

# Process evaluation of the Coordinated approach to socially excluded localities

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The final report summarises the results of the process evaluation of the Coordinated approach to socially excluded localities (hereinafter CASEL) under Operational Programme Employment (hereinafter OPE).

### **Project Focus**

Within the evaluation, the setting and functioning of the system and the cooperation of the involved entities were evaluated. An analysis of the drawdown of the allocations for individual municipalities (groups of municipalities) involved in the CASEL in the framework of the OPE calls for project applications were carried out, and the assessment of the quality of the submitted applications performed. At the same time, the evaluation identified factors influencing the drawdown of the allocation and quality of applications and analysed the functioning of the Local partnership cooperation and the individual working groups. Finally, it identified the advantages and disadvantages of allocation drawdown within the CASEL compared to drawdowns of similar financial schemes in the past, barriers to implementation and created a set of recommendations, the introduction of which has the potential to contribute to the improvement of the systemic setting of CASEL.

### **Methodological Approach**

Secondary data sources provided by the contracting authority were used, publicly available data analysed and primary data collected through personal or telephone interviews with relevant actors involved in nine case studies. Moreover, the questionnaire surveys of local consultants of the Agency for Social Inclusion (hereinafter ASI), managers of Strategy Plans for Social Inclusion (SPSI) and applicants for support were carried out. Following the nature of the data, qualitative and quantitative analytical methods of analysis were subsequently used, including the action model as the basic method of process evaluation. The analysis covered 38 localities which entered the cooperation within the CASEL before April 2018, the relevant strategy for social inclusion (SPSI) have been approved, and also their projects have been approved in one of three calls of the OPE, namely call No. 26, call No 42 and call No 52.

### **Allocation drawdown**

Overall, as of April 2018, 52.6% of allocation under SPSI were committed. The individual localities are considerably stand out in the rate of drawdown. For analysis purposes, the sites were divided into four categories according to the success of the allocation drawdown. None of the sites had a lower rate of success than 15%, 12 sites achieved a success rate of 15 – 40%, 10 sites 40.1-60%, 9 sites 60.1 – 75% and 7 sites reached more than 75% of the allocation rate.

The highest success rate in the evaluation had applications aimed at social services under the law regime (supported by 88% of all submitted aid applications). Social services followed outside the law regime (supported by 78% of the aid applications submitted). Projects thematically focused on employment promotion were successful in 75% of cases. The success rate of 63% has achieved projects focused on community social work or promoting community centres.

On the contrary, the lowest success rate was recorded for project applications focused on social entrepreneurship. Only 2 applications for the promotion of social entrepreneurship from 58 submitted applications were supported within the whole CASEL (only 3% of the applications submitted).

Only minor differences in the success of the drawdown could be recorded between the OPE calls. The success rate of the drawdown in the framework of call 26 reached 55%, under call 42, the success rate of 56% and 49% in call 52. A significant increase of successful applications in relation to the total number of aid applications submitted in the calls has been noted; In the framework of call 26, this proportion reached 56.3%, in call No 42 then 63.7% and in call no 52 already 83.5%.

### **Quality of applications**

The calculation of the quality index of applications showed a considerable impact of applications for social-entrepreneurship support, which were only very limited in the CASEL, and whose evaluations were very bad across all localities. The lowest quality index of aid applications was recorded in municipalities which primarily focused their strategies in this direction, e.g. Osoblažsko or Vrbensko. The highest quality index of the applications achieved small municipalities with a relatively small number of aid applications, e.g. Velké Hamry or Štětí.

### **Success factors of the drawdown**

Variables that potentially influence the drawdown of allocation set in the SPSI have been proposed. These variables were as follows: the characteristics of the municipality, the quality of SPSI, the quality of cooperation with ASI and the quality of cooperation with the OPE managing authority. The results of the analysis did not show the existence of any relationship between the proposed variables and the rate of drawdown of allocated allocations. The results also correspond to the conclusions of the field investigation, which tend to indicate the influence of a specific combination of factors, in particular, human capital involved in the implementation of CASEL in individual locations.

Local partnerships or working groups are engaged in the preparation of SPSI and associated input analyses and proposals for solving problematic areas in the form of project plans, so-called fiches. According to the study outcomes, the actors addressed (managers of SPSI, local consultants, and applicants) are three-quarters satisfied with the quality of cooperation in the local partnership.

The involvement of some actors, the staffing capacity of some municipalities and especially the members of the local partnership from the applicants, also appears problematic. At the same time, depending on the information available, the activity of most local partnerships is attenuated after SPSI approval, or after completion of the evaluation of Project applications.

### **Evaluation of the CASEL principle**

#### **CASEL Benefits**

The most frequently mentioned advantages of drawing aid under the CASEL compared to other similar aid schemes include professional support from the ASI. Support includes methodological support in the preparation and implementation of SPSI, initiation, and management of local partnership meetings, training for representatives of municipalities and applicants and other activities. For a further advantage, the respondents consider the allocation reserved for applicants in the context of the CASEL calls. Applicants who have not received a positive opinion on the compliance of the application submitted to the municipality as SPSI and at the same time from the ASI shall not be eligible for support under the CASEL calls.

