



ASSESSMENT OF PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION SERVICES TARGETING YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS IN ROMANIA

REPORT

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Executive Summary

The evaluation “Assessment of professional integration services targeting young people living with HIV/AIDS in Romania” is an intermediate evaluation of the results of the social and professional integration programs for people living with HIV/AIDS², especially young people, implemented during Phase I (July 2007 – June 2009). The projects, developed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in 11 counties¹, are part of the HIV/AIDS Program, funded by the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Round 6, through the Romanian Angel Appeal Foundation (RAA). The field research took place between 14 June and 09 July 2009 and included focus-group interviews with the direct beneficiaries of the professional integration programs (young people living with HIV/AIDS), as well as the experts of the organizations that provide such services.

The assessment aimed the following types of services provided to the young people living with HIV/AIDS by non-governmental organizations:

- 1) vocational guidance and occupational counseling services;
- 2) vocational training courses (skills development or vocational training courses);
- 3) internships with employers, following completion of the vocational training courses;
- 4) integration of the HIV+ persons in protected workshops and units;
- 5) supplying information to employers concerning the right to work of the HIV+ persons;
- 6) occupational therapy services;
- 7) training for the psychosocial experts in the area of vocational counseling for the young people living with HIV/AIDS;
- 8) ensuring the operation of protected housing for the young people living with HIV/AIDS.

The research was based on a qualitative **methodology** and used an assessment matrix which was focused on two distinct standpoints regarding the results of the social and vocational integration interventions: of the sub-recipients³ and of the direct beneficiaries. Each type of service was assessed based on five criteria: **relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability**.

1. **The relevance** refers to a set of aspects which may occur prior to the implementation of the project or are in connection with its outcome, not only for the direct beneficiaries, but also for the indirect ones⁴. Assessed *from the standpoint of the sub-recipients and the beneficiaries*, the relevance refers to the justification of the project taking into account the local background and in agreement with the current legal provisions concerning the facilitation of professional integration of persons with disabilities (a category which also includes the young people living with HIV/AIDS). Relevance also re-

¹Bucharest, Suceava, Bacău, Galați, Arad, Dâmbovița, Hunedoara, Timiș, Iași, Mureș, Constanța.

²The program is titled “Towards Universal Access to HIV/AIDS Prevention, Treatment, Care and Social Support for Vulnerable and Underserved Populations”.

³Organization that develops projects within Round 6 of financing from the GFATM.

⁴The beneficiaries’ families, the members of the community, the representatives of the local authorities.

fers to how adequate the services are for the needs and abilities of the beneficiaries. Thus, the following aspects were assessed from both standpoints (of the sub-recipients and of the beneficiaries): the selection of the beneficiaries, the necessary services identified, their adequacy to the local employment market structure, the reasons for the young people to participate, the perceived utility of these services.

Both the discussions with the beneficiaries and the interviews with the sub-recipients led to the conclusion that the implemented services were based on a set of principles and a linear, progressive logic, starting with the current services, the needs of the beneficiaries and the existing resources, so as to tend to maximum relevance, especially for the target group, but also for the indirect beneficiaries. The anticipated and the proved success of most of the implemented services give us cause to conclude that they were justified and adequate to the needs and abilities of the beneficiaries. However, there are still small exceptions – courses which were dropped out of, as the graduation rate was low (training courses for the driver's license). To increase the relevance of services such as the vocational training courses or the integration of the youth in protected workshops, it is necessary to carry out counseling activities for the parents or the guardians of these young people.

2. To analyze the **efficacy** *from the point of view of the sub-recipients*, the assessment focused on identifying the goals and targets set and on evaluating of the extent to which these have been accomplished. We also aimed to determine the efficacy of the services provided by assessing their quality.

