Transnational Network of ERDF/CF SCO practitioners

Subgroup on 'Simplification'

Case reports on "Selection of operations"

(June 2021)

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Introduction

This note presents 16 case reports on successful practices implemented by ERDF/CF authorities to tackle administrative cost and burden around ‘selection of operations. The reports have been prepared by members of the subgroup on ‘Simplification’ established under the Transnational Network (TN) of ERDF/CF SCO practitioners.

The rationale of the subgroup is to identify and discuss the most burdensome activities in the implementation of ESI funds and facilitate the exchange of best replicable practices and their dissemination amongst Member States. The aim is, through the identification and exchange of good practices during implementation of ESIF programmes, to encourage wide uptake of these practices and the abandonment of unnecessary rules and procedures.

‘Selection of operations’ was selected as first topic to be addressed by the subgroup. In order to get the results expected and be able to assess the effectiveness and the efficiency of project selection processes including the level of administrative costs, ‘selection of operations’ was defined in the large sense of the term. In particular, the proposed definition included the following processes: the call of proposal (permanent / temporary / length / complexity / guidance / transparency…), application documents (submission / online / number of documents…), selection process (length / communication…), evaluation of applications (criteria / separate selection step / selection body / transparency…), preparation and signature of the agreement (length / formalities…).

The structure of the case reports includes the following sections:

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

II. Rationale and specific objectives

III. Key steps of the practice

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

V. Outcomes and added value

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

1. BELGIUM

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.
In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working before the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*:*
The improvements described below concerns the new OP of Brussels Region.

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented

- One problem was the number of applications. The call for the applications was realized on a large scale, with a lot of advertisings, without filter for the capacities of the applicants.
- A second one was the difficulties of the beneficiaries to respect all the regulation. This led to misunderstanding and errors in the claims.
- A 3^{rd} one is linked to the first one was the increase of the work for the managing authority who realised the technical evaluation of the applicants.

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale:
Automatization of the procedure thanks to the informatic tool to facilitate the work of the evaluator.

II.2 Specific objectives

- Decrease the number of applicants maintaining the quality of the call,
- Acceleration of the process
- Decrease the number of errors of the beneficiaries

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:

- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*

- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	Description of the problems found in the IT system	*24*	*Managing authority, IT, external auditors*
2	Better communication with beneficiaries to identify their needs	*24*	*Managing authority, beneficiaries*
3	Improvements of the quality of the documents asked	*12*	*Managing authority with the point of view of the assessment team, external auditors*

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
Development of the IT system	We developed a brand new system with all the integrations
Content of the call is not clear enough and the objectives are not enough described	Anticipation of the OP's development.

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

Better explanations on the IT system to avoid the large number of applications without enough quality. IT system blocks the bad documents to avoid not useful documents and lack of documents requested Online forms to integrate the information on the system to avoid the no integration of the paper documents in the IT system

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do's and don'ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes.

- Take time to analyse the problems and the possibilities to improve the system
- Focus on the quality of the call and not the size
- Use the new technologies to simplify the tasks of the applicants and the stakeholders in charge of the assessment
- Don't underestimate the administrative burden for the beneficiaries

2. GREECE

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.

In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working before the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*:*

All Operational Programs

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented

- Long process for selecting operations, especially in case of state aid or de minimis aid which have a high number of applications.
- Issues in the evaluation of projects that are immature, e.g. due to lack of the required licenses, or feasibility studies, leading sometimes to select ideas instead of designed projects ready to start being implemented after the decision of financing.
- Challenges in case of beneficiaries who don't have the necessary administrative capacity.
- Challenges related to the correct implementation of state aid rules at the selection stage
- Difficulties in assessing that budget proposed by the potential beneficiaries are reasonable.

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale:

- Reducing the time and administrative workload required for selecting operations.
- Strengthening the maturity of projects that are proposed for financing in order to ensure correct and timely implementation afterwards
- Reinforce beneficiaries' administrative capacity to develop and implement their operations
- Mitigating risks regarding state aid issues
- Alleviate the burden to assess the proposed costs of operations and minimize the risks of future errors.

II.2 Specific objectives

N.A.

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:

- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*
- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	Use of a Monitoring Information System (M.I.S.) to monitor the progress of the Operational Programs and projects, covering all stages (call of proposals, selection, funding decisions, implementation, payment claims, management verifications, etc.). Beneficiaries submit electronically their proposals and all the required documents. Hardcopies are no longer used but only in exceptional cases. For state aid calls some steps of the evaluation process are automated (retrieval of required data directly from official sources and automatically assessed, especially in cases of on/off criteria).		Coordination authorities
2	Specific criteria for selection, concerning the maturity of the project, are introduced, as well as legal provision of losing funding in case the project doesn't start being implemented in 18 months after funding approval at the latest.		Coordination / Managing Authorities
3	Preparatory actions supporting the design and future implementation of operations, before the call for proposal and application for funding, especially in case of one or few potential beneficiaries.		Line Ministries, Managing Authorities
4	Technical assistance complemented with targeted administrative capacity building measures, including training, staffing or external support. Flexibility of weak beneficiaries to have their projects implemented using the administrative capacity of other more capable beneficiaries (e.g.. local authorities' projects may be implemented by respective regional services, dedicated task force for support of weak beneficiaries, e.g. small municipalities)		Coordination authorities/Managing Authorities
5	Review of call for proposals by Central State Aid Unit before its issuance		Coordination Authorities

6	Trying to introduce simplified cost options where applicable		Line Ministries, Coordination authorities, Managing Authorities

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
Verifying the data submitted by the Beneficiaries, cross-checking with the official supporting documents	Interoperability of main electronic systems, for retrieving the required data directly from the official source (financial data, data on cumulation, number of employees, etc.)
For state aid calls, the IT system needs adjustments for each call	Use of standardized call of proposals for similar actions

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

- Significant reduction of the time required for the evaluation process especially in case of non-competitive selection process.
- Hardcopies are no longer used.
- More standardized procedures

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do's and don'ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes.

N.A.

3. ESTONIA

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.

In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working before the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*:*

There is one OP in Estonia and the simplification was developed under this OP.

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented

Before the simplification was adopted there were a lot of manual controls through e-mails that caused errors and were very time-consuming.

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale:

To simplify the application process Estonia has established interfaces between different IT systems. Therefore, we can reduce double data and make automatic controls between different IT systems.

Estonia’s management information system for managing ESIF and some other funds and it consists of 3 parts:

- system for data collection and proceedings used by SF administration (SFOS);
- system for compiling reports SFCS;
- e-service for beneficiaries.

II.2 Specific objectives

- to fasten the selection of operations
- to reduce errors
- to reduce double data

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:

- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*
- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	Clarification of the most frequently used national registers	Approx 4 months	MA/2nd level IB
2	Negotiations and cooperation with the national register owners (with e-Business Register or with person ID code with e-Population Register)	Approx 3-4 months	MA and register owners
3	Interfacing the application information system with national registers	Approx 1 year	MA, register owners and IT developers

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
IT developments are expensive and time-consuming	Analysis to show the benefits of development and large user base
The structures of the databases are different and therefore it may be rather difficult to interface them	Good knowledge of processes and identification of common grounds

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

After the adaption of simplification in 2019 when the applicant starts entering their application in e-service, then an automated controls help to complete some fields. Address field is automatically compared with e-Address Register and company registers code with e-Business Register or with person ID code with e-Population Register. SFOS will suggest the contact information available in e-Business Register and e-Population to applicant.

After the applicant has sent the project application through e-service the corresponding Intermediate Body starts application validation process. SFOS has automated controls to different national registers:

1) We have same information system for different funds and therefore there is available SFOS internal control if the project applicant or partner have unrepaid financial corrections in previous ESIF projects or other projects in SFOS;

2) Controls to Criminal Records Database - automated checks towards project applicant and partners. Project will not get funded, if applicant or at least one partner have punishment in force for relevant paragraphs;

3) Controls to Tax and Custom Board if project applicant or partners have state tax debt more than 100€ or if the debt is rescheduled;

4) Automated control to national Public Announcements registers that the applicant or partners have no ongoing or finalized bankruptcy, liquidation or compulsory dissolution processes.

