing and political) or the European Commission (EC).

The present document is based on the summary of the outcomes included in the final version of the Technical Guidance on Effective Interventions in Social Services. The present document outlines key policy recommendations for Social Services to consider when programming and implementing interventions.

These policy recommendations advocate for a systematic approach to developing and implementing social services that prioritise the needs and rights of individuals and marginalised groups. They emphasise the importance of evidence-based project proposals that efficiently address service designs that are person-centered, user-oriented, and rights-based, also through integration and partnership with different stakeholders. They outline the significance of technology use to enhance service quality.

Moreover, they highlight the significance of adequately trained staff, ensuring their safety and support, while upholding the principles of human rights, social inclusion, and non-discrimination throughout service delivery.

The policy recommendations are the result of a comprehensive collaboration with social services, MAs, the EC and other relevant stakeholders. The identified measures represent the will to foster the ongoing cooperation for a greater impact.

The document also provides practical steps that Social Services can take to immediately improve the delivery of social services.

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Before developing project proposals, conduct a **needs assessment** to identify the specific needs of the (target) population and ensure that social services are tailored to meet those needs.
- The needs assessment done by Social Services interested in elaborating project proposals – and, where appropriate, in cooperation with other key stakeholders, in particular local and regional government, Public Employment Services, social insurance bodies, other non-profit/social economy organisations, etc. – should form the **basis to develop, roll out and scale up service designs that are person-centered, rights-based and which empower persons who draw on care and support**.
- When developing project proposals, use **evidence-based and proven solutions** to have social services which **address the needs** of the individual users and identified needs of a specific group of marginalised or disadvantaged users in an effective and efficient way.
- Design and promote **integrated and comprehensive** social services, involving partnerships with other service providers and the relevant local and regional governments, Public Employment Services or social insurance bodies.

- Implement mechanisms and use **quantitative and qualitative indicators** to monitor and evaluate the effects of the service delivery and to guarantee that the social services piloted or scaled up with the financial support of ESF+ or ERDF can best respond to the needs of the users and improve their wellbeing (referring also to the principle of co-production).
- Design social services in a way that they are **accessible to all users**, including those with physical or intellectual disabilities, by providing support measures or assistive personnel and by removing physical and communication barriers.
- Design social services that make use of **ICT** in a way **to improve the service quality**, to facilitate the work of the workforce delivering them and to guarantee the rights and autonomy of the service users, building on their individual capacities.
- Design social services piloted or scaled up with the financial support of ESF+ or ERDF that pursue the aim to have adequately **trained staff**, **available** in adequate numbers, being **protected** in line with the health and safety requirements, and **supported** by management and digital tools to provide high-quality services that are responsive to the needs of the users.
- Design social services that **respect the rights of end users**, facilitate **social inclusion**, and prevent **discrimination**, **segregation**, and **social exclusion**.

PRACTICAL STEPS

The following is a list of quickly actionable measures social service providers can immediately take to ensure ESF+ and ERDF contribute to ensuring access to social services, in line with the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and other relevant local, regional, national, European policy frameworks, and international law. The measures aim to cover horizontal issues affecting social services across the European Union.

01

Conduct a needs assessment

to identify the specific needs of the (target) population and ensure that social services are tailored to meet those needs.

02

Implement a user-centred approach

to service delivery that focuses on the needs and preferences of the individual users. Involve the users in the design and development of services implementing a co-production mechanism.

03

Use evidence-based practices

to ensure that services are effective and efficient in meeting the needs of the users.

04

Develop partnerships

with other service providers to ensure that users receive comprehensive and coordinated services.

05

Ensure that staff are adequately trained

available in adequate numbers, being protected in line with the health and safety requirements, and supported by management and digital tools to provide high-quality services that are responsive to the needs of the users.

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06

Implement a quality assurance programme

to monitor and evaluate service delivery and ensure that services are meeting the needs of the users.

07

Ensure that services are accessible

to all users, including those with physical or intellectual disabilities, by removing physical and communication barriers.

08

Use technology

to enhance and improve service delivery, such as telehealth services or online appointment booking but also ensure the appropriate training to be able to correctly use digital devices by the staff and the users.

09

Provide information and education

to the users about their rights and entitlements to social services. Make sure that service providers are also aware of users' rights and entitlements.

10

Develop and implement a complain and feedback mechanism

to ensure that users can provide feedback and raise concerns about service delivery.

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