The general goal, common to all sub-recipients in their applications, was to increase the professional integration opportunities for the HIV+ young people. In almost all cases, the targets were reached over 90% or even exceeded, which translates into a high level of efficacy. There have also been situations when the targets set in the project were not reached in the first year, and in such a situation they were reformulated. The selection of the targets may be substantiated through the system of indicators that the organizations have used to monitor their progress. The indicators have not been standardized in all situations; however, all sub-recipients have used a set of standard indicators, such as number of young people living with HIV/AIDS registered for vocational training courses, number of young people living with HIV/AIDS who have graduated from vocational training courses etc. Given the fact that the efficacy of the services may also be strongly influenced by the motivation level of each individual beneficiary, in such assessment situations, it is useful to also consider the individual positive results. In this respect, the sub-recipients have shown that there have been substantial differences between the individual beneficiaries' performances and, in many cases, such differences were generated by the motivation level.

As to the way in which the services are provided, the sub-recipients have stated that they used a system of appointments, but that, for certain activities, there is flexibility –the beneficiaries can access these services more often or more seldom than they have their appointments scheduled.

With respect to the quality of the services developed and supplied, the sub-recipients feel that the services they provide are largely adequate, and the likely flaws are moreover generated by the additional less-than-favorable conditions (reduced space, inappropriate infrastructure, insufficient equipment, etc.). The quality of the services provided is appreciated by all sub-recipients, and the services address most of the requirements. The appreciations are based in a balanced manner on the efforts the professionals are putting forth throughout their activities with the young people, as well as on the effects or their performance. However, the quality of some services does not depend on the sub-recipients – this is mainly the case of the courses organized by the AJOFM⁵ in which the young people are engaged.

⁵county employment agencies

Unlike the analysis of the efficacy from the standpoint of sub-recipients, *from the standpoint of the beneficiaries* the study aimed at assessing the progress achieved, how adequate the newly-acquired knowledge and skills were to the local market needs, and, to a lesser extent, the outcome of such progress in terms of employment or increase of such opportunities, as well as independent life skills acquisition.

The progress recorded is significant as compared to the previous level; however, there are quite a few situations where their current level is far from what they need to be able to compete with other young people on the labor market. Additionally, because of their social handicap (but also because of the physical illness), the young people living with HIV/AIDS believe that, in many situations, they should be a lot better at what they do than the other “competitors” if they are to be preferred during the selection and employment processes.

How appropriate the knowledge and the skills acquired are for the needs of the local market was not directly assessed by means of the “employment degree” indicator – that is, how many young people got a job following their participation in the various vocational training courses. A large part of the young people stated that they acquired the necessary skills to be able to get a job on the labor market, even when competing against other young people. However, there are at least three problems directly connected to the beneficiaries and which can endanger their integration opportunities: a) their reduced level of education; b) the diminished independent life skills of some of those young people; c) their health status, which can sometimes involve extended periods of hospitalization.

Following the discussions with both the sub-recipients, and the beneficiaries, one conclusion could be that the services developed by the sub-recipients have a high level of efficacy, both because of the success of such services and because of the beneficiaries’ results – the increase in their potential for social and professional integration. If one were to conduct a functional analysis, the efficacy of these programs is average on short term and high on medium and long-term, as the targets and objectives set have been reached in their quasi-totality.

3. No objective cost/efficacy assessment has been conducted to evaluate the **efficiency** *from the standpoint of the sub-recipients*, on the one hand because these services, by their nature, will bear effects after a longer time from the conclusion of activities, and, on the other hand, the sub-recipients do not make the cost calculation per each beneficiary. In exchange, there is information concerning the budgeted amount for each individual service and targets set to be reached, but the budgeted amounts do not always fully cover the services provided within the project.

The number of staff involved in these projects is kept at a minimum to satisfactory level in all cases, as it was not possible to allocate the adequate financial resources to hire additional professionals and auxiliary staff; thus the financial cost for the staff pay is significantly limited. But while the number of experts and auxiliary staff involved in the development of the services was limited, this does not apply to their qualification level, since staff with the adequate qualifications for each individual job has been hired.

Based on the specific elements of the implemented services, in terms of project funding, the emphasis was laid on staff pay (for the counseling, social work and support services provided), on the purchase of equipment and raw materials (for the protected workshops and units), as well as on the overhead/ maintenance expenses. In fact, since the available funding was much smaller than the actual needs, the sub-recipients had to allocate the financial resources in a very precise and balanced manner (from the very moment when

they designed their applications).

