

EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS AIMED TO THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF THE DISADVANTAGED POPULATION LIVING IN HUNGARY

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Abstract

Hungary has recently taken significant steps to improve the social condition of people living in poverty, yet the social inclusion of the disadvantaged population is still on the agenda. Individuals, families and communities living in multiple disadvantaged, marginalized living conditions and suffering from segregation are mainly concentrated in the backward territorial areas of Hungary - to a greater extent in Southern Transdanubia and North-Eastern Hungary. The consequences of the negative effects of lasting deprivation of goods and opportunities, which are inherited over generations, include falling behind, exclusion from life opportunities, both in terms of learning, employment and access to services.

The Research Center for Social Inclusion and Social Economy at the University of Pécs, in cooperation with the Human Exchange Human Resource Development and Consulting Foundation, has participated in several projects financed by the European Social Fund (ESF). The mentioned projects are aimed to promote the social conditions of disadvantaged people, increasing their chances and opportunities. In addition to the planning and development activities carried out within the framework of the projects, we also participated in the examination of the effectiveness of projects and programs aimed to the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups living in Hungary.

Evaluation research should be an important tool in measuring the effectiveness, success and efficiency of different programs and projects, since without them it is not possible to improve the programs; to enhance their efficiency and increase their sustainability.

Keywords: multiply disadvantaged population and territorial units, social inclusion, increasing opportunities, development initiatives, evaluation of European Union projects and programs.

Introduction

The Research Center for Social Inclusion and Social Economy at the University of Pécs Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, in cooperation with the well experienced Human Exchange Foundation and other national and international actors, has implemented several projects to help disadvantaged minorities enhance their opportunities and assert their interests. Disadvantaged minorities supported by recent projects include the severely deprived, marginalized, segregated long-

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term unemployed (Dózsa & Juhász, 2014), people with disabilities, people with reduced working capacity, families living in deep poverty (Dózsa & Juhász, 2020), children living in residential institutions (Molnár et al., 2020), young graduates, and members of international migrant groups (Juhász, 2019), as well as members of the Roma minority (Borda, Vojtek & Juhász, 2019). Past and current development programs for these target groups – including Human Resource Development Operative Programme (HRDOP, in Hungarian: HEFOP), Social Renewal Operational Programme (SROP, in Hungarian: TÁMOP) and the new Human Resource Development Operative Programme (new HRDOP, in Hungarian: EFOP) – as well as the projects implemented within their framework have been and continue to be financed mainly with resources from the European Social Fund (ESF).

Meeting the differentiated development needs and necessities of the target groups of the projects which reflect the domestic and international processes, issues and problems of social inclusion, requires the planning and implementation of complex interventions in partnership. In the course of planning and implementation of our joint interventions with our partners, we placed special emphasis on examining the effectiveness, success and efficiency of past and present ESF-funded programs (HRDOP, SROP and new HRDOP) and projects in order to improve the interventions and ensure their sustainability. In order to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and effectiveness of the programs and projects, we conducted evaluative research within the framework of the programs and projects. We also consider the development and strengthening of social economy in Hungary to be an important aspect, which can provide an appropriate framework and conditionality for the implementation of programs and projects representing the goals and activities of social inclusion and opportunity creation. Social economy can ensure the elimination and more efficient management of the problems, errors and shortcomings discovered during the projects and programs by fulfilling social-economic-environmental sustainability.

In the next section we discuss issues related to examining the effectiveness of so-called ESF-type programs, which aim the social inclusion of the disadvantaged population living in Hungary, through the example of a specific research.

The examination and evaluation of so-called ESF-type (financed by European Social Fund) programs for social inclusion

Objectives, tools and main issues of the research

Hungary became a member state of the European Union in 2004. Prior to that, during the accession phase from the early 1990s, the resources of the pre-accession instruments (SAPARD, PHARE, ISPA) provided EU support to various sectors, areas of activity and development initiatives. After gaining full member status Hungary has received subsidies from the European Union's Structural and Cohesion Funds, which have made a significant contribution to the country's development and catching up to the level of the EU in the recent period. (Juhász, 2013)

Reports on the effectiveness, success and efficiency of the use of EU funds within the country and in the framework of programs and projects have revealed

different findings. In our opinion, factual, duly substantiated and quantifiable results and impacts would be ensured if the interventions were examined in accordance with the above-mentioned expectations and criteria for each project.