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do's and don'ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes.

Simplification is an investment but undoubtedly reduces the administrative burden. The benefits must be demonstrated in decision-making process. In the long run, automation benefits to all stakeholders therefore it is always essential to keep in mind the long term advantages.

4. HUNGARY

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.

In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working before the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*:* Competitive Central-Hungary Operational Programme, Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme, Environmental and Energy-Efficiency Operational Programme, Integrated Transport Development Operational Programme, Territorial and Settlement Development Operational Programme

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented Project proposals had to be submitted in off-line form. MA had to set up acceptance criteria and had to check these criteria. After checking, the MA had to inform the applicant that the application had been accepted. It took 7 days. The off-line submission was implemented via CD-s beside the paper version, and CD-s had to be uploaded to the central system by the MAs. This meant a lot of workload for the MAs. Furthermore, the CD and the paper version often did not match (because of the applicants rush for submission in time). Another issue was that the evaluation of the application was outsourced by the MAs often to for-profit companies, and this practice did not exclude conflict of interest perfectly, e.g. a for profit company evaluated the application of another for-profit company.

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale: Effective process management, enhancing e-administration

II.2 Specific objectives ▪ speed up the selection process ▪ make selection process simple ▪ strengthen independency of evaluation

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:
- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*
- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	Development of submission from off-line to online. This activity was part of setting up a complete new system ('FAIR' system), which is planned to manage the process from the submission of applications to the closure of programmes.	The development of the submission part was only a part of the entire system, so it is not possible to determine.	Central coordination, MAs – testing the new system
2	Set up an expert pool for evaluation; evaluation is implemented also via an online system.	10 weeks	Central coordination, Legal Department of the host ministry for central coordination – set up legal background, managing application process

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
For Development of submission from off-line to online.: Applicant had to learn how to fill in the electronic web-based application forms .	The IT system built in a lot of tools for in order to help: self-assessment tools and automatic checks have been applied.
For Development of submission from off-line to online: difficulties in establishing the proper online portal to cater for the submission of applications.	We built in a lot of pre-testing during the preparation process in order to ensure a smooth start of the application period.
For setting up an expert pool: all the expertise fields that covered the professional areas of the	An application procedure had been implemented.

MAs had to be managed	
For setting up an expert pool: the regulation did not provide the prohibition of conflicts of interest between the experts and management control staff	Regulation had to be modified.
For setting up an expert pool: experts who are experienced in professional areas are not familiar with the EU procedures by all means	On-line training system had been developed covering EU knowledge and the content of the relevant calls as well.

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

Online submission: applicants are able to submit their application in more simple way, immediately; MAs have less workload for not having compare electronic and paper versions of applications; . Online forms are able to integrate information on the system, in contrast to paper documents. The evaluation process became shorter for every stakeholder as many automatic checks have built in the application process.

Setting up an expert pool: unified process of evaluation is better for the implementation system and for audits, all the evaluations are managed in the same system. There is no more conflict of interest among the evaluators, and the evaluations became more balanced and realistic. It has a positive impact on project implementation too.

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do's and don'ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes.

Setting up an expert pool:
- training is needed for the evaluators on the general principles of evaluations;
- MAs should carry out quality assurance
- contradictions between the evaluations may arise and should be handled

5. LITHUANIA

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.

In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working before the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*:*

Activity No. 07.3.3.-IVG-428 Reimbursement of wage costs under the global grant instrument "Subsidies for business start-ups", financed from the European Social Fund

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented

Before the practice was implemented there was a very high administrative burden for both the implementing authority and project beneficiaries, as they had to provide a wide range of documents relating to the wage's payment – information provided by the applicant on imputed wages, payment orders on paid wages and others.

If simplification were not implemented such collection of various documents would lead to ineffective implementation of the activity.

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale:

the simplification was implemented in order to reduce the administrative burden, seeking that money (support) will reach the business faster and also seeking to avoid the collection and storage of all paper documents.

II.2 Specific objectives

- Reliability of data.
- Obtaining data from the State source (SODRA), which provides all information on accrued earnings and social security contributions.
- Efficiency, it means that upon receipt of the application, the SODRA is contacted directly and no additional documentation shall be required.
- Reduction of administrative costs.

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:

- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*
- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	According to the content of the program, the need to obtain data on the wages accrued by employees, dates of employment / recruitment, etc. was identified.		INVEGA (IB)
2	Initiation the signing of the agreement on the acquisition of data		Ministry of Social Security and Labour-SODRA (data controller)-INVEGA (IB)
3	Agreement with SODRA on data provision / receipt		SODRA (data controller, primary data source)-INVEGA (IB)
4	IT and technical solutions (systems integration)		INVEGA (IB), SODRA, the company supervising the financial management system.

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
A long alignment process with SODRA on the integration of data into the IB database.	The Ministry of Social Security and Labour mediated in this process and a consensus was reached.
The finding of technical solutions how to integrate SODRA data to IB financial management system.	The company supervising the financial management system helped to find right solutions. IB has integration with the financial management system, which also includes a project module. Data is imported into the specific project cards. Data acquisition logs are stored. Data acquisition is implemented via WEB-service.

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

Compensation is paid monthly. INVEGA (IB) automatically receives all data on the taxes paid to SODRA, so the project beneficiary does not need to provide any additional data or documents on the calculated and paid wages. That way the administrative burden for both – the beneficiary and IB is reduced, as well as the administrative costs are decreased, also the reliability of data is ensured.

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do's and don'ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes.

This type of system integration requires the identification of the data content required to assess the specific criteria. Institutional systems need to implement rules for data processing, fuses, error messages. The contract with data controller (in our case – SODRA) must cover not only data sets, but also reaction times to problem solving.

6. LATVIA

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.

In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working before the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*:*

In previous planning period (2007. – 2013) there were many intermediate bodies and project selection process was handled differently in each of those intermediate bodies. Lack of a common approach.

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented

There were a lot of "first come, first serve" project selection processes that eventually led to a problem that not the best projects where selected, but those who were submitted first.

Project selection processes differed between intermediate bodies – one applicant in two project selection procedures, for example, could have two different evaluations on the same or similar criteria.

Project applications were submitted in a paper form (using also the post services). Since posted project application had to have specific data on the envelope (post office stamp with the date of the current day), it led to some fraud cases involving post office workers.

That led to the assumption that project selection process is not as transparent, effective and fare as it should be. System altogether was losing trust.

Another problem in previous planning period was low usage of public data bases in evaluation process. The «need to prove element» was entirely depending on applicant, e.g. newest/latest tax payment discipline statistics from State revenue service was one of documents that now is available in open data base, De minimis data etc.

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale:

To gain more trust and transparency in administrative processes, gain better efficiency, spend time at selection stage and select the best projects to co-finance from the EU funds.

II.2 Specific objectives

- Minimize the administrative burden for applicants
- Ensure common practices and approaches for evaluating same or similar criteria
- Reduce administrative costs for project selection process (more specific policy objectives are reached with the same resources – e.g. all responsible authorities work with the same resources)

Since it would be the main tasks for the institutions project selection division, reduce the project selection process time frame – get projects going faster.