No budget corrections have been requested by submitting applications for additional sums, only adjustments to categories of expenses within the same budget were made. This proves that the services initially designed to be developed were relatively well budgeted, thus proving an increased efficiency.

Almost all sub-recipients made minor funding readjustments, as a consequence of the necessary/ unforeseen changes during the project implementation. Such minor readjustments were likely to increase the overall project efficiency.

It is difficult to analyze the efficiency of the projects implemented by the sub-recipients through *the filter of the beneficiaries' perception*, as they do not have enough information (financial details) regarding the projects and, in addition, they are likely to be biased, as direct beneficiaries. In this situation, the author monitored how the personal efficiency was perceived.

Most beneficiaries appreciated that the personal resources they invested (time, energy, money etc.) in participating in the activities or services developed by the sub-recipients were returned in their personal progress. There were also a few beneficiaries who felt they could have made better use of their personal time while developing other activities, but they were unable to say what other things they would have wanted or could have done.

The availability of co-funding for services was a relatively sensitive and surprising feature for some of the beneficiaries. Many of them had never been faced with such a problem and stated that they would not be willing to co-fund the services for various reasons – from lack of financial resources to their right to have such services provided to them free of charge.

Even if the efficiency per se is hard to assess, it can be stated that the projects developed by the sub-recipients have an adequate cost/benefit ratio.

4. The **impact** of the services provided may be perceived differently by the sub-recipients and the beneficiaries. The impact on the indirect beneficiaries – family, community, employers – is much more difficult to quantify and was not the object of this assessment. There are also a series of methodological and practical difficulties related to the impact assessment and analysis, which are aimed at isolating the effects of the indirect influences of some background, external factors. In other words, to what extent the positive or negative outcome is exclusively the result of the intervention or the result of some other distorting factors as well? To the extent to which it was possible, we tried to isolate the direct impact from the various distorting, unintentional influences.

Impact from the point of view of the sub-recipients

The progress of the beneficiaries can be measured both through the outcomes (participation/course graduation, employment etc. – which are strongly connected to the efficacy of the implemented actions), but mostly by comparing it to the initial situation, their attitude towards employment and independent life. Increasing the degree of independence for the beneficiaries did not aim, in all cases, to immediate independence, but rather to the long-term one; in a few years from now, part of the beneficiaries will be able to get a job and keep it, live alone and start a family. It may also be the case of limited independence for some of the beneficiaries, i.e. they could be better integrated in a protected workshop rather than on the free labor market.

In this context it is useful to assess to what extent the services developed by the sub-recipients create dependency or independence for the beneficiaries. In this respect, a manifest but momentary dependency may occur, specific for the training and learning period, as well as for the adjustment to the idea of work and even employment. Currently, this dependency may prove useful, as it ensures, to a certain extent, a continuity in participation, based on which the beneficiaries may acquire the knowledge and abilities which can make them become independent in the nearest future. Subsequently, this form of dependency will very likely turn into some independent life abilities in the case of most of the HIV+ young people.

Most sub-recipients appreciated that both the short term and the medium and long term impact on the beneficiaries was “Very good” and “Good”, none of the sub-recipients stated that the impact was “Satisfactory” or even “Unsatisfactory.”

With respect to the unplanned impact/secondary effects, the sub-recipients reported only a few aspects circumscribed to the category of external factors (both positive and negative), without any important consequences on a larger group of beneficiaries, the entire project or the indirect beneficiaries. Both positive secondary effects and negative secondary effects were reported, most of them at individual level. The positive secondary effects include the ones related to the beneficiaries’ families, the increase in the participation frequency, beyond the pre-determined schedule, the self-mobilization of the young people to continue or graduate school. The negative secondary effects which have been mentioned were few and referred especially to the actions and behaviors of some of the beneficiaries who could not adjust to the working schedule or the existing rules. No “diversions” of the services provided to the direct beneficiaries to third persons have been identified (members of their families etc.).