The members of our research center were therefore particularly pleased with the task they were offered to evaluate the projects promoting social inclusion and equal opportunities funded by the European Social Fund. These projects were launched in the framework of the Social Renewal Operational Programme, related to the so-called ESF-type programs aimed to increase the opportunities for disadvantaged target groups. The main objective of our research was to analyze the database of the Unified Monitoring Information System (UMIS, in Hungarian: EMIR) – which includes data and information about social inclusion projects implemented from SROP as an ESF-type program, financed by the European Social Fund, aiming to increase the opportunities of disadvantaged target groups – and also collect and process further data to contribute to the generation of new results and reflect on the conclusions that can be drawn from them. In addition to the UMIS data analysis, we also conducted a questionnaire survey in order to determine the correctness of the conclusions that can be drawn from the data stored in EMIR. During the analysis of the database of the Unified Monitoring Information System containing the data of the European Union grants arriving in Hungary, our research focus was on those tender projects implemented within the framework of SROP, which were launched to enhance the life situation and opportunities of the multiply disadvantaged population. More than 8,000 tender projects were included in the analysis, representing a total cost of more than HUF 420 billion to be spent on the aforementioned disadvantaged target groups, involving more than 1,500 settlements or parts of settlements. (Antalóczy et al., 2014)

Furthermore, in the framework of our research, we intended to explore the information channels through which the multiply disadvantaged target groups could be notified about the funding opportunities created within the programs, and we also asked the representatives of the target groups about their experiences with development programs. Beside the questionnaire, our empirical research aimed at discovering information channels also included personal interviews conducted with experts in the field - project managers, expert leaders. During the interviews we intended to gather the opinion of experts on the effectiveness, success and efficiency of the projects planned and implemented in order to help the integration of disadvantaged groups, based on their personal experiences.

The main questions of our research, in accordance with the previously mentioned goals and tasks, included the following: From what sources did the members of the target groups get information about the calls for proposals announced under the programs? With which organizations did the members of each target group cooperate in the framework of the projects during their activities? To what extent were the target groups able to get involved in the project activities? What were the projects implemented in the living environment of the target groups which had significant results and impacts? What critical remarks and suggestions are made by the members of the target groups involved in the developments regarding the programs and the implemented projects?

Summary of research results

The following main conclusions can be drawn from the examination of the programs and projects aimed at social inclusion and enhanced opportunities of the multiply disadvantaged target groups living in Hungary.

Most of the programs and projects aimed at social inclusion and opportunity creation are implemented in Hungary without conducting evaluation research and examinations, which makes it significantly more difficult to measure the effectiveness, success and efficiency of development interventions.

In addition to the analysis of the database of the Unified Monitoring Information System containing the data of the European Union grants Hungary has received, examinations carried out after the implementation of the projects must also include additional examination tools and methodological elements to reach a reliable result.

Compared to the previously used planning method, “bottom-up” approach is less frequently taken into account in Hungary during the planning and preparation of tenders. Thus, the calls for proposals announced within the framework of SROP are in many cases not in accordance with the actual development needs and requirements, they include unfeasible and unrealistic expectations that are difficult to implement.

Successive programs and projects do not build on each other, experience is not defined due to the lack of evaluation research, so lessons cannot be incorporated into the planning and implementation of programs and projects in the next period.

Calls for proposals announced in one cycle and the schedule of project implementation do not contribute to the sustainability of the results achieved by previous projects.

Although certain social consultations are carried out prior to the calls for proposals aimed at social inclusion, integration and opportunity creation, they do not facilitate the correction of planning and preparation errors and the involvement of the relevant target groups.

