Table of Contents

1. Background ............................................................................................................................................ 2
  1.1 Most relevant articles .......................................................................................................................... 2
  1.2 Key differences with the 2007-2013 programming period ................................................................. 3

2 Guidance ..................................................................................................................................................... 3
  2.1 e-Cohesion implementation within the programming period ............................................................... 3
     2.1.1 Before the regulatory deadline ..................................................................................................... 3
     2.1.1.1 e-Cohesion during the monitoring committee meetings .......................................................... 4
     2.1.1.2 e-Cohesion during the annual review meetings ........................................................................ 5
     2.1.2 After the regulatory deadline ....................................................................................................... 6
     2.1.3 Repercussions for Member States where the electronic data exchange systems are not in place by the due date .......................................................................................................................... 7
  2.2 Commentary/analysis of the regulatory framework ............................................................................. 7
     2.2.1 Definitions ..................................................................................................................................... 7
     2.2.2 Data protection rules ..................................................................................................................... 8
     2.2.3 References .................................................................................................................................... 8
  2.3 Contact points ....................................................................................................................................... 8

Annex 1 Checklist for verifying information about the e-Cohesion implementation ......................... 9

This is a draft document based on the new ESIF Regulations published in OJ 347 of 20 December 2013 and on the most recent version of the relevant Commission draft implementing and delegated acts. It may still require review to reflect the content of these draft legal acts once they are adopted.
1. Background

One of the elements that aims to simplify and streamline the implementation of ERDF, CF and ESF programmes is **e-Cohesion**. This new initiative included in Article 122(3) of Regulation 1303/2013 (Common Provisions Regulation, CPR) concerns the **electronic exchange of information between beneficiaries and relevant bodies** involved in the implementation of cohesion policy during 2014-2020.

The concept of electronic exchange is intended to reduce the administrative burden for beneficiaries. In practice, e-Cohesion requires Member States to implement e-government services allowing beneficiaries of the Funds to exchange information with programme bodies through the use of electronic portals accessible through the web.

Article 122(3) CPR does not impose at EU level an obligation on beneficiaries to use e-Government functionalities. However, it is understood that Member States, at their own initiative, could impose this obligation upon beneficiaries according to their own schedule, cost/benefit analysis and legal constraints after verification that it does not exclude some types of beneficiaries from having access to Funds compared to the previous situation\(^1\). Therefore, at the EU level, the only requirement is that, as from 31 December 2015, beneficiaries should be able to choose at the moment of signing the document setting out the conditions for support for each operation, whether they prefer electronic exchange of data, without parallel paper exchange, or not.

According to Article 59(1) CPR, **Technical assistance (TA) of the Member States** may be used to support actions for the reduction of administrative burden for beneficiaries, including electronic data exchange systems.

The aim of this document is to provide desk officers with guidelines on how to deal with the e-Cohesion initiative during 2014-2020.

2.1 Most relevant articles

| Art. 122(3) CPR | Management and control systems  
Responsibilities of Member States (e-Cohesion) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art. 15 (1) (b) (vi) CPR</td>
<td>The Partnership Agreement (administrative burden reduction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art. 15 (2) (b) CPR</td>
<td>The Partnership Agreement (e-Cohesion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art. 96 (6)(c) CPR</td>
<td>An operational programme (administrative burden reduction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art. 59(1) CPR</td>
<td>Technical Assistance of the Member States (e-Cohesion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art. 140 CPR</td>
<td>Availability of documents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

\(^1\) If an obligatory electronic exchange of information with beneficiaries (without a parallel paper exchange) has been a practice in the previous programming period/s, there is no need for a justification of such decision for 2014-2020.
2.2 Key differences with the 2007-2013 programming period

Article 122(3) CPR is a new provision. There is no equivalent in previous periods.

3 Guidance

Verification of information about the e-Cohesion implementation shall be done:

a) Ex-ante: during the negotiation of the Partnership Agreement and programmes (see specific guidance on partnership agreement and operational programme templates).

b) Within the programming period, on a regular basis before and after the regulatory deadline.