Impact from the point of view of the beneficiaries

The personal outcome, as identified by the beneficiaries, relates in the first place to having acquired knowledge and skills sufficiently relevant and adequate to enable them to find a job and live an independent life. For a small part of them, the outcome took a more specific shape as they managed to find a job which they succeeded in keeping and even to rent an apartment and live independently. Part of the beneficiaries, following the courses and the counseling for independent life, resumed formal education programs, either in special schools or within the program “*A doua șansă*” (Second chance). Some of the HIV+ young people were hired within the protected workshops, others – not so many – have worked for various employers, whereas a significant part of them have looked or are still looking for a job.

Another aspect that the impact assessment focused on was the extent to which, following participation in the activities for professional integration, the young people living with HIV/AIDS can perceive that their degree of independence has increased or decreased (dependency is on the increase). Almost without exception, the young people stated that following their participation in courses, workshops and counseling, their degree of independence had increased.

Another unplanned impact was the loss of motivation in looking for a job in the area for which they qualified. It may be the result of the fact that the counseling and vocational guidance services have not been adjusted to each individual beneficiary. In the case of most of the beneficiaries there is, however, a discrepancy between the employment opportunities on the local labor market and their aspiration related to the ideal job.

The main individual problems the beneficiaries had to deal with were related to finding a job locally. Other difficulties were generated by the novelty of activities, the need to put into practice specific skills and knowledge whose acquisition, and moreover, assimilation, require a longer period of time. The young people living with HIV/AIDS expect marginalization – latent or manifest – from those around (especially employers). That is the reason why those young people would rather not disclose their diagnostic to the employers or the course organizers.

5. Sustainability. Most sub-recipients stated that, following the conclusion of the GFATM Program Round 6, the sustainability of the professional integration programs would be ensured out of other funding sources, at least for the following 2-4 years (international or national donors, ESF-type programs) or with the support of the local authorities.

Some organizations, especially in smaller towns, located in underprivileged areas, depend on funding from the GFATM Round 6. In these circumstances those organizations might have a problem with sustainability of the services.

Even though the GFATM Round 6 funding was, throughout 2007 – 2009, the main source of funding for the evaluated projects, most of the organizations stated they had filed funding applications for European Social Fund or with other international and national funding agencies.

Other financial support strategies included the certification and development of protected workshops and the development of a protected unit (an economic operator), so that, based on the orders received, resources could be provided for the implementation of social-professional integration projects devoted to the HIV+ persons.

The sustainability of the services provided is perceived by the beneficiaries rather vaguely. A large part of them, since they are old beneficiaries of the services provided by these organizations, are not aware of the fact that there is a real, and not just potential, risk that the services they receive might be discontinued. In connection with the strengthening of the outcomes, the beneficiaries who took part in professional integration activities stated that the acquired skills and abilities could be further developed if they could get hired or participate in other trainings as well.

One important element the beneficiaries mentioned in terms of ensuring sustainability was related to confidentiality. The Romanian society still discriminates and marginalizes the HIV+ persons, and, in this situation, keeping the diagnostic confidential to the community, training suppliers and employers is the best way these social-professional integration interventions can refrain from causing harm by way of stigmatization and marginalization of the beneficiaries. Confidentiality in accessing these services is an important prerequisite for the motivation and social-professional integration of the young people living with HIV/AIDS.

Conclusions

The professional and occupational counseling services have a large relevance and a high level of efficacy, which stimulate, in particular, the motivation of the young people to enlist and actively participate in the activities of the organization. In the case of the sub-recipients which also conducted counseling sessions for parents, the *efficacy* of the activities and results were better. The conclusions drawn by some sub-recipients

concerning the need and utility to provide counseling services for the parents of the HIV+ young people, as well, prompts us to recommend support in development of such activities.

Almost without exception, the young people stated that following their participation in the training courses, workshops and counseling sessions, their level of independence increased. Additionally, the young people emphasized that taking part in the counseling as well as in the vocational courses made them aware that it is much more difficult to get a job or to earn a good living without an education, which motivated most of them to continue or to resume the formal education process once again.