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:
- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*
- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	**Phases before selection process in Latvia for OP "Growth and Employment" (covering ESF, ERDF and CF):** • **Subcommittee** (we have created 9 thematic subcommittee working groups corresponding to each priority axis included in OP, to reach wider range of social and cooperation partners for each sector) **reviews:** - Evaluation criteria, Methodology for applying evaluation criteria - Initial assessment reports - Draft Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers for implementation of SO Steps: drafts of documents are available two weeks before subcommittee, received comments are gathered in table of comments, which is reviewed together with draft of documents during subcommittee meeting. After subcommittee meeting, participants can agree or comment on draft of protocol on agreed points. Responsible Authority reviews received comments and updates drafts of documents before submitting evaluation criteria to Monitoring committee (see next step).	*Approx. 4 weeks*	Responsible authorities (RA) – create documents to be reviewed (evaluation criteria, methodology for applying evaluation criteria, initial assessment reports, drafts regulations of the Cabinets of Ministers for implementation of SO) MA, IB and social and co-operation partners review mentioned documents and give comments.
2	• **Monitoring committee & Cabinet of Ministers:** - Monitoring committee adopts evaluation criteria and draft of methodology - Cabinet of Ministers adopts regulations (legislation) for implementation of SO Steps for Monitoring committee: Draft of evaluation criteria, which were agreed on during subcommittee are included in	*Approx. 4 weeks*	Monitoring committee members with voting rights adopts evaluation criteria. Ministers from line ministries together with Prime minister adopts

	Monitoring committee agenda and made available 15 days before meeting. During Monitoring committee meeting usually evaluation criteria are adopted and corresponding Monitoring committee decision is created and information included in protocol. Steps for Cabinet of Ministers: Standard procedure for draft Regulation of Cabinet of Ministers for implementation of SO is announced in meeting of State Secretaries and line ministries involved and social and co-ordination partners have two weeks to give comments on draft of documents. Comments are gathered in table of comments. RA (corresponding line ministry) reviews received comments and updates draft of document, if necessary before submission of document for adoption in Cabinet of Ministers.		Regulations of Cabinet of Ministers for implementation of SO.
3	• **Provision elaboration (Intermediate body (IB) in Latvia Central Finance and Contracting Agency (CFCA) and RA)**: - Procedure for approving the project, - Evaluation criteria & Methodology for applying evaluation criteria, - Project application form & Methodology for filling project application, - Standard legal agreement for implementation of project Before launching of project selection call provision is being published (usually at least one month before start of project selection call). In closed calls invitation letters are being sent to pre decided project applicants, in open calls information about start of project selection call is being published in "Latvijas Vēstnesis", the official publisher of the Republic of Latvia, according to the Law On Official Publications and Legal Information. In both – closed and open calls it is published in official homesite of IB together with the provision (including selection criteria) of the project selection call. Usually all potential project applicants already know about planned calls and criteria set, because of wide range of partners participate in mentioned subcommittee meetings. Information on calls is available also in RA official WEB site. Steps: IB sends draft of provision to RA and MA. RA and MA reviews draft of provision and gives opinion/ comments in 10 working days. If necessary draft of provision is being corrected/ updated before it is being adopted and published. Procedure can be done repeatedly until all authorities agree on provision documentation.	*Approx. 2 weeks*	IB creates provision of corresponding project selection including evaluation criteria adopted in Monitoring Committee and Methodology for applying evaluation criteria reviewed in Subcommittee. Corresponding RA and MA gives opinion on draft of provision before it is being adopted and published.
4	• **Project selection committee (IB):** - Meetings of evaluation committee, - Decision of approval, approval with conditionalities, rejection of project application In Latvia project selection process is centralized- almost all selection of projects is made by IB – CFCA, which also signs all contract of project implementation. Some of selection process is made by 9 national cities, to whom project selection process is delegated in order to ensure implementation within <u>integrated territorial investments</u> approach (art.36 CPR). Project application selection is carried out in several stages: 1) Selection of project applicant for its compliance of exclusion regulations *(set in Law On Management*	*Approx. 6-8 weeks*	Evaluating committee – participants from intermediate body and RA (with voting rights), participant form MA (without voting rights).

	of European Union Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund for the 2014-2020 Programming Period); 2) Selection of project applicant, project application according to following evaluation criteria types: a) **common criteria**, i.e. common criteria and common optional criteria (if applicable) *(set in Methodology for project application selection – adopted by Monitoring Committee)*; b) **specific eligibility criteria**; c) **quality criteria**. Common criteria and common optional criteria are set by the MA. Specific eligibility criteria and quality criteria are set by RA (corresponding line ministry). **Common criteria**: • Includes administrative and regulatory conditionalities. • All common criteria are mandatory for each set of project selection criteria in every project selection for EU funded projects (excluding financial instruments). **Specific eligibility criteria:** • Are set by creating specific set of evaluation criteria for each SO. • Includes specific conditionalities corresponding specifically to SO, like its target group, needs and priorities of industry etc. **Quality criteria:** • Are setting up minimum amount of points to be reached in each quality criteria or minimum sum for all quality criteria to ensure quality of project application and predict its potential socio-economic contribution. Project application compliance with the project evaluation criteria is evaluated by the project application evaluation commission, first evaluating all the criteria that cannot be specified (assessment for criteria cannot be changed) and then – criteria which can be specified (revised project application can be submitted and assessment of corresponding criteria can be changed, if first version of project application was approved with conditionalities) in the following order: 1) common criteria, 2) common optional criteria, 3) specific eligibility criteria, 4) quality criteria. In case one of the exclusion rules is met or the project application is found to be non-compliant with some criteria that cannot be specified, the project application is rejected and no further evaluation is made. The project application selection evaluation order may be changed, adapting it to the specifics of the implementation of corresponding SO. Within the framework of open project calls, project applications are approved in order of priority, taking into account the amount of funding specified in the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on the implementation of the SO and the project application queuing procedure is specified in the project application selection regulations.		

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
Since one IB is holding responsibility for all the selection process it is very important for responsible institutions to coordinate the timing of call of proposals, because they work with same resources.	MA is helping in this coordination process by providing planning documents and by trying to balance those troughs out the planning period – the fulfilment of the objectives of the operational program is closely monitored.
New system (in 14-20 planning period) introduced two types of project selection: 1. restricted project selection (decision with conditions can be made 2 times and clarification submission can be handled in 2 times); 2. open project selection (decision with conditions can be made one time and clarification submission can be handled in one time). It is concluded by CFCA that project applications in restricted project selection are showing lower quality than those in open project selections where clarification can be done only one time. Thus, it was very time consuming and almost more expensive to handle restricted project selections, although those are made for public legal entities and actually suppose to have quite formal selection at all because grants are appointed to the specific and previously known applicants.	Some improvements are planned in 21-27 planning period for both – restricted and open project selection schemes.

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

There has been significant improvement in 2014. – 2020. planning period within the consolidation of administrative resources in one intermediate body –CFCA, that is agency in one sector with MA (e.g. finance sector).

The decision to have only one intermediate body led to several important improvements regarding project selection process:

1. All project selection process is done same and is directed by strict, united rules, defined in Law[1] and it is transparent, understandable to everyone.
2. More common approach is assured when it comes to applying evaluation criteria. Also, the institutional memory of the institution is ensured when it comes to knowledge in difficult

[1] *Law On Management of European Union Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund for the 2014-2020 Programming Period (https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/267471)*

situations, problem solving capacity and next planning period revising and improvement making process;

3. More and more projects (in next planning period it will be proposed that even all of the projects) is submitted in Cohesion Policy Funds Management Information System (CPFMIS) that CFCA has built regarding system development responsibilities and thus it is more time saving to apply different checks trough the project selection process and furthermore trough the project monitoring process, linking those two important stages together;

CFCA has taken more efficient approach to minimize the administrative burden for applicants by signing multiple mutual cooperation agreements with other state authorities, thus linking CPFMIS with multiple other data basis to gain data for the projects (for example, State revenue service data base).

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do's and don'ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States <u>in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes</u>.

Be wise how You choose the partner – intermediate body. If it is only one, it should have impeccable reputation and should have be able to allocate sufficient resources and institutional capacity as well as to build reliable internal procedures to gain trust of all players in system (including, MA, RA, AA, beneficiaries, applicants and society in general).

7. MALTA

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.

In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working before the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*:*

Operational Programme I – *Fostering a competitive and sustainable economy to meet our challenges – 2014-2020*

State Aid Schemes for the private sector funded through ERDF

Further information can be obtained from www.businessenhance.gov.mt.