3.1 e-Cohesion implementation within the programming period

Within the programming period, follow-up on the set-up of e-Cohesion system depends on whether this is carried-out before or after the regulatory deadline of 31/12/2015. This approach may not derive directly from the regulatory requirements but should be seen as a recommendation by the Commission.

3.1.1 Before the regulatory deadline

The starting point is the information given by the Member State at the beginning of the period, namely:

a) the information given by Member States in the PA according to Article 15 (2)(b) CPR on its assessment of the existing systems for electronic data exchange, and a summary of the actions planned to gradually permit all exchange of information between beneficiaries and authorities responsible for management and control of programmes;
b) the actions planned following Article 15 (1)(b)(vi) CPR to reduce administrative burden for beneficiaries indicated both in the PA and in programmes (Art. 96 (6)(c) CPR).

In order to be effective, the follow-up on the set-up of the e-Cohesion system needs to be done by the Commission sufficiently in advance before the regulatory deadline. Given the deadline defined in the CPR Regulation (2015) this first check will not be feasible in the context of the examination of programme Annual Implementation Reports: the first delivery of the AIR is planned in June 2016 covering the year 2015 (Art. 50 CPR).

3.1.1.1 e-Cohesion during the monitoring committee meetings

For this reason, desk officers are recommended to enquire during monitoring committees about the implementation of e-Cohesion aspects. In that regard, they should:

a) Ask the managing authority to provide information on the implementation of the roadmap set up in the PA in the form of an "e-Cohesion progress report" and in particular:
   − how beneficiaries, the Commission and all stakeholders can have reasonable assurance that the regulatory deadline will be met (and if not, verify what the underlying reasons are);
   − whether actions taken cover all types of beneficiaries and all necessary information requirements (including reporting on progress, declaration of expenditure and exchange of information related to management, verifications and audits);
   − if the ‘only once’ encoding principle is respected;
   − if a parallel paper track has been eliminated for beneficiaries who opted for electronic data exchange.

b) Ask beneficiaries present in the monitoring committees their evaluation of measures anticipated or already implemented in relation to the effective reduction of the administrative burden;

c) Inform the Member State that the e-Cohesion topic will be discussed annually during a COCOF meeting.

In practical terms, the desk officer should encourage the managing authority to include the e-Cohesion progress report in the agenda of the monitoring committee and to ensure that such document is sent sufficiently in advance to all stakeholders. This will allow all stakeholders (including the desk officer) to have sufficient time to prepare reasoned comments on the progress during the monitoring committee.

---

2 Both elements from point a) and b) are not subject to the Commission’s decision, but subject to assessment and observations as basis for approval. Member State may decide to change the actions indicated in the OP at any given time following a decision by the monitoring committee.

3 Please see also guidance document on Commission participation in the monitoring committees.

4 Beneficiaries may provide their evaluation either through stakeholders participating in the monitoring committee (associations, NGOs, etc.) or personally, being invited by the managing authority to attend the meeting.

5 For REGIO, several units could provide additional input: F1 could reply to questions linked to the reduction of administrative burden, E1 could reply to questions linked to administrative capacity, and A4 could reply to technical issues.
The *e-Cohesion progress report* does not result directly from any regulatory requirement. Its preparation should not cause an additional administrative burden for the managing authority, since it is a general practice in IT project management discipline. Nevertheless, its communication to the monitoring committee may depend on the Member State’s goodwill to exchange *e-Cohesion* related information with the Commission and other programme stakeholders.

Regular discussions during the monitoring committee on *e-Cohesion* should help the managing authority to implement commitments set up in the programming documents and deliver e-Cohesion before the regulatory deadline:

- firstly, via preparing regular reasoned comments on the *e-Cohesion progress report* (in order to maintain the momentum on *e-Cohesion* progress and evaluate if there is reasonable assurance of reaching the deadline with an up-and-running system covering all beneficiaries);
- secondly, via listening to beneficiaries’ opinions\(^6\) (in order to ensure that these commitments are effectively implemented in the simplest, most pragmatic and cost-efficient way).

