

MANAGEMENT OF NON-REFUNDABLE EXTERNAL FINANCING PROJECT AS SUPPORT OF SOCIAL SERVICES DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *This article has emerged from the project management practice that had a significant impact on the institutional development of the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection Dolj. In the context of the financial constraints faced by both local authorities and private providers of social services and, at the same time, in the conditions of decentralization, non-refundable external funds represent a financing opportunity for the development and diversification of specialized social services, depending on the social needs identified at the level of each community. In the social field, project management, beyond being a fashion, has become a necessity and efficient form of institutional development.*

Key words: *projects management, social services, institutional development*

A topical domain of our day, project management, is not only a tool for attracting non-refundable external funds, but a new way of thinking and acting through which we can increase personal and organizational performance, a way of institutional development.

Project management is a specialized branch of management that has emerged quite recently, but whose importance has seen a major growth in recent years.

Social services are a component of the social protection system, along with social benefits that are monetary measures that help solve social problems. Social services are not primarily targeted at vulnerable groups, but they are meant to help anyone in a difficult situation at a time, including children or adults, single-parent families, people whose legal status is unclear, and especially about people with disabilities or homelessness, or with different types of addictions.

Social services are organized in various forms and structures, depending on the specifics of the activities carried out and the particular needs of each category of beneficiaries, and involve an integrated approach to the needs of the person, in relation to the socio-economic situation, health status, level of education and its social environment.

Regardless of the legal form, in order to provide social services on the territory of Romania, social service providers must be accredited under the law.

Social service providers in Romania are public authorities, non-governmental organizations and religious cults.

In our country, social services operate and are decentralized on the principle of local autonomy.

Social Assistance Law no. 292/2011, specifies the sources of financing of social services, namely:

- the state budget, the local budget of the county, respectively of the Municipality of Bucharest;
- the local budgets of the communes, towns and municipalities, respectively the local budgets of the Bucharest Municipality sectors;
- donations, sponsorships or other contributions from individuals or legal entities in the country and abroad;
- refundable and non-refundable external funds;
- contribution of beneficiaries;
- other sources of funding, in accordance with current legislation.

After the years 2000, with the diversification of the social services range at national level, then the introduction of quality standards and the diversification of types of service providers, the social services sector was in a process of modernization, a process accelerated by the adoption of the Law no. 292/2011.

This law aimed at decentralization of services, more efficient allocation of existing resources, exploration of new financing lines for social services developed locally, diversification of services. However, all these measures have not been accompanied by unitary methodologies at national level, so that local authorities can make a complex diagnosis of social needs, allocate an appropriate budget to cover these needs, or monitor and evaluate their functioning effectively.

The economic crisis that has also affected our country has led to a slow evolution of this sector and, in some cases, the elimination of social services on the agenda of local authorities, especially in small localities.

Currently, local city halls can fund social services only through local budgets, from the state budget being funded part of social benefits and the personal assistant of the disabled person ones. Thus, as small towns and communes face difficulties in collecting local taxes, there are very few chances for funding social services in these localities.

Another aspect to be considered is that the local budgeting of social services is generally made at historic costs, or in relation to minimum cost standards for a limited number of social services. A budget based on priority policies and public programs, or strategic objectives and measurable and verifiable results do not yet apply in the social sector.

Social services maintained at a high-quality level are means by which citizens are helped to become active in the economic and social life of their

communities, overcome difficult, temporary or long-standing situations, and actively contribute to collective welfare. They provide a more effective and more active means of supporting the population in situations of vulnerability, or marginalization, in relation to social benefits.

In the national social protection system, the role of the two types of measures is complementary, but investment in social services contributes to more effective long-term support effects for the marginalized or vulnerable population categories, social services based on the principle of individualizing intervention, adjusting to the specifics and needs of the person, to the socio-economic context in which the beneficiaries of these services live. They respond more effectively to risk or crisis situations and allow for an intervention adjusted to the peculiarities of the beneficiaries with the help of specialized staff.

The experience of the past 10 years shows that both in the development of the social services infrastructure and the organizational development of the social service providers, non-refundable external funds have had an excellent impact and excellent outcomes, the majority share being held by the European funds. However, the social services sector still faces many gaps and inconsistencies.

Thus, during the pre-accession period, the national social assistance system benefited from direct support from the European Union through the PHARE financial instrument. These funding aimed at accelerating the reform of the social assistance system and diminishing the negative effects of the communist regime's policy in the field of the protection of disadvantaged groups, especially children in difficulty and people with disabilities.

Within the Phare program, projects that developed primary social services (social services aimed at preventing or limiting situations of difficulty, or vulnerability that may lead to marginalization or social exclusion) and integrated/specialized social services (social services aimed at maintaining, restoring or developing individual capacities to overcome a social need situation) were eligible for non-refundable financing.

Starting with 2007, Romania had the opportunity to reform the social assistance system, given the size of European non-refundable funds and the experience gained during the pre-accession period.