Reaching the targets to almost 90-100% in the area of counseling by all sub-recipients shows both efficacy and efficiency increase, and interest from the beneficiaries. While some of the services implemented by the sub-recipients depend on the local economic and social background and on the relationship with the local authorities, the counseling services are less sensitive to such aspects and this is the reason why that their sustainability and its generated effects are less at risk.

Out of the 898 young people who received professional integration counseling during July 2007 – June 2009, 54 got a job. During the interviews, other young people, who are not yet employed, stated that they want to get a job and live an independent life.

The vocational workshops and vocational training courses organized by the sub-recipients or by the authorized suppliers saw significant success with the young people. The success of this type of activities has also been ensured through the selection process of the beneficiaries for training courses, not only based on their preferences but also based on their level of education and current skills. Overall, the courses proved to be effective, especially the courses organized by the sub-recipients within protected workshops, as compared with those by the authorized suppliers (AJOFM). A series of activities and courses proved to be extremely attractive, especially those implemented in the “Arts and creation” workshops (painting, decorating, wick-erwork, decoration candles etc.). The efficiency of these services is hard to estimate. In the case of the courses implemented by the vocational training suppliers (i.e. AJOFM), these have been paid by the organization as the participation fee is not expensive. In the case of the courses organized by the sub-recipients within the protected workshops, it is hard to say if these have proved efficient as the expenses related to the investment in equipment and consumables were high within the general budget for the projects, and the effects/ benefits cannot be seen on short term. The impact of these courses will also be seen in the long term. The sustainability of these services could be affected, especially in the case of the vocational training courses supplied by the sub-recipients, as they are very costly. However, given that all sub-recipients have made the necessary investments in equipment, the sustainability is endangered especially in the case of the workshops, which require costly raw materials. The sustainability of those services is also affected by the fact that the sub-recipients cannot issue certificates of attendance and qualification to the young people in relation with the profession for which they were trained.

The internships with the employers were mainly aimed at training the young people to get a job on the open labor market. Even if the relevance of this service is evident, other assessment elements (efficacy, efficiency and impact) could not be analyzed more in depth since, on the one hand, the necessary information is not consistent, and, on the other hand, the service is quite recent and insufficiently developed to assess the effects it generated. Throughout debates on this topic with the experts, they pointed out that they were convinced not only about how useful this service was, but also that the impact could be seen in the medium and long term, which was an opinion shared by the interviewed beneficiaries, as well.

Employing the young people living with HIV/AIDS in protected workshops and establishments – is a service implemented by the “Alături de Voi” Foundation and “Speranta” Association, which supply the young people with work environment extremely close to the one on the open market, with clear obligations and responsibilities, as well as with the appropriate compensations (especially financial incentives). Thus, the young people have an opportunity to work and integrate effectively on the labor market. There is a series of obstacles in the way of their speedy and full integration, which are generated both by the development in time⁶ of a very close relationship between the young people and the staff of these organizations, and, consequently, by the more difficult understanding of their new role and responsibilities as employees (unlike what happened during the previous “stage” when they were just beneficiaries). The services developed and supplied by Util Deco (ADV) have a very high degree of relevance, both from the point of view of the beneficiaries, and of the sub-recipients. The efficacy of the project is very high, as the objective of the project has been reached – 15 young people who were integrated in the protected unit, out of a total of 117 beneficiaries who were trained within the workshops developed by the “Alături de Voi” Foundation in 3 counties: Iași, Mureș and Constanța. One measure of efficacy is given by the ability to get a return on investment in a relatively short time. The impact of the developed services is direct for the beneficiaries and indirect for their families and the local community. The services responded extremely well to the current needs of the beneficiaries, however, the real impact can be seen primarily in the medium and long term under the form of a good social and professional integration of the young people living with HIV/AIDS. The sustainability of the project is ensured by the very fact that Util Deco is a protected business establishment. In addition, the ADV team continued to supply funding for the projects through other sources of funding and the partnership with the Local Public Administration.