For more details, please see the attached checklist which has been built to help the desk officers to assess in a standard and homogeneous way the *e-Cohesion progress report* drafted by the managing authority.

Moreover, for ERDF/CF the desk officer could refer to the knowledge base of existing good practices and guidance on building blocks established by REGIO A4 at the end of 2012 together with public Q&A drafted by INTERACT\(^7\).

With regard to the ERDF and CF, after the monitoring committee and at least once a year, the REGIO desk officer is recommended to update the ‘Knowledge management’ tool of REGIO (to be set up at the end of 2014) on the state of play of *e-Cohesion* implementation for the programme concerned, its current and the foreseen coverage (type of projects and beneficiaries, % of funding) at the deadline set by the Regulation\(^8\).

### 3.1.1.2 e-Cohesion during the annual review meetings

The annual review meetings should also discuss progress in setting up electronic exchange of information with beneficiaries, in particular when a Member State fails to meet the end 2015 deadline defined in Article 122(3) CPR. The Member State should explain how progress is in line with actions aimed at the reduction of the administrative burden, a key factor in a smooth implementation of any programme. The annual review meeting should be a forum to discuss general aspects with regard to implementation of *e-Cohesion* by the Member State/programme\(^9\).

---

\(^6\) Beneficiaries may express their view either through stakeholders participating in the monitoring committee (associations, NGOs, etc.) or personally, being invited by the managing authority to attend the meeting.

\(^7\) Please see 2.2.3 References.

\(^8\) High-level information is aimed to be available at REGIO Wiki, while a more detailed report in form of the completed check-list as set out in annex should be uploaded on SharePoint.

\(^9\) Depending on the form of monitoring committee and annual review meetings, desk officers should choose the forum which is more appropriate for *e-Cohesion* topics.
3.1.2 After the regulatory deadline

Desk officers should ask how the implementation of e-Cohesion has allowed electronic exchange of information with beneficiaries referring to:

a) the information given by Member States in the PA according to Article 15 (2)(b) CPR on its overview of the arrangements for electronic data exchange with beneficiaries;

b) the actions planned following Article 15 (1)(b)(vi) CPR to reduce administrative burden for beneficiaries indicated in the PA and the programme (Art. 96 (6)(c) CPR)\textsuperscript{10}.

It will mean following up the state of actions taken which have permitted electronic exchange of information with beneficiaries and whether this e-Cohesion system functions according to the regulatory requirements.

The desk officer is recommended to check if the Member State confirmed formally the implementation of the e-Cohesion regulatory requirements via 4 elements:

− in the first monitoring committee after the deadline, a final e-Cohesion progress report should give the detailed confirmation of implementation of regulatory requirements;
− the 2016 annual implementation report of the programme (Art. 111(5)(b) CPR – specific reference to be inserted after corrigendum CPR) should provide a short confirmation that the system has been put in place and refer to the detailed e-Cohesion progress report;
− the progress report on the implementation of the PA to be received by the Commission by 31 August 2017 (Art. 52 f, g CPR) should also indicate the impact of the system on the reduction of administrative burden;
− the annual implementation report of the OP from 2017 onwards.

Desk officers are recommended to continue to check on e-Cohesion implementation state-of-play during the monitoring committee and annual review meetings after the deadline (applying the relevant part of the attached checklist). There may be a case when enhancements of e-Cohesion functionalities beyond the regulatory minimum requirements are required in order to continue to reduce the administrative burden for beneficiaries\textsuperscript{11} or when a delay in e-Cohesion implementation has occurred (see section below).

Desk officers are also recommended to remind the Member State to include e-Cohesion in their programme evaluations after the regulatory deadline.

\textsuperscript{10} Both elements from point a) and b) are not subject to the Commission’s decision, but subject to assessment and observations as basis for approval. Member States may decide to change the actions indicated in the programme at any time, following a decision by the monitoring committee.

