



Summary Report

ESF Community of Practice on Results-based Management

1st meeting of the subgroup on 'Simplification'

7 October 2021, online event

The first meeting of the sub-group on 'Simplification' under the Community of Practices (CoP) on Results-based Management (RBM), was dedicated to setting up and starting the work of the subgroup, identifying priority topics and tasks around simplification and sharing the first set of simplification practices developed under ESF programmes.

The online event, organised by the Transnationality Team on behalf of the European Commission, brought together 38 representatives from Managing Authorities, National Coordination Bodies, Intermediate Bodies, Audit Authorities and ESF stakeholders from 20 Member States as well as officials from the European Commission - DG EMPL and DG REGIO.

Presentations and group discussions focussed on:

- Introducing the subgroup on Simplification.
- Presenting the outcomes of the preliminary mapping of simplification practices.
- Sharing experiences on the design and use of simplification measures.
- Identifying priorities and tasks for the subgroup.
- Preparing the 3rd CoP plenary meeting.

The key conclusions on each session are:

State of play and future of simplification

- The chair of the CoP RBM introduced the theme of the subgroup, based on the experience of the High-Level Group on simplification, the ESF Transnational Network on simplification and the initiatives implemented by Belgium Flanders to enhance simplification in ESF.
- The key points addressed by the CoP's chair were:
 - Simplification and results are closely linked. Shifting the focus to results requires reducing administrative costs and burdens.
 - Simplification should be ensured for all ESF stakeholders, including final beneficiaries who actually implement the operations and achieve results.
 - An enhanced partnership between authorities (e.g. Managing Authorities and Audit Authorities, Intermediate Bodies, Line Ministries) and with stakeholders and final beneficiaries is a key precondition to realise simplification. The willingness to change mindset and the courage to simplify are also essential requisites for introducing simplification measures.
 - Exchange of knowledge and mutual learning processes at the national and transnational levels are highly recommended for empowering authorities and

stakeholders, in the view to enhance simplification in the design and implementation of ESF(+) programmes.

Point of view of the Commission on simplification

- The Commission carried out several systemic actions across years to promote and support simplification and enhance the impact of EU Policies.
- Simplified Cost Options proved to be a very effective simplification measure. Nevertheless, to fully enhance simplification in ESF(+) programmes several other tasks and measures should be considered.
- An overview of the (80) simplification measures in cohesion policy in the 2021-2027 programming period is available [here](#).
- Building on the experience of the ESF Transnational Network on Simplification, the CoP RBM would be a key forum for discussion around simplification in ESF(+).

Mapping of simplification practices

- In preparation for the launch of the subgroup on 'Simplification', CoP members had been invited to carry out a preliminary mapping of the simplification practices developed by ESF authorities in their Member States. In response to the task, a 52 simplification practices developed by 12 Member States have been mapped.
- Key outcomes of the preliminary mapping, presented in a [background note](#) circulated in preparation for the meeting, are:
 - *Administrative tasks covered* – out of the (8) administrative tasks which generate the highest administrative costs and burden, discussed at the 2nd plenary meeting of the CoP RBM, the most frequently covered by the practices are: verifications for reimbursement of beneficiaries (33% of the practices), selection of operations (24%), on the spot verifications (13%) and system for collecting, recording and storing data (9%).
 - *Specific actions (sub-tasks) covered* – the most frequent actions covered are: fully electronic processes (for selection of operations); risk-based sampling methodologies for payment claim checks; common checklists, More data links/interconnections with other national systems.
 - *Outcomes of the practices* – responses provided by the Member States indicate that the added value of the simplification practices included in the preliminary maps goes beyond the reduction of administrative costs and burden and includes several other positive outcomes, such as: enhanced coordination and collaboration between authorities and with stakeholders, reduced errors and risks, increased transparency, flexibility and focus on outcomes and results, equal treatment of beneficiaries and enhanced legal certainty.

Simplification in practice.