To a lesser extent, the complex approach under SPSI covering various thematic areas was appreciated, which contribute to a comprehensive solution to the problems of socially excluded localities. The actors also appreciate the possibility of cooperation and discussion of projects on local

partnerships, i.e. the within the broader platform of participants, where they had the opportunity to share their experience and knowledge. Many participants also valued the possibility of cooperation with the OPE managing authority, which many have used and evaluated very positively. Finally, the advantages related to the practical implementation of projects were mentioned; For example, some of the actors have identified a longer project implementation period, i.e. and guaranteed funds for the implementation of the project (3 years).

### **CASEL Drawbacks**

On the contrary, the most commonly described disadvantage was the **rigidity of the CASEL system settings**. Although the approach builds on the detailed analysis of the needs in the localities, it cannot react flexibly to them. Only projects that are already anchored in approved SPSI for the locality can be submitted in the CASEL calls. But the time that passes between the actual creation of the SPSI and the real implementation of the supported projects gives considerable scope for changing needs in the locality, but the system is not able to respond flexibly.

The **complexity of coordinating the operational programmes involved** (OPE, OP RDE, IROP) leads to a low level of mutual continuity of calls for projects within the CASEL, both factual and temporal. The absence of continuity as a result in some cases led to a reversal from the realization of the originally planned activities.

Although the **booked allocation** of the CASEL has largely been evaluated positively, according to the responses of some respondents, it leads to a lack of competitive environment, which, as a result, may contribute to a lower quality supported projects. At the same time, in some cases, the booked allocations were considered to equal the “certainty of project approval”. According to the opinions of some respondents, this led to an underestimation of the preparation of project applications.

Among other disadvantages is the high **degree of administrative and time complexity** of the processes associated with the implementation of CASEL. As a disadvantage, respondents perceive the limited power of the ASI, which also has no resources to support projects or decision-making powers that would enable it to provide direct financial support to the project. Although ASI may influence the amount of allocated for a given locality in the calls, it cannot induce the MA to launch the call itself. According to the respondents, there was often also a misunderstanding of the powers and role of the ASI in the CASEL system, as it was perceived as an authority decisive for allocating funds, which in turn led to frustrations associated with the fact that, despite the approval of ASI, the projects may have not been approved in the calls.

According to some of the respondents, for **projects planned for a limited period**, raises the question of sustainability of outputs in the absence of an adequate follow-up intervention from other sources. Representatives of the social services perceive negatively the necessity of separating the services provided for defined (locality and age) target group and the necessity of introducing separate records for this target group. At the same time, in some regions, the services supported within the CASEL were not included in the core regional network of social services, but in the so-called conditional networks of social services. A place in the core regional network must, therefore, be awarded after the completion of the social services project, with this step and required decision of the regional authorities being linked to the uncertainty of the sustainability of the service.

## Barriers

Respondents identified barriers and factors which, according to their views, influence the successful drawdown of allocated funds. The personal stability and capacity of ASI were essential to the successful implementation of CASEL. For many of the respondents, the personnel instability of ASI, and thus the support provided, created barriers to the successful implementation of CASEL. At the same time, staff capacities on the part of local partners and potential applicants were limited, who faced difficulties in staffing skilled job positions.

**Low coherence between the calls of operational programmes** limited the possibility of using allocated resources. The link of projects from OPE to investment projects funded by the IROP calls has been negatively influenced by the setting of the conditions of the investment calls which have been unacceptable for much of the municipalities, in particular, the condition of 20 years sustainability.

The conditions set out in the calls of OPE limited the possibility of carrying out some activities against the originally planned interventions. These were, for example, support for different target groups compared to the originally planned. This non-compliance was no longer present in the case of Call 52, whose publication was preceded by approval of project fiches and SPSI. All potential applicants were thus able to familiarise themselves with the text of the call during the preparations of the SPSI and their project proposals. Following this call (already after its publication) the possibility of applying for funding of social entrepreneurship was removed, and its support moved into an “open call”. This step has dissuaded some potential applicants from submitting the originally planned applications.

A **change in the unemployment rate**, which occurred at the time of implementation of the CASEL, was also identified as another of the barriers for allocation drawdown. As a result, there have been changes in the needs of target groups relating to their employment rates and their employability. Following the development in the labour market. People who could not find a job at the time of the SPSI planning and preparation have become employable. This situation has therefore made a significant contribution to addressing the needs of the target groups but has also contributed to the fact that the funds originally allocated for interventions in this area were no longer needed.

The **existence and use of alternative financial resources** have been identified as an additional with the potential to influence the rate of the allocated budget drawdown. Some of the ASI representatives mentioned cases where service providers decided to draw support from sources other than CASEL, for example, because of the lower complexity of their administration. However, this situation only occurred in the minimum number of cases covered by field investigations.

Support of the political representation for social inclusion in the municipality was identified as a key factor influencing the rate of allocation drawdown within the KSPVL. The municipality is the basic carrier of the whole SPSI and therefore bears responsibility for its creation, approval, and fulfilment. The Absence of this aid was assessed by actors as a significant barrier to successful drawdown.

## Awareness of municipalities

Most of the representatives of municipalities from the evaluated localities are satisfied with information about the course of the OPE call. Despite a relatively small sample of respondents, it can be appreciated that satisfaction has a rather increasing tendency over time.

## **Recommendations**

The evaluator formulated recommendations in the field of time and factual coordination of the calls of operational programmes, support for potential applicants regarding the foundation or development of social entrepreneurship and the procedural setting up of cooperation with representatives of the ASI in the field of factual Evaluation of project applications.