\textsuperscript{11} Previous studies proved that portals at the highest level of sophistication would bring the most significant reduction in the administrative burden for beneficiaries. The CPR and accompanying IA define only minimum requirements for an e-Cohesion system. Therefore, Member States may wish to improve existing functionalities to achieve more administrative burden reduction. For more information, please see the studies: 'IT Implications Assessment of E-Cohesion Policy at EU/Member State level’, Deloitte and ‘Measuring the impact of changing regulatory requirements to administrative cost and administrative burden of managing EU Structural Funds (ERDF and Cohesion Fund)’, t33 snc, SWECO.
3.1.3 Repercussions for Member States where the electronic data exchange systems are not put in place by the due date

Each Partnership Agreement will set out the planned actions in order to ensure the respect of the regulatory deadline of 31 December 2015. If the required system is not fully in place in a Member State by the due date, the level of administrative burden for beneficiaries compared to 2007-2013 will remain either unchanged (if nothing is put in place) or will not be reduced to the expected level (if the required system is only partially put in place).

When the deadline is reached without a complete implementation, 2 cases are foreseen:

− where the Member State's delay in e-Cohesion implementation is due to technical reasons:
  ▪ the delay will be mentioned by the Commission in the 2016 AIR observations which the Member State will have to follow up;
  ▪ in case of partial implementation, priority should be given to advice on practical and concrete measures helping programme bodies to reach the regulatory target as soon as possible.

− where the Member State has delayed the implementation of e-Cohesion for political reasons (no real goodwill of the administration to reduce the administrative burden and to implement the roadmap foreseen in the PA), 3 possible responses can be anticipated:
  ▪ if the programme does not perform correctly, an audit on e-Cohesion implementation and on 'only once' encoding principle enforcement could be launched. The Member State could be then requested to follow up the recommendation stemming from this audit;
  ▪ a breach of European law can be suspected and therefore an infringement procedure could be started upon assessment of the seriousness of such breach;
  ▪ as the system for electronic data exchange with beneficiaries is part of the Member State’s management and control system, this may lead to imposing a financial correction following a compliance audit.

3.2 Commentary/analysis of the regulatory framework

3.2.1 Definitions

Electronic data exchange:

− refers to a medium of exchange of documents (see definition in Article 2(17) CPR), i.e. any electronic medium, including scanned documents and large files, as well as to structured data;

− covers the relationship between the authorities (managing authority and any intermediate bodies as well as the certifying authority and audit authority) and beneficiaries. "Beneficiary" is defined as "an operator, body or firm, whether public or private, responsible for initiating or initiating and implementing operations".
This means that the scope of electronic exchange of information is limited to the beneficiary and not to the applicant or to the person trained in an ESF training programme. There is no requirement to set up a facility enabling electronic submission of applications for support. However, once a grant has been awarded, any information requirements applicable to the beneficiary should be possible to fulfil via electronic exchange. This includes reporting on progress, declaration of expenditure and exchange of information related to management, verifications and audits.

### 3.2.2 Data protection rules
Managing Authorities shall ensure that national data protection laws implementing Directive 95/46/EC are respected. Specific guidance will be provided in the Vade-Mecum for Desk Officers on management and control and financial management [link to be inserted].

### 3.2.3 References

**E-Cohesion Policy, Fiche no 11**, Brussels 7 February 2012 (prepared for the Council and Parliament negotiations)

*Implementing Act on the rules concerning electronic information exchange with beneficiaries, Fiche nr 6,*
https://myintracommcollab.ec.europa.eu/dg/REGIO/prepdelimimplacts4ESIfunds/CPR%20Art%20112%20Detailed%20rules%20on%20the%20exchanges%20of%20I/Fiche%20for%20IA%20e-Cohesion_19%2007%202013.docx

**Building blocks for e-Cohesion. Good practices from Member States, regions and programmes,** Version 2,
https://www.yammer.com/regionetwork/uploaded_files/15925322


**IT Implications Assessment of E-Cohesion Policy at EU/Member State level,** Deloitte,

**Measuring the impact of changing regulatory requirements to administrative cost and administrative burden of managing EU Structural Funds (ERDF and Cohesion Fund),** t33 snc, SWECO,