Thus, the Regional Operational Program within the Major Domain of Intervention 3.2 The rehabilitation/modernization/development and fitting-out of the social services infrastructure, meant both the financing of projects targeting the multifunctional social centers that can cover a wide range of services in order to help people in difficulty, starting with their acceptance in the center, until specific problems they face temporarily, including through the organization of workshops for the development of independent life skills and professional skills, as well as investments in residential care centers providing

long-term accommodation services, thus providing an adequate framework for hosting and caring for people in difficulty.

The Regional Operational Program represented at the same time a means at the hands of the local authorities through which the high capacity centers could be restructured to meet the quality standards in the field.

Infrastructure investments are an attractive target in particular for public authorities and, therefore, to the extent that a series of measures will be taken to align the public policy objectives in the field of social services with the existing financing objectives of the Operational Program Regional, this is an important element.

The Sectoral Operational Program Human Resources Development is another program that has provided funding opportunities to social service providers, namely funding of staff training programs working in the field of social services for people with disabilities and facilitating people with disabilities access to education and the labor market, as a vulnerable group.

Key areas of intervention 6.1 Developing the social economy and 6.2 Improving the access and participation of vulnerable groups in the labor market, under Priority Axis 6, have been an opportunity to increase the employment of people with disabilities.

Within this priority axis, it was intended to promote specific programs for personal development, both in order to strengthen the motivation for vocational training and the integration of vulnerable groups into the labor market, as well as to improve their access to the labor market. At the same time, local authorities are encouraged to develop partnerships with non-governmental organizations representing vulnerable groups in order to better reach those who are marginalized or those who most need such support.

The priority axes and major areas of intervention of this program were generously formulated and provided multiple opportunities to finance social services for people with intellectual disabilities, staff training, and budget allocations were relatively large, which was the premise of community social services development.

At the same time, it should be noted that the program did not propose the actual development of social services, but the development of appropriate tools and methods for providing social services and the provision, development and creation of flexible and alternative services for children care and/or other family members being in care during the day.

In the social sector, reform means moving as far as possible from a situation of passive dependence to active participation in society, a move that is possible by setting-up social services, which must be flexible, adapted to the needs of the beneficiaries, open to the community and provided by professionals. At the same time, it should be mentioned that the national Strategy on social services development envisages the global approach to the

needs of people at social risk, the development of services taking into account, as a priority, the principle of social need, diversification of social services as a factor of orientation of social assistance institutions to proximity services, the right of assisted persons to participate in the decision on the type of social intervention.

The Sectoral Operational Program for Human Resources Development represented the necessary funding for training, one of the actions that could be financed through Axis 6.1 being the development of training programs for the specialists involved in the social services system: social workers, personal assistants, community assistants, family mediators, health mediators, nursing assistants, caregivers, staff from residential institutions.

Improving the quality of life of beneficiaries and their families, better social inclusion and a better professional environment for staff are objectives that can be achieved with the help of non-refundable funds, which represent an opportunity for the development of social services in our country.

The efficiency of project management at the level of the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection Dolj translates, on the one hand, into the value of investments made from non-refundable external funds, and on the other hand, the real and positive impact on beneficiaries' quality of life.

Thus, during the period 2006-2016, 11 projects with non-refundable external financing were implemented, projects aimed at the diversification and development of specialized social services, taking into account the dynamics of the social needs in the county and the correlation of these needs with the general mission of the social inclusion policies. At the same time, it was aimed to develop social services in a balanced manner throughout the county, so that as many inhabitants as possible have access to specialized social services.

In terms of disabled adults, 7 organizational structures were set up to provide services to disabled adults (2 recovery centers and a mobile team providing recovery/rehabilitation services, 1 home care service, 3 residential centers, personal care services, assistance and support).

In child protection field, a mobile team was set up to provide recovery/rehabilitation services to the beneficiaries' homes, a small hearing room to ensure a friendly, secure, atraumatic environment during the hearing of the child victim or the author of criminal offenses, counseling and support center for parents and children to overcome the difficulties faced by families at risk of abandoning children by maintaining, rebuilding or developing parental individual abilities, and a counseling and support center for reintegration/integration of children into the family.

Through the non-refundable funds, the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection Dolj managed to build and develop a system of

social services with substantial implications for the quality of life of people with disabilities.

The development of structures providing recovery/rehabilitation services to both children and adults with disabilities means, on the one hand, increasing the degree of individual autonomy of these persons, preventing the aggravation of disabilities and alleviating the consequences of these disabilities and, on the other hand, lowering the degree dependence on the family and the social protection system, respectively, contributes to the prevention of their institutionalization.

Project management is an engine of institutional development, achieving maturity in this area, contributing to the development of the ability to face the dynamism and complexity of the environment in which we live and work.

In the social field, project management, beyond being a fashion, has become a necessary and effective form of institutional development.

One of the major pillars of support for social inclusion of vulnerable categories is social services that will demonstrate their effectiveness when the relationship between the needs of vulnerable groups and the provision of social services will be balanced, generating a complex and integrated response in which the mission of social services finds itself under the umbrella of social inclusion.

On the weaker funding from the state budget, the field of attracting non-refundable foreign funds is becoming increasingly an area of interest for public and private social service providers, who see in this process a way of improving the quality of social services.

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