- Practical experiences on the adoption of simplification measures under ESF programmes were presented by:
 - *Malta* – a National Steering Committee on Simplification was set up with the main stakeholders of Cohesion Policy to ensure a common understanding and interpretation of the rules. The Committee works as a consultative body aiming to arrive at joint and informed decisions through regular, formal and informal, exchanges between its members. The Committee proved to be a very effective solution to enhance simplification, ensure a common approach across all authorities as well as to prevent corrections and avoid mistakes during implementation.
 - *Croatia* – a stratified simple random sampling approach was adopted for management verifications. The practice allowed to significantly reduce administrative costs and burden related to the verification of expenditures

reported by final beneficiaries. It is important to note that the Audit Authority was consulted throughout the process of designing and implementing the sampling approach.

- *Latvia* – several coordinated actions have been taken by Latvian authorities to simplify and optimise the selection of operations. All applications are submitted in Cohesion Policy Funds Management Information System. Seminars about project application selection process and filling the application form are held online. The evaluation process can be organised electronically. Individual online consultations are also possible. Documentation of the selection of operations is developed on a uniform basis.
- The presentations (available [here](#)) included lessons learned and recommendations on the use of simplification measures based on the experience of the three MSs.

Group discussion and peer review of simplification practices.

- Participants were divided into groups to peer-review the preliminary maps and select and most interesting simplification practices. The session also served to identify future priorities for the subgroup and the CoP RBM around the simplification theme. In particular, two questions were addressed by participants:
 - ***Selection of the most interesting practices:*** *looking at the consolidated map, please select the four most interesting practices and indicate the reasons why those practices should be further investigated, in the view to disseminate them to other Member States.*
 - ***Key tasks for the subgroup:*** *what concrete actions should be carried out by the subgroup and the CoP RBM to enhance simplification in ESF+ programmes?*
- Outcomes of group discussions were presented in plenary by group rapporteurs and addressed by the CoP chair, thematic expert and representatives of DG-EMPL in a panel discussion. A summary of the key points discussed during the session is presented [Annex 1](#).

Next steps

- The revised timeline for the next CoP and subgroup events was presented. It is available [here](#).
- Please note that the CoP Plenary Meeting III was moved to 9-10 December 2021 as the ESF Technical Working Group and ESF Committee will take place on 1-3 December 2021.

Annex 1 – Outcomes of group and panel discussions

1. Selection of the most interesting practices: *most interesting practices and reasons why those practices should be further investigated, in the view to disseminate them to other Member States.*

The outcomes of the preliminary selection carried out by the groups are presented in the table below.

Topics	Selected practices	Reasons for the selections
Management verifications and proportionate control	EE-2 and EE-5 LV-2, LV-9 and LV-10 HR-1 PL-2 and PL-3	Risk-based sampling would be very useful to reduce administrative costs and burdens related to management verifications and allow more efficient and effective on-the-spot checks. It would be interesting to understand how such approaches worked in practice.
Selection of operations	LV-1 PT-1 BG-1	A simpler, more efficient and transparent process of selection of operations would generate important advantages both for authorities and stakeholders.
Coordination at national level	MT-2 PT-1	Ensure a common understanding and interpretation of the rules to enhance legal certainty and prevent errors and inefficiencies. The involvement of authorities and stakeholders would be essential to ensure real simplification for all parties involved in designing and implementing Cohesion Policy programmes.
Digital procedures / IT systems	PT-1 and PT-2 EE-3 LV-1 FR- 7 and FR-9	Importance of an integrated System - data links/interconnections with other national systems (e.g. with national public procurement database).

2. Key tasks for the subgroup: concrete actions that should be carried out by the subgroup and the CoP RBM to enhance simplification in ESF+ programmes.

Clusters of actions and topics proposed by members of the subgroup on 'Simplification' are presented in the table below.

Actions/topics	Proposed priorities
Actions	Provide more in-depth information (case studies) on the simplification practices
	Set up working groups dedicated to specific topics (e.g. selection of operations, sampling/proportionate control)
	Organise workshop and peer review sessions to present and discuss the details of the most interesting practices
	Set up an online chat (open chat)(for example on Teams): in order to have the opportunity to ask questions (MS, COM, Experts)
	Collect more practices from the Member States (extend the mapping exercise)
Topics	Electronic based processes / Automatic controls (bots)
	Collaboration/communication with stakeholders and final beneficiaries
	Assessment on simplifying staff costs, abolishing timesheets
	Selection of operations and self-evaluation approaches
	How to further simplify management verifications