

# Development of Clearing Houses for Cohesion Policy reporting at national and regional level

## Final Report





# Sections

§ **Set-up of the study**

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# Set-up of the study

# Study scope and objectives (1)

## The Clearing House Recommendation

- The **main recommendation** in the Sectoral Reduction Plan for the Cohesion Policy area is to urge Member States and Regions to develop at their level a '**Clearing House**'; an '**information broker**' that links different databases to each other.
- **Data submitted by Beneficiaries is not stored centrally** but is distributed to the different national or regional databases. Against this background, the development and implementation of one common central database seems to be an obvious solution.
- A 'Clearing House' would simplify the business processes for the Beneficiaries and is less labour and cost intensive.
- Such a system requires a certain level of **interoperability** of the different databases, which is not only a technical matter, as it also requires a coordinated involvement of several types of expertise: legal, organisational, content and technology.
- A **well-thought and balanced governance model** is therefore essential for the implementation.
- Clearing houses do not store data centrally, but keep track of what information is stored where. It should enable interactive portals and ensure that all information will be submitted only once by Beneficiaries.

# Study scope and objectives (2)

## Scope

The scope of this study was to evaluate the feasibility – with specific reference to technical, legal and budgetary aspects – of creating 'Clearing Houses' in Member States, taking into account the work already done at Member State level for the 2007- 2013 period.

## Objectives

- a) Assess the **existence and the current degree of implementation in all 27 Member States of the concept of a 'Clearing House'** within the Cohesion Policy area for the 2007 - 2013 period.
- b) Assess the **feasibility of creating 'Clearing Houses' in all Member States**, taking into account existing systems and technical, legal and budgetary aspects.
- c) Identify **best practices** already present in Member States which can be exchanged at EU level for a better and simplified implementation of the 'Clearing House' concept.
- d) Define the **impact** of potential measures on Member States.
- e) Determine whether **measures should be adopted** only for the programmes of territorial cooperation or for all programmes in the Cohesion Policy area.

# Key findings

# Key Findings (1)

**The Clearing House concept is already in place in some EU Member States.**

**Most Member States have a centralised system / database and / or have centered their efforts mostly on intergovernmental interoperability.**

**However, not all Member States offer online portals towards Beneficiaries.**

**There are significant differences between Member States in the level of sophistication of these portals.**

**A focus on transactional self service for Beneficiaries is the main improvement area going forward.**

**The Administrative Burden for Beneficiaries remains at the same level as some years ago (€1.001 mio per annum).**

**According to the Commission's Communication of 22/10/2009, the Clearing House concept would contribute to reach the Administrative Burden reduction target with a reduction of -6%.**

**Similar experiences (such as the ALTINN system in Norway) have shown that the reduction could possibly be much higher (up to 30%).**

# Key Findings (2)

So-called 'sophisticated' portals allow Beneficiaries to use a full range of e-services such as uploading project information, consultation of personalised files, e-submission of forms, etc.

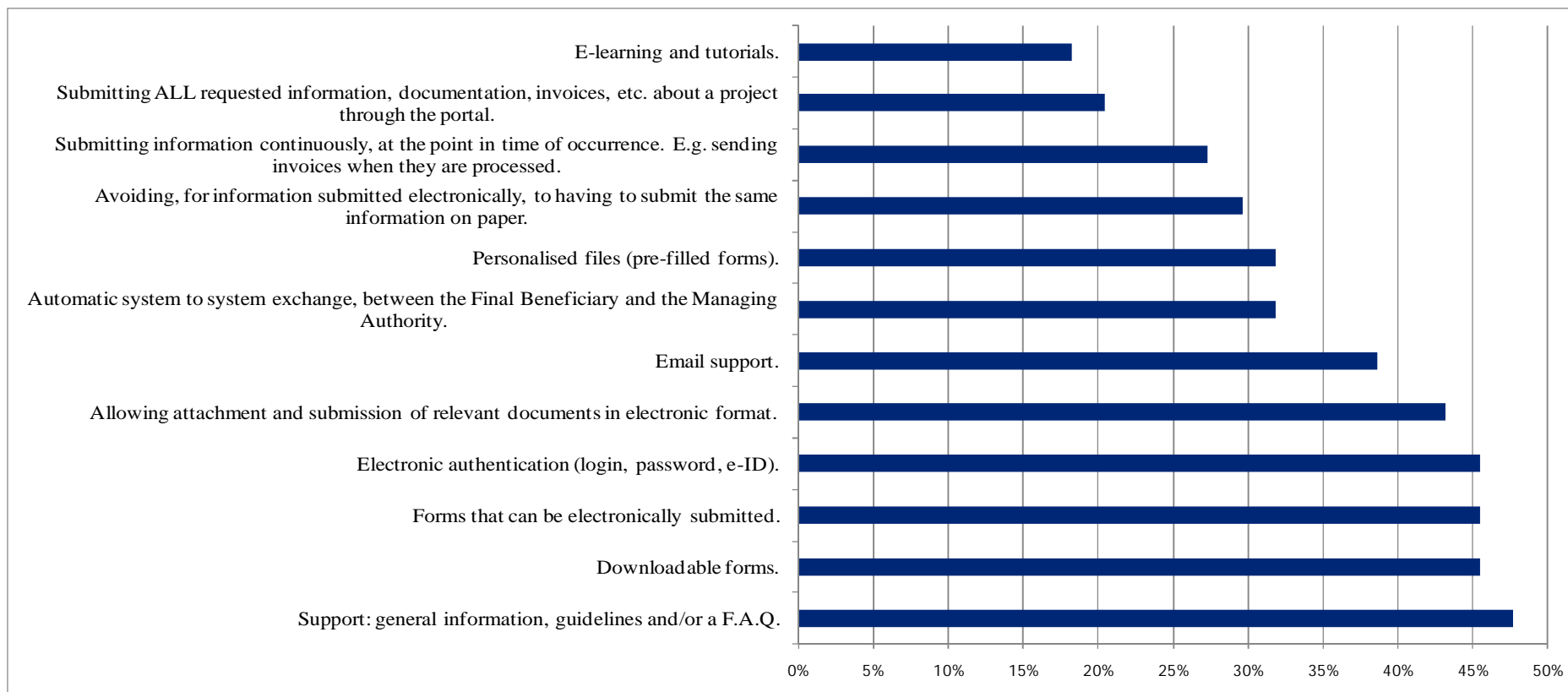
The framework of portal sophistication as shown here below depicts that portals could / should move towards higher levels of sophistication