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented

- State aid schemes were administered through calls launched from time to time depending on the capacity of the Intermediate Body
- Evaluation of applications took quite a few months
- If an application was found to be ineligible for administrative reasons, the Undertaking had to wait for the next call to be issued to be able to re-apply for a grant

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale:

- To revamp the selection of operations process into a more systemic and efficient manner
- To facilitate access to EU funding and reduce time-lag between the need for the support and the timing of the calls

II.2 Specific objectives

- Support is provided when needed with limited time lag in the investment plans by the private sector
- Investment proposal is implemented quickly during implementation
- Applications which are deemed ineligible for administrative reasons can re-apply quickly, without significant delay
- To switch to e-facilities

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:

- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*
- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	Open rolling calls are issued for all ERDF state aid schemes to enable private Undertakings to apply whenever they are ready and to ensure that such applications are not written with a deadline in mind resulting in poor quality	Ongoing	State Aid Monitoring Board – responsible to review the scheme proposal and issue/refuse approval Monitoring Committee – responsible to approve the selection and eligibility criteria for each scheme Managing Authority – responsible to delegate authority to the Intermediate Body to administer the state aid schemes, and approve guidance issued by the IB and the administration of the whole process Intermediate Body – responsible to issue the open rolling calls for each scheme, issue guidance, hold information sessions and reply to queries received
2	The selection process for each scheme takes place at the start of each month following the cut-off point	8 weeks	Intermediate Body – responsible to administer the online portal through which applications are received. These are then gathered and passed on to the Project Selection Committee Project Selection Committee – responsible to assess each application received, and issue approval/rejection letter Intermediate Body – responsible to draw up the Grant Agreement once approval is issued by the Project

			Selection Committee
3	An online portal is used to draw up and submit applications for funding	It is up to the private Undertaking to decide when to apply	Intermediate Body / Managing Authority – responsible for hosting and administering the online portal, testing new functions to make the application process more user-friendly and potentially specific to certain terms issued under certain schemes

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
Setup of the organization – every officer under the different IBs was responsible of a scheme from implementation till reimbursement stage.	All ERDF state aid schemes are being implemented through a centralized IB. The organization is divided into two units; implementation and financial control. The latter checks the former during reimbursement stage. This ensures a four-eye principle approach.
Not enough on-the-spots visits carried out	More visits are being undertaken by the officers therefore they are more informed on the implementation of the operations. Moreover, the beneficiary has to report every 6 months on the implementation of the operation.
Lack of standardized templates	Due to a centralized system, standardized templates have been created in order to ensure a common approach across the different schemes.
Difficulties in establishing the proper online portal to cater for the submission of applications	Regular testing of the system is conducted to ensure smooth implementation.
Timing with respect to when calls were launched, the evaluation process and the actual implementation of the investment by the private sector	Calls for applications are issued on an open-rolling basis with monthly cut-off dates. Following each cut-off date the Intermediate Body would already have scheduled the necessary meetings for the Project Selection Committee, to meet and carry out the evaluation process to ensure that eligible Undertakings are not delayed in putting in motion the planned investment.

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

- Faster and quicker selection process
- Quality applications
- More manpower and focus have been shifted to implementation and verification of the support provided. This has enabled the Intermediate Body and the Managing Authority to start discussing and implementing the use of simplified cost options to facilitate, not only the selection process, but also the reimbursement process, and focus more on the results expected from the funding given
- Investment proposals/grants are implemented faster
- Private sector reacted positively to the simplification measures implemented
- Intermediate Body has a schedule it keeps to when it comes to selection of operations that ensures that applications are processed quickly and in an efficient manner, thus creating less room for error

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do's and don'ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes.

- Use of open rolling calls for action/expenditure that is recurrent and streamlined
- Use of electronic platforms to help manage the selection process (ideally the evaluation process as well)
- Ensure a strict schedule is abided during the selection process where Project Selection Committee Members are readily available to form a quorum, guidelines for both applications and the Project Selection Committee are available, and clear criteria are published on which the evaluation process is based

N.B.

– MT is interested in experiences that can be shared by other Member States of operations that are of national importance and that are often directly referred to in the Operational Programmes. Specifically, if for such operations, normal calls for applications are issued and the Beneficiary must go through a normal (and possibly lengthy) evaluation process, or if other measures are undertaken that may simplify this (potentially bureaucratic) procedure.

- We are also interested in experiences that show how the evaluation process can be done efficiently and cost-effectively through online means

8. POLAND - I

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.

In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working before the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*:*

The practice was developed under all Operational Programmes in Poland. It is regulated in Polish law. The simplification practice allows to correct projects during its verification.

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented

1. Institutions couldn't propose any changes in projects that would lead to better achievement of Programmes Objectives. All changes which led to substantial change of project were forbidden.

2. Good and very good projects were negatively assessed because of not completely meeting criteria that were not substantively the most important, or only of formal, not substantive importance.

3. The correcting projects mechanism was not regulated, which led to many doubts how to proceed in those situations in which such correction would be desirable.

4. Because of the fact that substantial changes of projects were forbidden applicants had to submit their corrected proposals during the next call for proposals.

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale:

The main objective of implementing this practice was to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of projects selection procedures.

II.2 Specific objectives

- Allow institutions to propose changes in projects that would lead to better achievement of Programmes Objectives
- More effective use of funds because of contracting good projects that should have been assessed negatively if there was no correcting mechanism
- Better control of procedures by the Monitoring Committee which would indicate

criteria in the light of which projects could be corrected ▪ Regulation of correcting projects should guarantee transparency and equal treatment of all applicants.

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:

- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*
- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	Preparation of the project of legal act that includes appropriate provisions	4	Coordinating bodies
2	Carrying out the legislative process	32	Coordinating bodies and all bodies involved in implementing operational programmes and law Department.
3	Preparation of the project of Ministerial Guidelines (to explain how apply new legal provisions)	4	Coordinating bodies
4	Carrying out the process of consulting and accepting of Ministerial Guidelines	16	Coordinating bodies and all bodies involved in implementing operational programmes and law Department.
5	Conducting several trainings in terms of implementing new practice	4	Coordinating bodies and all bodies involved in implementing operational programmes

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
How and where to define the range of possible corrections of projects	The criteria accepted by the Monitoring Committee must indicate the possibility of correcting project in the light of given criteria and the regulations of given call for proposals must define the scope of possible corrections.
How to guarantee the equal treatment	Every applicant knows in advance what can be corrected during assessment of project. Every applicant can correct project to the same extent in

	the given situation.
How to train the institution employees to implement new practice	Several meetings in terms of implementing new practice

<u>EXAMPLE:</u>

Call for proposal in Regional Operational Programme of the Lodzkie Voivodship, ERDF.

The criteria accepted by the Monitoring Committee for the call for proposal indicated the possibility of correcting project in the light of several criteria, which had formal importance. Usually those criteria are 0 / 1. It was the same in this particular case. Those criteria, for example applied to:

- compliance of the eligibility period
- compliance with the principle of equal opportunities for women and men
- compliance with the principle of sustainable development
- compliance with the principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination, including availability for people with disabilities

All the rules of this mechanism were set out in the regulations for the call for proposals. The regulations provided especially information about the range of possible corrections (which criteria could be corrected and in which way) and how to guarantee the equal treatment (every applicant had to be treated in the same way in terms of using this mechanism and had to have the same number of days for correcting his project).

What is more the applicant couldn't make other corrections in addition to the required. If he did, his application was evaluated in the version that was sent by the institution to applicant.

The mechanism was highly appreciated by the applicants. In the given call for proposals there were 185 applications submitted and 156 of them were covered by the mechanism of correcting projects.

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

1. The increase of the effectiveness and efficiency of projects selection procedures
2. Contracted projects are substantively better what leads to better achievement of Programmes Objectives
3. Better control of the procedures by the Monitoring Committee which indicates criteria which can be corrected
4. Good and very good projects are not rejected because of formal aspects or criteria that are not substantively the most important

5. The evaluation process is transparent
6. All applicants are treated equally
7. All applicants know in advance which aspects of projects can be corrected as it is set out in regulations for given call for proposals
8. Correcting mechanism and its proper use can be verified in appealing procedure if any project is negatively assessed
9. Mechanism is very flexible for institutions which can, in cooperation with Monitoring Committee, define the scope of projects that can be corrected.

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do's and don'ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes.

First of all correcting projects mechanism is very useful practice, both from applicant point of view and from institutional point of view.

What is important is to guarantee the equal treatment of all applicants during correction of projects and to develop this procedure in transparent way with participation of partners, for example represented in Monitoring Committee.

What is also important is the Human Factor, that is why in Poland several meetings and trainings were organised with institutional employees in terms of how to use this practice during assessment of projects. They began already during legislative process.