Getting access to and interpreting the calls for proposals is practically an insurmountable challenge for the members of the multiply disadvantaged target groups identified by the programs, therefore they do not have proper motivation to deal with them, participate and get involved. Consequently, the beneficiaries of the programs or projects must ask for the assistance of experts specialized in these activities in order to monitor the calls for proposals, to write the proposals and to manage the projects professionally and financially. Members of disadvantaged target groups typically participate merely in the implementation phase of individual projects, in many cases their role is only passive even then.

In order to help members of disadvantaged target groups directly reach and properly interpret calls for proposals, more accurate and intensive information is required on call opportunities and their implementation, and special training is also needed. Separate trainings should be organized on topics related to the independent

preparation of applications by the members of the target group and the implementation of projects.

Community organizing and community development interventions that establish the involvement, as well as the active, efficient and successful participation of disadvantaged target groups in certain development initiatives, are conducted only partially and take place with relatively low efficiency.

To participate effectively and successfully, it is necessary to provide better infrastructural conditions, in addition to the community organizing elements organizational development interventions must also be implemented. This also applies to the partnership building related to each application.

In addition to enhancing the involvement and participation of disadvantaged target groups in all phases of development initiatives, efforts must be made to achieve that well-functioning projects can be maintained in the long run, since without that even forward-looking initiatives can become counterproductive.

The most important source of project-related information is definitely the Internet. The majority of the respondents receive information about news on projects and tender opportunities from various websites.

The beneficiary representing the target group, usually tries to implement the projects in cooperation with the municipality and local NGOs. Due to the lack of information and motivation and the unpreparedness of the projects (lack of community organizing) the members of the disadvantaged target groups affected by the developments are usually difficult to involve in the implementation of individual projects, they play a partial role compared to what is needed.

To determine the efficiency of resource allocation more precisely and to identify development needs, it would be expedient to establish an information network that would enable targeted data collection.

Within the framework of programs and projects, project elements measuring the effectiveness, success and efficiency of each development initiative (evaluation research) should be introduced as a general requirement.

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A MAGYARORSZÁGON ÉLŐ HÁTRÁNYOS HELYZETŰ NÉPESSÉG TÁRSADALMI FELZÁRKÓZÁSÁNAK ELŐSEGÍTÉSÉRE IRÁNYULÓ PROJEKTEK ÉS PROGRAMOK HATÉKONYSÁGÁNAK VIZSGÁLATA

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Magyarország az elmúlt időszakban jelentős lépéseket tett a szegénységben élők, köztük a roma népesség társadalmi helyzetének javítása érdekében, ennek ellenére mind a mai napig napirenden szerepel a hátrányos helyzetű népesség társadalmi felzárkóztatása. A halmozottan hátrányos helyzetű, marginalizált életkörülmények között élő, szegregáció által sújtott egyének, családok és közösségek elsősorban Magyarország elmaradott térségi-területi egységeiben – nagyobb mértékben a Dél-Dunántúlon és Észak-kelet Magyarországon – koncentrálnak. A javaktól, esélyektől és lehetőségektől való tartós megfosztottság generációkon keresztül öröklődő negatív hatásainak következményei közé tartozik a leszakadás, az életlehetőségekből való kiszorulás mind a tanulás, mind a foglalkoztatás, mind a szolgáltatók igénybevétele terén.

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felzárkózásának elősegítésére, esélyeik, lehetőségeik növelésére irányultak. A pályázati projektek keretében megvalósult tervezési és fejlesztési tevékenységek mellett részt vettünk a Magyarországon élő, hátrányos helyzetű csoportok társadalmi felzárkózására irányuló projektek és programok hatékonyságának vizsgálatában is.

Kulcsszavak: halmozottan hátrányos helyzetű népesség és térségi-területi egységek, társadalmi felzárkózás, esélyek és lehetőségek növelése, fejlesztési kezdeményezések, európai uniós pályázati projektek és programok értékelése