**Explorative study in preparation of the possible future development of central Clearing Houses for Cohesion Policy reporting at national/regional level,** Deloitte – Capgemini – Ramboll Consortium

### 3.3 Contact points

REGIO A4, Andrés Espinosa, 56899, [Andres.ESPINOSA-FERNANDEZ@ec.europa.eu](mailto:Andres.ESPINOSA-FERNANDEZ@ec.europa.eu)

EMPL E1: [EMPL-ESF-Q-A@ec.europa.eu](mailto:EMPL-ESF-Q-A@ec.europa.eu)
Annex 1 Checklist for verifying information about the e-Cohesion implementation\textsuperscript{12}

Part I Verification of information before the regulatory deadline\textsuperscript{*}

This verification will entail checking the following elements:

A) Obligatory checks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Verification of adherence to the regulatory deadline:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a) Has the e-Cohesion roadmap implementing the regulatory deadline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>been respected so far (see point 4.1 of PA)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b) Is there reasonable assurance that electronic exchange system will</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be operational in due time?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Verification of implementation of regulatory requirements on electronic data exchange:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a) Do the actions taken already cover all types of beneficiaries or is</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there reasonable assurance that all beneficiaries who opt for  electronic data exchange could use e-Cohesion features before the deadline?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b) Do the actions taken already cover all necessary information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requirements (reporting on progress, declaration of expenditure and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exchange of information related to management, verifications and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>audits) or is there reasonable assurance that all these processes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>will be covered before the deadline?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2c) Do the actions taken already cover all the Member State’s bodies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concerned (MA/IB/CA/AA) or is there</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{12} The checklist has been prepared with regard to minimum requirements defined in IA which provides uniform conditions for Article 122(3) of the CPR.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>reasonable assurance that all these bodies will be covered before the deadline?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2d) Has the ‘only once’ encoding principle been respected so far (at least at the level of operation, within the same programme) or is there reasonable assurance that the ‘only once’ encoding principle will be respected within the due deadline?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2e) Has a parallel paper flow of documents and data been eliminated so far within all processes (for beneficiaries who opted for electronic data exchange) or is there reasonable assurance that a parallel paper flow of documents and data will be eliminated within all processes before the deadline (for beneficiaries who opt for electronic data exchange)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2f) For proper functioning of the computer system for data exchange has compliance with the following aspects been ensured (or is there reasonable assurance that it will be ensured before the deadline)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− data integrity and confidentiality;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− authentication of the sender within the meaning of Directive 1999/93/EC;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− storage in compliance with retention rules defined in accordance with Article 140 of the proposed CPR;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− secure transfer of data;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− availability during and outside standard office hours (almost 24/7, except for technical maintenance activities);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− accessibility by the Member States and the beneficiaries either directly or via an interface for automatic synchronisation and recording of data with national,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

13 The IA will give the Member State, region, programme freedom to establish its own level of security for electronic signature in the context of the Directive. In particular, a simple login/password can be seen sufficient after a cost/benefit analysis and following acceptance by the beneficiary of linked terms and conditions of use mentioned in the document mentioned in Article 125(3)
regional and local computer management systems;
− protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and commercial confidentiality for legal entities with respect to the information processed (according to Directive 2002/58/EC, Directive 2009/136/EC and Directive 1995/46/EC)

3) Verification of implementation of actions planned to achieve a reduction of administrative burden for beneficiaries:

3a) Have the e-Cohesion targets contributing to the reduction of the administrative burden of beneficiaries been achieved so far (targets set in the PA and OP)?

3b) Is there reasonable assurance that all the e-Cohesion targets contributing to the reduction of the administrative burden of beneficiaries will be achieved within the due date (targets set in the PA and OP)?

B) Additional optional reporting

4) How well does the electronic portal already in place serve beneficiaries’ needs? Can the electronic exchange of data take place in the most effective, efficient and satisfactory for the beneficiary manner enabling him/her to interact with the minimal outlay in terms of work, time and costs?