During those meetings the institutional employees were also encouraged not to be afraid of using this mechanism. Despite the fact that it requires appropriate approach and preparation the benefits are noticeable.

Last but not least very important is to leave the flexibility for institutions. For every Operational Programme there should be possibility for defining the scope of the projects that can be corrected depending for example on demand for funds, experience of applicants or the level of complexity of applications.

9. POLAND - II

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.

In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working before the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*:*

The practice was developed under all Operational Programmes in Poland. It is regulated in Polish law. The simplification practice allows to carry out a call for proposals in rounds.

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented

1. There was necessity of preparing very similar calls for proposals periodically with all the documentation whenever, which was very costly / expensive and time-consuming.
2. Applicants couldn't plan flexibly when to submit an application, because there was one set period during competition for applying.
3. There was no flexible possibility of contracting projects by institutions, before the end of assessment of all submitted projects.
4. Projects assessed negatively definitively had no chance (unless as a result of appealing procedure) to be selected. Their applicants had no chance to correct them and submit one more time within the next round in the same call for proposal.

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale:

The main objective of implementing this practice was to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of projects selection procedures.

II.2 Specific objectives

- Reduction of time-consuming duties connected with the necessity of preparing and proceeding very similar documentation periodically
- Reduction of costs in terms of preparing very similar call for proposals.
- Acceleration of contracting projects
- Working out the more pro-applicant approach

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:

- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*
- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	Preparation of the project of legal act that includes appropriate provisions of law	4	Coordinating bodies
2	Carrying out the legislative process	32	Coordinating bodies and all bodies involved in implementing operational programmes and law Department.
3	Preparation of the project of Ministerial Guidelines (to explain how apply new legal provisions)	4	Coordinating bodies
4	Carrying out the process of consulting and accepting of Ministerial Guidelines	16	Coordinating bodies and all bodies involved in implementing operational programmes and law Department.
5	Conducting several trainings in terms of implementing new practice	4	Coordinating bodies and all bodies involved in implementing operational programmes

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
How to reduce costs and time-consuming procedures in the area of preparing call for proposals documentation	One call for proposals accompanied with one announcement and one regulatory framework.
How to avoid situation in which institution decides to limit previously predicted number of rounds within call for proposals	There is an obligation to indicate the number of rounds and allocation for them in the regulation of given call for proposals.
How to train the institution employees to implement new practice	Several meetings in terms of implementing new practice

EXAMPLE:

Call for proposal number in Operational Programme Innovative Economy, ERDF.

All the rules of carrying out this call for proposals which was divided into rounds were set out in the regulations for the given call for proposals. The regulations provided, in the area of introducing rounds, especially information about the:

- number of rounds in the call for proposals (7), which was useful for the potential applicants because they could plan flexibly when to submit an application and they knew it in advance
- start and end date of call for proposals for each round:
    - 20 March 2019 – 20 May 2019,
    - 21 May 2019 – 21 July 2019,
    - 22 July 2019 – 22 September 2019,
    - 23 September 2019 – 28 November 2019,
    - 29 November 2019 – 29 January 2020,
    - 30 January 2020 – 31 March 2020,
    - 31 March 2020 – 30 June 2020
- possibilities and rules of second submission of the same application in the next round (during the call for proposals only one application can be submitted by the Applicant but he can withdraw his application anytime and submit the application in the next round.)
- rules for selection of projects after every round

There were 22 applications submitted in the first round, 7 in second round, 11 in third round, 5 in fourth round, 5 in fifth round, 1 in sixth round and 6 in seventh round.

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

1. The increase of the effectiveness and efficiency of projects selection procedures
2. Reduction of costs in terms of preparing very similar calls for proposals
3. Reduction of time-consuming procedures in the area of preparing documentation for call for proposals, because there is one announcement and one regulation for a given call for proposals.
4. Better pro-applicant approach because they can plan flexibly when to submit an application, there is not only one set period during competition for applying and applicants know that in advance
5. Acceleration of contracting projects. Institutions don’t have to wait until the end of the assessment of all submitted projects.
6. Projects assessed negatively still have a chance to be selected within the next rounds if they are corrected properly and submitted in the next round
7. Mechanism is very flexible for institutions

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do's and don'ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States <u>in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes</u>.

First of all, introduction of rounds into call for proposals is very useful if there is much allocation for distribution for similar types of beneficiaries or in the similar areas or with the similar rules. For example in Poland many calls for proposals with rounds are organised for entrepreneurs. This is very good and useful practice, both from applicant point of view (more flexibility in planning) and from institutional point of view (reduction of costs and time-consuming procedures) What is important is to guarantee that the timetable of call for proposals takes into account that single call for proposal is divided into rounds, and that it indicates the number of rounds and allocation for each of them and of course start and end date of the call. What is also important is the Human Factor, that is why in Poland were organised several meetings and trainings with institutional employees in terms of how to use this mechanism. They began already during legislative process. Last but not least very important is to leave the flexibility for institutions. Decision in the field of carrying out a call for proposals in rounds can depend on many conditions, especially on specific of given call for proposals or type of the support provided. What is more, dividing call for proposals into rounds can be useful when the support must be delivered to beneficiaries quickly or the institution want to avoid cumulation of submitting applications.

10. PORTUGAL - I

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.

In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working before the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*:*

Developed by ADC for the following OPs:

Competitiveness and Internationalization OP (POCI)
Sustainability and Efficient Use of Resources OP (PO SEUR)
North Regional OP (PO NORTE)
Center Regional OP (PO CENTRO)
Lisbon Regional OP (PO LISBOA)
Alentejo Regional OP (PO ALT20)
Algarve Regional OP (PO ALG)
Autonomous Region of the Azores OP (PO ACORES)
Autonomous Region of Madeira OP (PO M1420)
Technical Assistance OP (POAT)

The practice “Balcão 2020”, which is the Single Access Point to the ESIF and is used by all PT 2020 Managing Authorities, was developed and works under the responsibility of ADC as responsible for the technical coordination of the ESIF in Portugal. ADC also ensures the functions of monitoring and evaluation, payments and certification and has delegated functions by the National Audit Authority.

Balcão 2020 is the single access point for all beneficiaries that wish to apply for finance support. It also provides information on the available funding and useful information on the submission of applications and beneficiaries can monitoring their projects in all phases.

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented

At the end of the 2007-2014 Programming period, it was identified by several ESIF stakeholders that a Centralized Database on beneficiaries would constitute a significant improvement in the architecture of the IT Systems at that time (each MA had its own, independent, with periodic reporting of information to the ERDF/FC Funds Coordination and Certification Authority IFDR).

With the transition to PT2020, this orientation was reflected in the Partnership Agreement:

- A single database of promoters (BUP): storage, on a single basis, of all information available in the public administration about the beneficiary, significantly reducing - in addition to the exercise of the advisory function - the administrative burden on the promoters.

The ADC, created in 2014, ensured the implementation of Balcão 2020 based on the guidelines of the Partner Agreement and the fulfillment of the e-Cohesion Initiative.