Protected housing. Although the HIV+ young people who live in protected housing are few (most of them live with their original families), the relevance of these services for the target group is extremely high. Individual housing or housing in smaller groups using these apartments provides the young people with the possibility to see and understand to a greater extent what an independent life means – responsibilities and advantages (self-management, freedom etc.). When assessing the efficacy and the impact of this service, a good integration of the beneficiaries was observed, as well as a high awareness of the importance of an independent life and of the responsibilities towards themselves and the others around. There is also the risk to create dependency in connection with this type of services. Such a situation is not necessarily the outcome of less efficient services but of some individual-personal circumstances of the beneficiaries (health status, intellectual level, education level, expectations etc.). The sustainability of these services is ensured not only through projects which ensure the continuous funding, but also through the contribution of the young people for the maintenance of the household.

Training the experts. The purpose of the experts’ participation in the training sessions was, among other things, that the staff working with the HIV+ young people should acquire the adequate knowledge and abilities to be able to provide quality vocational counseling and professional integration services for the young people. It is hard to estimate to what extent they were effective and efficient, what their direct impact was on the staff and on the beneficiaries. It is certain that the experts feel the need for continuous training and, in the context of the projects implemented by the sub-recipients, these activities will not use very many resources and will not have secondary negative effects.

⁶Beyond a more or less impersonal/ formal relationship between supplier and customer.

Recommendations

Two sets of recommendations were developed as a result of this assessment:

Recommendations from sub-recipients:

- Support the creation of more protected establishments, since some of the young people may have a better employment integration rate in such establishments and are more motivated and feel more protected.
- There is need for both individual and group sessions counseling for professional and occupational integration for the beneficiaries. Counseling activities with the parents are also needed in order to help them become aware of how important the professional guidance and independent life skills services provided to their children are. In many cases, the parents were reticent towards the professional integration and independent life skills services provided to their children.
- Inform the employers concerning their rights and obligations, as well as the rights and obligations of the people living with HIV/AIDS.
- Set the goals for the professional integration of the HIV+ young people in accordance with the local/ regional specific elements concerning the access to the labor market, the education and the social services, as well as the access to resources etc.

Recommendations from the evaluator

- Identify common models of support, taking into account the suggestions/recommendations made by the sub-recipients. Even if the topic of the HIV+ young people's integration is a general one, there are particular aspects in connection with the local contingencies, which the sub-recipients know best.
- Identify a common point between the aspirations of the young people and the social and economic realities of those crafts or professions pursued, taking into account the current crisis of the labor market, whose effects will be experienced more acutely in the following 3-4 years to come.
- Develop a strategy targeting both employers and local authorities (lobby and partnerships), family (support/counseling for parents) and the local community (minimize discrimination and marginalization of the HIV+ young people).
- The protected units and workshops are a transit solution and not a permanent one. Even so, the increase in the number of such establishments would allow for a much easier professional integration for these people, so that, subsequently, their shift to the real labor market can occur in a more streamlined and natural manner.
- Decrease the hyper-protective measures, to increase the young people's opportunities to lead an independent life.
- Identify possibilities to certify the sub-recipients as training suppliers in order to be able to provide the young people living with HIV/AIDS with diplomas/vocational training certificates. In many cases, the AJOFM cannot organize the requested training sessions, since the minimum number of participants cannot be reached, which largely hinders the social-professional integration process.
- Enlarge the number of internship opportunities for the young people, which proved extremely useful.
- Empower the young people who live in protected houses to participate in the maintenance of the household and the joint household expenses. Also, stimulate and support the people who have reached 18 years of age to live alone and support themselves under a close coordination/supervision.

- Encourage the completion/continuation of the formal education, so that almost all the HIV+ young people could reach at least 8 years of formal education/vocational school.
- Increase the number of professionals at the level of the sub-recipients who provide social-professional integration services for the HIV+ young people.
- Take advantage of the potential benefits generated through the purchase of complex equipment for the workshops (bindery, candles, tailor's, IT etc.), which could stimulate not only the supply/strengthening of the financial sustainability, but also entry on the market with a slight edge over the competition.