Please describe to what extent the system for electronic data exchange already in place is equipped with the following functionalities:
− interactive and/or pre-filled forms by the system on the basis of the data which is stored at consecutive steps of the procedures,
− automatic calculations preventing mistakes and speeding up the work,
− automatic embedded controls which reduce as much as possible back-and forth exchange of documents,
− system generated alerts to warn the beneficiary that certain actions can be performed,
− on-line status tracking: beneficiary can follow up the current state of the project, which results in more transparency,
− availability of all the history of the file.
5) Can any e-Cohesion good practices be identified which contribute to the reduction of administrative burden for beneficiaries? Please describe them.

* If the system for electronic data exchange has already been put in place, please apply questions from Part two: ex-post verification

**Part II Verification of information after the regulatory deadline**

This verification will entail checking the following elements:

**A) Obligatory checks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Has the deadline set in the Regulation been respected?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>If No, explain the root causes and evaluate if they are mainly technical or political</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Does the electronic data exchange cover all types of beneficiaries?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>If No, explain the root causes and evaluate if they are mainly technical or political</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Does the electronic data exchange cover all necessary information requirements? (reporting on progress, declaration of expenditure and exchange of information related to management, verifications and audits)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>If No, explain the root causes and evaluate if they are mainly technical or political</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Does the electronic exchange with beneficiaries cover all the Member State’s bodies concerned (MA/IB/CA/AA)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>If No, explain the root causes and evaluate if they are mainly technical or political</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Has the ‘only once’ encoding principle been respected (at least at the level of operation, within the same programme)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>If No, explain the root causes and evaluate if they are mainly technical or political</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Has a parallel paper flow of documents and data been eliminated within all processes (for beneficiaries who opted for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>If No, explain the root causes and evaluate if they are mainly technical or political</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
electronic data exchange)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7) For proper functioning of the computer system for data exchange has compliance with the following aspects been ensured?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>− data integrity and confidentiality;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− authentication of the sender within the meaning of Directive 1999/93/EC;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− storage in compliance with retention rules defined in accordance with Article 140 of the proposed CPR;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− secure transfer of data;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− availability during and outside standard office hours (almost 24/7, except for technical maintenance activities);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− accessibility by the Member States and the beneficiaries either directly or via an interface for automatic synchronisation and recording of data with national, regional and local computer management systems;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and commercial confidentiality for legal entities with respect to the information processed (according to Directive 2002/58/EC, Directive 2009/136/EC and Directive 1995/46/EC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| If No, explain the root causes and evaluate if they are mainly technical or political |

| 8) Have the e-Cohesion targets contributing to the reduction of the administrative burden of beneficiaries been achieved (targets set in the PA and OP)? |

| If No, explain the root causes and evaluate if they are mainly technical or political |

If No was replied to one or more of the questions above, please refer to the guidance document (heading 2.1.3 “Repercussions for Member States where the electronic data exchange systems are not put in place by the due date”)

---

14 The IA will give the Member State, region, programme freedom to establish its own level of security for electronic signature in the context of the Directive. In particular, a simple login/password can be seen sufficient after a cost/benefit analysis and following acceptance by the beneficiary of linked terms and conditions of use mentioned in the document mentioned in Article 125(3)
B) Additional optional reporting

9) How well does the electronic portal serve beneficiaries’ needs? Can the electronic exchange of data take place in the most effective, efficient and satisfactory for the beneficiary manner enabling him/her to interact with the minimal outlay in terms of work, time and costs?

Please describe to what extent the system for electronic data exchange is equipped with the following functionalities:

− interactive and/or pre-filled forms by the system on the basis of the data which is stored at consecutive steps of the procedures,
− automatic calculations preventing mistakes and speeding up the work,
− automatic embedded controls which reduce as much as possible back-and forth exchange of documents,
− system generated alerts to warn the beneficiary that certain actions can be performed,
− on-line status tracking: beneficiary can follow up the current state of the project, which results in more transparency,
− availability of all the history of the file.

10) Can any e-Cohesion good practices be identified which contribute to the reduction of administrative burden for beneficiaries? Please describe them.