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale:

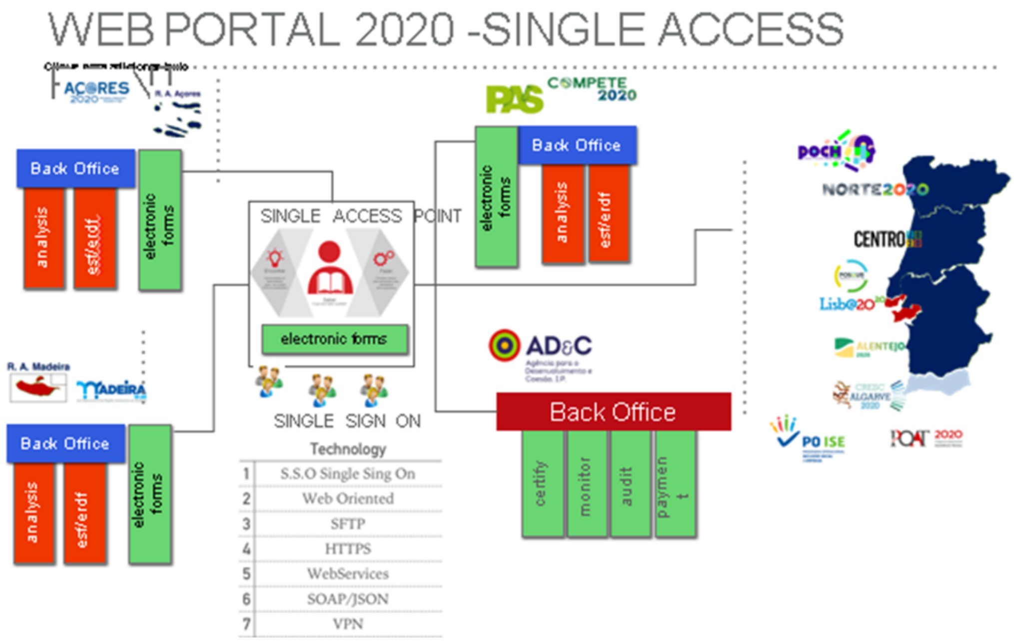
A set of services are available at Balcão 2020 to all ESIF Managing Authorities for the purpose of consultation of centralized information:

- Identification and characterization of beneficiaries: Declared by itself, complemented, and updated with information from several Public Administration entities that have relevant information for the entire ecosystem of the Funds.
- Calls for Proposals identification and characterization.
- User accreditation and access to the various information and project management systems.

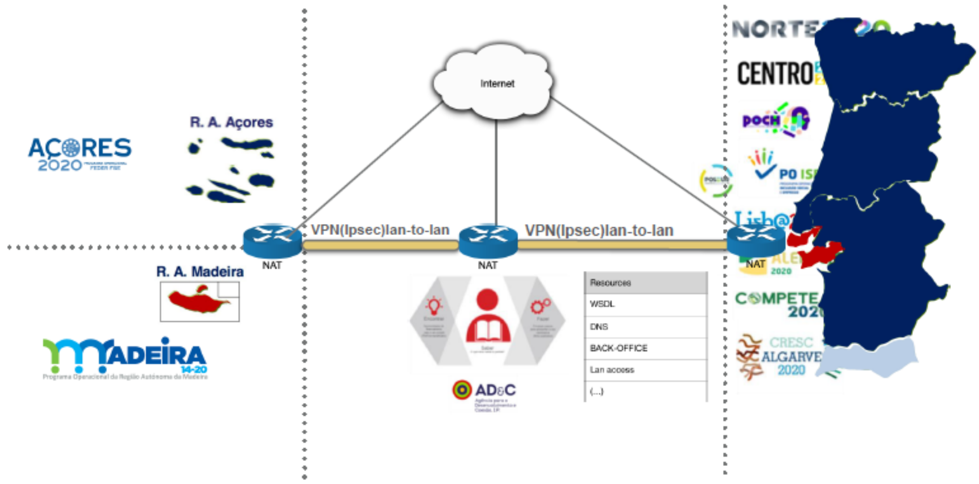
The main features of Balcão 2020 are as follows:

1. It constitutes a **single access point**, with only an authentication (***Single Sign On***): Registration and authentication at the Balcão 2020 is done only once by the beneficiary, before applying and it will not be repeated during the 2014-2020 programing period
2. Integrates a **Unique Database of Beneficiaries**: All entities wishing to access the ESIF register on one platform
3. Enables **interoperability** between different Public Administration systems for the collection of data from the Entities' Single Database:
   - Registration of beneficiaries (IRN): Notary data on entities
   - Verification of the regularized tax situation with the Tax Authority (AT)
   - Registration data information with the Tax Authority (AT): VAT regime, IR Termination Date;
   - Verification of the contributory situation of regularized social security Social Security (ISS)
   - Proof of the quality of SME (IAPMEI).
4. The possibility of interoperability constitutes a decisive element for the implementation of the ***only once*** principle with the use of data from the beneficiaries in the various applications of PT2020.
5. **Single point of publication of PT2020 Calls for Proposals** and dissemination of published notices, within the period for the applications submission
6. **"Conta Corrente"** beneficiary access point to its applications containing a summary set of financial status and values.
7. **Support** service for beneficiaries
   Centralized support system for presenting issues within the scope of the Balcão 2020 and applications in its different phases; allowing articulation between ADC, MA/IB and

Beneficiaries.



HOW THEY WORK WITH PT 2020 - BALCÃO 2020



II.2 Specific objectives

- Avoid repeated requests for the same information to beneficiaries
- Provide a set of reliable and updated information, from the national entities responsible for it, necessary to prove the eligibility criteria of the beneficiaries
- Inform and advice the beneficiaries to the Calls for Proposals that suited best to their legal nature, type of economic activity or projects location.
- Streamline application processes
- Reduce the time spent filling out application forms
- Make it possible to monitor the applications submitted by the beneficiaries
- Centralize technical support to clarify issues related to ESIF support and access and use of Information

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:

- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*
- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	Diagnosis		ADC
2	Implementation until the 1st production version becomes available	4 months	ADC, AT (Tax Authority); IRN (Notary data on entities)
3	Interoperability with IT system from the MAs	6 months	ADC, MA
4	Support and Technical Support System	6 months	ADC, MA

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
Interoperability with Public Administration entities	Regulation that allows interoperability between Public Administration entities.
System performance in high demand situations	Architecture, technical design of the system and infrastructure technology appropriate to the high performance required.
Establishment and maintenance of a shared knowledge base for support and technical support	Define methodologies and tools. Involve the different stakeholders in the process (ADC, MA, IB).

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

- Increase in the quality of the data collected;
- Increase in the efficiency and effectiveness of the application submission process, due to the decrease in the time spent by beneficiaries in filling out the forms, since some of the information is already pre-filled with data collected from official sources (application of the "only once" principle);
- Greater automation of application analysis processes by directly incorporating information obtained from pre-existing external opinions in the information system
- Increased efficiency and effectiveness in data analysis, as there is no need for

validation of data collected from external sources.

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do's and don'ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes.

- Strong leadership
- Institutional support discussion with the involvement of several ministries
- Definition of objectives to achieve and development strategy
- Integration of Management Authorities in the process of implementing support and technical support
- Clear and simple communication, strong commitment to good system usability.
- Ensuring adequate system performance even in periods of high demand

The future in preparation

In a first phase, the current "Balcão 2020" will evolve in the following macro points:

- Single access thru "Balcão 2020" to other systems, including access via the Digital Mobile Key in a transversal way to the programming periods and to the Funds;
- Dashboard contextualized and enriched with information from calls for proposals and Beneficiaries Current Account (information in aggregate form of the programming periods);
- Centralized Data Base of entities, with interoperability with other public entities, like IRN, ISS, AT, IAPMEI, will be enriched by interoperability with the OCC, and inclusion of information related to CASES and DGERT;
- Mobile app with access to the main features;
- New graphic image;
- Adequacy of Usability and Accessibility taking into account the best practices on websites and mobile applications, in accordance with the following portal - Seal of Usability and Accessibility[2].

We also intent to promote:

- Integration of "Balcão2020" with SPNE (SPNE: Public Service of Electronic Notifications), associated with the MUD (Unique Digital Address), simultaneously providing a common area of documents / notifications from and to beneficiaries;
- Integration with the SCAP (Professional Attributes Certification System), which allows authentication and professional signature;
- Registration of Public Procurement Data Bases, interoperability with ESPAP and IMPC;
- Interoperability with fiscal Simplified Business Information;
- Reinforcement of interoperability (see table below) with other Public Administration

[2] The Usability and Accessibility Seal identifies and promotes the application of best practices on websites and mobile applications. The initiative, developed by the Agency for Administrative Modernization and the National Institute for Rehabilitation, aims to simplify and make more efficient the use of public online services by citizens, namely those who need to use assistive technologies.

Bodies, which have an impact / benefits on the processes, streamlining access to existing information and prevent fraud and double financing.