Sophistication Scale of Portals for Use by Beneficiaries	
<b>Level 1</b>	Basic information provision provided to beneficiaries; passive website where information can be read.
<b>Level 2</b>	One-way interaction for beneficiaries to fill in information; downloadable forms on the website.
<b>Level 3</b>	Two-way interaction (Electronic forms that allow two way information exchange, meaning information can be uploaded into the system as well.)
<b>Level 4</b>	'Full' electronic case handling. (eg. Follow-up the status of your files yourself).
<b>Level 5</b>	Personalisation: pro-active and automatic handling (eg. pre-filled forms, deadlines, alarms,...)

Source: The User Challenge Benchmarking The Supply Of Online Public Services - European Commission  
Directorate General for Information Society and Media

# Key Findings (3)

- Overall, there are significant differences between Member States in the level of sophistication of portals.
- Several countries however, have placed Beneficiary self-service at the core of their efforts.
- The figure below provides more details on the adoption of various portal functionalities in the national / regional and cross border portals.



# Key Findings (4)

## Good practices regarding portals for Beneficiaries

- We have found good practices in a number of Member States ('new' and 'old' Member States; large and smaller Member States; for all objectives, ...).
- There is no indication of a 'bad example Member State' nor of any Member State that is unwilling or unable to implement these practices.

### **Functionalities offered by the portals in good practice Member States include:**

- The ability to submit all information through portals, and not having to send the same information on paper;
- Electronic forms that allow beneficiaries to upload information directly into the system;
- Personalised files (pre-filled forms) and individual communications;
- Automated workflows and processes that allow beneficiaries to follow-up the status of their records;
- An enhanced help desk and assistance, including the possibility to easily contact consultants that can give guidance on the projects or explain the legislation, a FAQ section, some e-learnings and tutorials, etc.;
- ...

# Key Findings (5)

## Administrative burden: margin of improvement

- If a portal with level 5 sophistication was set up in all Member States, this should lead to an administrative burden reduction of € 151 mio, i.e. of 15.1% of the current administrative burden, EU wide (taking into account that already a number of Member States already have a portal in place of some kind).
- For the calculation of this ‘future margin of improvement’ we have worked on a number of assumptions, as shown here below:

Information Obligations	Total Administrative Burden, EU wide	Estimation of the % of savings potential with the implementation of a portal, per level of sophistication				
		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
IO1: Interim payment request	€ 302,985,995	5.0%	10.0%	20.0%	25.0%	30.0%
IO2: Final payment request	€ 27,019,249	5.0%	10.0%	20.0%	25.0%	30.0%
IO3: Financial control on final beneficiaries by the Member States	€ 160,033,522	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%
IO4: Financial control on final beneficiaries by the Commission	€ 15,777,795	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%
IO5: Submitting information needed by management authorities to draft Annual Implementation/Final Report	€ 313,964,801	5.0%	10.0%	20.0%	25.0%	30.0%
IO6: Information and Publicity	€ 181,931,658	5.0%	10.0%	20.0%	25.0%	30.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>€ 1,001,713,020</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>17.4%</b>	<b>21.5%</b>	<b>25.6%</b>

# Key Findings (6)

The Clearing House recommendation is fully aligned with :

- the Europe 2020 Digital Agenda,
- the 2009 Malmö Declaration on a more intense use of eGovernment practices,
- and the e-Commission initiative, enabling enhanced efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of the European Commission.

Good practice portals are

- technically easy to implement,
- non-time consuming,
- and have a good return on investment.

Best ways identified to increase the set up and use of such portals are:

- Sharing best practices throughout all Member States;
- Establishing minimum principles in the Cohesion Policy Area through Regulation for the next programming period 2014+.

Possible difficulties in implementation at national level are:

- Legal issues;
- Political issues;
- Organisational issues.

However, the implementation of such advanced portal functionalities is not a dream, but can be done practically.

The way ahead

# The way ahead

## Main Potential Future Scenario

To help Member States and leaders of Territorial Cooperation Programmes to put in place the concept of a portal for Beneficiaries for the 2014 – and onwards – period (cfr. "Europe 2020 Digital Agenda")

Going forward, many countries can make progress to reduce administrative burdens for Beneficiaries by focusing their efforts in improving the ease and use of transactional self-service portals.

### Good practice sharing

+

### Regulation

Actively showcasing instances where beneficiaries can use a full range of e-services such as uploading project information, consultation of personalised files, e-submission of forms, workflows etc.  
à Possible forum is <http://www.epractice.eu/>

Working with Member States to establish minimum principles in the Cohesion Policy Area:

- "Let the data do the walking principle" : allowing beneficiaries to only submit information once.
- Minimum level of portal functionalities: e.g. Possibility to send all information electronically, and avoiding, for information submitted electronically, having to send the same information on paper.

**Deloitte.**