

NEEDS ANALYSIS: MAIN RESULTS FROM THE INTERVIEWS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Organisation	Evropská rozvojová agentura, s.r.o.
Output	IO1
Title	TICTAC Guide
Activity	Needs Analysis
Research tool	Interview (Qualitative Questionnaire)
No. of valid questionnaires received	10 questionnaires
Profile of the institutions	10 public administrations
Area covered by the research	Czech Republic
Date of execution	February – April 2020

1.	<i>Which is your level of knowledge of the EU programmes in general?</i>
<p>Based on the respondent's answers generally, the main difference in the level of knowledge of the EU programmes lies in which public sector body or administration the respondent comes from.</p> <p>In terms of knowledge of the EU programmes from the perspective of the Prague municipal district, the knowledge is only very superficial, limited to one or two Czech operational programmes. Moreover, the international subsidy programs are hardly known to city officials. Regarding specific subsidy areas, municipal district officials often know (are aware of) environmental subsidies.</p> <p>However, if there is someone in the municipal district who deals with subsidy programs and subsidies in general (which is definitely not always in the Czech environment), then they have some awareness of specific subsidy possibilities.</p> <p>In general, municipal district officials do not know where the extra money, above the set budget, could be obtained. Nevertheless, if they identify a new problem that they would like to solve with the help of EU grants, they do not know what options are available to them.</p> <p>From the perspective of Czech ministries, the knowledge of subsidy EU programmes of ministry officials varies. Mainly because of the fact that in some cases a specific ministry is the only eligible applicant or sometimes the ministry can be the managing authority of the subsidy programme. Czech operational programmes can be an example. This means that if the ministry is a central body, some of its sections are familiar with grant issues (this is their scope of work). However, this is often only a very narrow focus.</p>	

2. *What level of intensity have you experienced in obtaining EU funding in your city/region over the last decade? Which is your concrete experience?*

In connection with the intensity of drawing EU funds, most respondents mention that the intensity of the use of EU subsidies does not change much, it is still very low. If we look at the level of drawing on individual calls within the Czech operational programs, drawing is not growing much; the respondents also confirm this.

In general, it can be said that the mood in municipalities is often directed against EU subsidies. The problem is often that it is not certain in advance whether the project will work or not, external agencies are expensive, municipalities do not have officials trained in grant issues. Respondents also mentioned that if the EU subsidies are used, this is usually not a conceptual matter

There are not many individuals who understand the subsidy EU programmes including writing a project application and then managing the project, and can somehow correctly evaluate the options, so political decision-makers are often sceptical about gaining EU subsidies.

Respondents agree that in order to increase the intensity of the use of EU subsidies, it would certainly help to train officials in subsidy issues so that they can work with this type of information at least a little (it plays a big role, especially in local governments). Unfortunately, this is partly hampered by the existence of table salaries. If officials become experts on the subject, they often leave for the private sector.

In this context, Prague's municipal districts are partially disadvantaged, as they do not have, like municipalities with extended powers, local action groups that are a supporting apparatus of cities. The main aim of these groups is to provide information, train officials of the cities. Sometimes they are also involved in the writing of the project within EU funded programmes.

3. *How do you get involved in EU projects and who usually manage these projects (clerks or external consultants)?*

Even in the case of involvement in EU projects, the type of public entity is very important. As it was mentioned before in the case of Czech ministries, they are usually involved in projects that are more extensive often determined for the specific ministry. The ministries also have the capacity and financial sources for the establishment of the project office within the ministry. The officials of the project office are therefore responsible for searching for funding opportunities, writing of the project applications, applying for the grants, getting involved in projects, managing the successfully approved projects. Furthermore, sometimes it also happens that different types of organizations established by the ministry are involved in EU funded projects (for example, contributory organizations).

On the other hand, in case of Czech municipal districts, especially small municipal districts do not have the capacity to set up EU funds departments, for example; therefore, they have to manage the whole process for themselves. It can, therefore, be said that if public entities do not have a support apparatus, then EU subsidies are not much used except for things that are mandatory or, for example, public schools established by the municipal district that seeks subsidy opportunities by themselves and then the obtained funds pass through the municipal districts.

However, some municipal districts are repeatedly getting involved in various EU funded projects with the help of an external agency focused on EU funding programmes. Awareness and previous experience for some selected works very well. An important factor for involvement in EU projects in the case of municipal districts is the will of decision-makers, elected political leaders. This is often influenced by insufficient motivation, Euroscepticism, or the focus of a political party.

Municipalities with extended powers are often involved in projects with the help of the already mentioned local action groups.

4. How important is for your city/region to receive EU funding?

An interesting fact is that almost all respondents mention the importance of drawing funds from EU subsidy programs, especially in the field of investment, even though they are not actively involved in projects. The importance of EU funds is emphasized mainly by kindergartens and primary schools, which are currently struggling with a growing number of children with special educational needs and a different mother tongue.

5. To what extent do you consider significant the impact of the EU funds managed in the development of your city/region?

All respondents consider the impact of the EU funds to be a major one in the development of the city since the funds are a crucial financial source, which brings development on various sectors of society not just in Prague but also in the whole country. EU funds help not only in the field of investment (renovation of old buildings, brownfields, square renovations, construction of new buildings, construction of cycle paths, etc.) but also in the field of education, health, community development. Moreover, EU projects help to promote EU visions, values, importance for European citizens.

6. Which are the main obstacles (if any) for the participation of your institution in EU funded projects?

The main obstacles identified by the respondents are:

- Political throughput
- Ignorance of subsidy issues, programmes, rules, project management
- Fears of failure and occurred problems
- Financial sources for hiring external agencies
- The complexity of the whole process – submission, reporting of the projects
- Bureaucracy connected with the EU funds
- Insufficient staff capacity
- Language barriers
- Sufficient funding, no need for additional funding
- Constant control by managing authorities

7. Which are the preferred areas or fields of activity that your institution would like to explore through EU funding opportunities in the near future?

In the near future, the preferred areas that most of the respondents would like to explore through EU funding opportunities are digitalization, adult education, sustainable tourism, transportation, research and innovation, environment, health, youth.

Some of the respondents would also like to be involved in some international projects and cooperation supporting the community development, integration of vulnerable groups, exchange of experience, creation of international partnership.



8. Which information would you like to receive from each EU funding opportunity? Do you prefer to receive information about the funding opportunities generally speaking or practical information about how to get involved and how to write a project proposal?

All respondents have mentioned the importance of providing both general theoretical information as well as the importance of practical information regarding the EU funding opportunities. However, it should be mentioned that there is Euroscepticism in the Czech Republic, the contribution of the EU is not emphasized, people often view EU subsidies very strangely or negatively, and therefore it is primarily necessary to support general education about the EU funds. Respondents emphasize that looking for good practice examples could appeal to them. The bureaucracy associated with EU funds is very discouraging to public sector representatives, so they would welcome clear and simple basic information on EU funds, with which they could then continue to work. Moreover, receiver information regarding the new European programmes 2021-2027 would be very helpful for the respondents.

9. Do you think it would be helpful for your daily work to have a Guide dealing with how to manage these opportunities? If yes, which format would you prefer?

For most interviewees, the idea of having a Guide sounds very helpful and useful in order to apply for EU funds and manage them. Its format is intended to be online, is much more transmissible.