Entities	**Interoperability**
AMA (Agency for Administrative Modernization)	Document Bag Citizen Card Information IAP Services Integration with ePortugal l
AT (Tax Authority)	Registration Information (More information) E-Invoice Coercive Collection Information (Payments, Collection Record Detail Information)
SS (National Public Social Security Institute)	NIF / NISS validation Employability Situation
IEFP (Public Employment Service)	Situation in relation to employment Starting date of unemployment
IRN (Institute of Registries and Notaries)	FCPC (additional information)
IGFEJ (Institute of Financial Management and Justice Equipment)	Registration of the Beneficiary
CASES (CASES - Cooperativa António Sérgio para a Economia Social)	CASES certificates
DGERT (General Directorate for Employment and Labor Relations)	Training Areas
Ministério da Justiça (Justice Ministry)	Insolvencies and PER
APA (Public Environment Agency)	Licensing Information
INE (National Public Statistics Institute)	Institutional Sector
DGEEC (Directorate-General for Education and Science Statistics)	SIGO
ICNF (Institute for the Conservation of Nature and Forests (ICNF, I.P.))	Licensing Information
IGCP (Treasury and Public Debt Management Agency)	Validation of binomial NIF / IBAN Date-Value Information Payment
ANQEP (National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education, I.P.)	CNQ - National Qualifications Catalog
DGAL (General Directorate of Local Administration)	Local Government data relevant to the Funds
DGT (General Directorate of the Territory)	Georeferencing (additional information)
IAPMEI (Agency for Competitiveness and Innovation (IAPMEI)	SME Classification (Additional information)
DGEG (General Directorate of Energy and Geology)	Relevant data for the Funds
ERSAR (Entidade Reguladora dos Serviços de Águas e Resíduos)	Relevant data for the Funds

11. PORTUGAL - II

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.

In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working <u>before</u> the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*:*

Developed by ADC for all public projects under ERDF/CF OPs

North Regional Operational Programme (PO NORTE)
Center Regional Operational Programme (PO CENTRO)
Lisbon Regional Operational Programme (PO LISBOA)
Alentejo Regional Operational Programme (PO ALT20)
Algarve Regional Operational Programme (PO ALG)
Technical Assistance Operational Programme (POAT)

The availability for all FEDER/FC MA of a Single Form for the different moments of interaction with the beneficiary, intended to standardize concepts and facilitate the entire application process, execution and monitoring of the operation.

For each of these moments (application, payment request, execution report, rescheduling of the operation) only exists.an unique form for data and information.

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented

This initiative started with intense participation from the MAs throughout 2013, still during the final period of the National Strategic Reference Frameworks (NSRF).

It resulted from the difficulty registered by the beneficiaries in filling out different forms for the same purpose, as they related to different MAs.

In the preparatory meetings for the forms consolidation it was been concluded that the concepts behind each field of the form were often not a consensual matter among all MAs.

The result of the standardization exercise on forms also led to a harmonization of procedures and processes in the MAs.

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale:

The main characteristics of the Single Form are:

1. Organization by section according to the theme, in a step-by-step filling sequence, with validations in each step and global validation at the time of submission
2. Pre-filling, whenever possible, with information already collected and compiled in

the IT system, namely information on the beneficiary and on the call for proposals as recorded in the Balcão 2020, and the implementation information, namely charts with the approved and executed amounts in the operation.

3. During the course of PT2020, the possibility of collecting elements of geo referencing of the operation was been added to the application form.

4. Access to filling out the form is available to users accredited by the beneficiary with the technical profile, requiring a profile with super user responsibility for the moment of submission. The identification of these users is nominal.

Fulfilling these characteristics, we wanted to achieve the objective of collecting updated, truthful and consistent data, with a high level of security and responsibility.

II.2 Specific objectives

- Provide a set of reliable and updated information, from the national entities responsible for it, necessary to prove the eligibility criteria of the beneficiaries
- Streamline all beneficiary intervention processes
- Reduce times when filling out forms
- Promote data quality
- Ensure a level of security and accountability in the registry

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:

- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*
- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	Diagnosis - identification of the needs for harmonization and improvement in the data recognition process	During the previous NSRF	ADC
2	Identification and harmonization of forms	8 to 12 months	ADC and MAs
3	Implementation - Tests	8 to 12 months Production of support document	ADC and MAs

4	Implementation - Corrective and evolutionary post-production maintenance	Still in process	ADC and MAs
5	Development of support documents	2-3 months	MAs (occasionally with ADC)

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
Clear definition of concepts	Involvement of MAs and ADC in several open meetings to define the data to be collected in each type of form and to share the experience of using that same data. These meetings contributed to clarify the concepts and to harmonize the procedures and processes related to the operations life cycle.
Different procedures between MAs	The sharing and joint analysis of these different procedures allowed for some harmonization and generalized the same practices to similar situations.
Management of basic documentation and update and compilation circuits	Use of collaborative work tools in editing documents such as Google Docs.
Operationalization of application tests	Test environment available to all interlocutors (ADC and MAs) in order to make possible for everyone to participate.
Available Data for testing	Production data available for testing in order to optimize the testing of forms with data and information already compiled.

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

- Increase the quality of the data collected.
- Increased efficiency and effectiveness in data analysis, as there is no need for validation of data collected from external sources.
- Familiarization of beneficiaries with the form.
- Harmonization of GA procedural procedures.
- Easier communication and production of documentation to support the form.

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do's and don'ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States <u>in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes</u>.

- Strong leadership
- Well-defined organizational structure and responsibilities
- Appropriate collaborative work methodologies and tools.
- Definition of the objectives to be achieved and good communication of the implementation strategy and its benefits for all.
- Integration of Management Authorities in the design and development process from the beginning.
- Available to listen, share, understand, analyze and consolidate best practices with a view to simplification (for beneficiaries but also for back office technicians.
- Ability to monitor and follow the adequacy of the form throughout the programming period, in order to improve and adapt according to the evolution of the typologies or type of beneficiaries.
- Promote simple and clear communication.

12. PORTUGAL - III

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.
In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working before the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*:*
POCI – Thematic Operational Program for Competitiveness and Internationalization (COMPETE 2020)

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented

It was necessary to implement a mechanism for collecting technical advices by the Banks involved in the financing of the projects. A solution for collecting external information has been first implemented within the scope of an I&D call for proposal and after applied to all calls, when needed.

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale:
Simplification of operations' selection processes.

II.2 Specific objectives

Collection of external technical advices, namely by Banks, needed for the analysis of the applications in order to:

- Streamline application processes
- Reduced time of operations selection

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:

- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*
- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	Development of a matrix to collect the technical advices of stakeholders external to the organization		The COMPETE 2020 Managing Authority had developed the IT solutions necessary to create the links between evaluation forms and registered banking institutions

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
Implementation of links with Banks to collect beneficiaries risk analysis, thus avoiding the need for beneficiaries to have to provide this information.	

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

- Increased automation of application analysis processes by directly incorporating in the IT system data obtained from pre-existing external technical advice.
- Increased efficiency and effectiveness of the selection process.

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do's and don'ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes.

The implementation of direct data collection channels from stakeholders involved in the processes necessary for the analysis of applications, allows to increase the efficiency of the analysis process by formatting the information and proceeding to its treatment and integration in the remaining analysis tools, with direct results in the optimization evaluation time required for each project.

Internally, the challenges are related to the necessary developments in the information systems, and to the time needed to adjust human resources to the new functionalities, so efficient communication should be privileged.

13. ROMANIA

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.

In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working before the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*:*
Competitiveness Operational Programme, Human Capital Operational Programme, Regional Operational Programme

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented

All documents sent on paper or partially in the IT system and partially on paper.

Duplication of checks – same documents checked when evaluating the project and before signing the financing contract.

Burden on applicants – same documents required when submitting the project and before signing the financing contract

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale:
Within the working groups established for the simplification exercise at national level, the analysis highlighted the need to avoid duplication of documents submitted to the managing authority/intermediate body. Also, one main outcome of the analysis was that some documents were still sent on paper

II.2 Specific objectives

- Digitalisation
- Simplification of the submission process of a project
- Simplification of checks, especially in reducing the allocated time

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:

- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*

- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	Working groups to establish needs analysis for simplification	8	MA's, IB's, coordination unit
2	Note describing the simplification measures	2	Coordination unit
3	Prioritisation of the simplification measures identified (meetings and minutes)	2-4	MA's, IB's, coordination unit, COM
4	Implementing the practice	12	MA's, IB's
5	Follow-up on the practice	2	Coordination unit

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
MA's express interest in adopting the measures, but lag behind with their implementation	Constant follow-up
Adoption level of digitalisation measures at the MA's may not be sufficient	Decision to promote a normative act in order to make it applicable to all stakeholders

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

For the digitalisation a normative act was adopted (Governmental Emergency Ordinance). The added-value is that all documents are sent exclusively in electronic format. In addition, some documents are checked using institutional databases, thus there is no longer a need to request those documents from the applicants.

For the avoidance of duplication of the documents requested, the coordination unit followed-up twice with the MA's in order to make sure the practice was actually implemented by all the actors. The added value is that the applicants only send documents once.

For the evaluation process, procedures were updated and, as added-value, the process is less lengthy.

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do's and don'ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes.

The simplification exercise will require time and constant dialogue with all the stakeholders involved.

Deadlines should be permissive enough to accommodate eventual delays in the implementation of the simplification measures.

14. SLOVENIA

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.

In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working before the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed:
Operational Programme for the Implementation of the European Cohesion Policy in the 2014-2020 period (national programme for ERDF, CF and ESF)

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented

The procedures for selection of operations had the same legal basis (Public Finance Act) regardless of the value of an operation. So in many cases the selection procedures in the field of supporting SMEs (especially micro enterprises) have been too complex for simple operations with no significant grant value (under 10.000 EUR). Normally project proposals with all the necessary supporting documents were submitted in paper version, because preparing IT system for electronic application for each measure would be too complicated. Therefore, beneficiaries had to put a lot of effort in preparing the applications and payment claims, instead of concentrating on the implementation of operations. Also on the side of institutions which were granting aids (usually for high number of applications) these procedures were quite big administrative burden. So consequently it took much more time from publishing the call to finish the operations.

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale:
Ministry of economy prepared the amendment of national act on support environment for entrepreneurship to simplify selection procedures for the operations under 10.000 EUR of grant (state aid or de-minimis aid). The amended act was adopted in 2017 and Ministry of economy had a legal basis to simplify the selection procedures for specific calls. The major simplification is that in the process of selection for operations under 10.000 EUR only the eligibility criteria may be checked. This has been approved by Monitoring committee (in line with article 110.2.(a) 1303/2013) even before the adoption of law. Because there is no further assessment on the basis of selection criteria, IT systems for electronic submission of proposals can be developed in shorter time. These IT systems can automatically check many of eligibility criteria in national databases, which significantly reduces administrative burden at IBs and speed up grant decision process.

II.2 Specific objectives

- Simplification of selection procedures
- Reduce administrative burden
- Enable electronic application
- Automatic e-check of eligibility criteria
- Speed-up selection process

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:
- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*
- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	Preparation and adoption of amended national act (Support Environment for Entrepreneurship Act)	12 months	Ministry of economy (IB) and all other bodies, (including MA) that are involved in approving the national laws (government office of legislation)
2	Development of IT system for electronic submission of proposals (process analysis, specification and programming)	6 – 12 months	Public body (IB, agency, public fund) that prepares and publishes calls for proposals
3	Adjustment of IT system for various measures	1 – 2 months	Public body (IB, agency, public fund) that prepares and publishes calls for proposals
4	Selection procedure and automatic draft of grant agreements	1 – 2 months	Public body (IB, agency, public fund) that prepares and publishes calls for proposals

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
Harmonization of the IT system with the legal bases	Use of appropriate e-signatures
Coordination with Government Office of Legislation took a lot of time	Many explanations and meetings lead to compromise text of act

Interface with other public databases (financial administration office, Slovenian business register agency)	Integration of interfaces in IT systems for selection
Including the entrepreneurship supportive environment into the selection process	Reduces administrative burden at bodies that are granting the aid and at beneficiaries

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

- Less administrative burden for public authorities and beneficiaries
- Much faster selection process (1-2 month(s) instead of 6 or more months) and better implementation of operations
- Lower error rate in selection process
- Accessibility of audit trail documents (everything is online).
- More result-oriented management of EU funds
- Reduced costs at beneficiaries

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do's and don'ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes.

We found it worth to invest more time when preparing calls – to include information about the potential applicants that can be found in existing databases and focus on adjustment of IT system in a way that allows automatic check of as much data as possible.

We would suggest that in the process of planning the simplifications like IT system for electronic application you should put a lot of effort in analysis of processes, which should be clearly defined. We should have clear picture, what the final solution should provide and analyse what the market can offer. Sometimes you should follow the rule “less is more”.

According to our experiences simplifications normally take more time than planned, so we suggest to start with all the actions early enough to have the results within expected timeframe and that the result is really simplification.

15. INTERACT - I

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.

In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working before the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed:

Interreg programmes

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented

Different rules, templates and terminology of different programmes for same potential beneficiaries.

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale:

To help applicants and to make the selection process leaner, faster and transparent.

II.2 Specific objectives

- Applying the same rules, templates and terminology across programmes, allows beneficiaries to not learn everything again for different programmes. It saves time and resources and can attract new applicants.
- On programme side it helps to save time and resources, too, because those things do not have to be created from scratch and the joint development helps to re-think existing rules, templates and language. Plus, less advanced programmes can learn and benefit from more experienced programmes, which helps to reduce the risk of errors.
- Technical improvements of application forms, with automatization and standardised fields.;
- To avoid unnecessary information in the application form (e.g. all information in the application form should be exclusively based on the regulatory requirements, all the information should be needed for the assessment of the application and the potential monitoring later on – if the information in the application form is not used at any stage of the project implementation it should not be asked).
- To establish harmonised and standardised assessment criteria, published and available for beneficiaries in advance. This can help applicants to have a form of self-

assessment and the MA to work in a transparent way.

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:

- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*
- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	Interact together with Interreg practitioners established an integrated package of templates and tools to support programmes throughout the entire project life cycle (harmonised application form, project progress report, management verification control report, etc.) – **HIT** (Harmonised Implementation Tool). The idea as such was born yet in 2009, started with fact sheets on budget category harmonisation (2010), the first HIT package published in 2012, and final in 2014. The HIT structure covers 'required', 'desired' and 'nice-to-have' practices. In 2015, 73 Interreg programmes used HIT tools. In 2018 – 24 programmes.		
2	In preparation for a new programming period, the work is continued. A HIT Core group (composed of Interreg programmes) had their first meeting in Dec 2018. Majority of the tools will be finalised until end in the end of 2021 (the application form and related documents already in 2020). Examples of the HIT outputs: - Budget category factsheets, application form (content and finance), application form for small project funds, application form for micro projects, administrative and eligibility checklists, quality assessment criteria, complaints procedure, subsidy contract, project partnership agreement, progress report templates …	*26-52 weeks*	MA (feedback loop with other stakeholders, e.g. monitoring/steering committee, beneficiaries recommended)

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
Adjustment of the tools to programme specificities	Reduce specificities, avoid gold plating, simplification
National legislation	Avoid adding additional rules, distinguish between what is a must and what is good to have
Lack of ownership (difficulties to convince programme stakeholders to use HIT); not involved programmes were afraid of change and did not understand the process, lack of trust	Transparency of the process, timely communication (from the start) HIT is a safe and tested package (not starting from scratch for the next period but building on what was already developed). Early involvement of relevant stakeholders (MAs, AAs)
Difference between wanting change and actually changing. Most programmes are sure that their way is the “right” way.	Working in groups, identifying good and bad practices (what worked objectively well, what not), finding consensus and compromises.

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

Harmonised tools:

- Helped to create an Interreg brand identity,
- Is based on good practices from across the community of Interreg programmes,
- Assures that programmes are using implementation tools in line with regulations.
- Saved staff resources as programmes didn’t need to develop own implementation tools,
- Simplify procedures,
- Simplified work for control and audit bodies working with multiple programmes,
- Made life easier for applicants working with different Interreg programmes,
- Provided the basis for development of the common monitoring system (eMS in the 2014-2020 programming period and a new monitoring system, Jems, which is currently under development for the 2021-2027 programming period

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do’s and don’ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes.

Selection of operations is a key step with a view to fairness & transparency. And the process has shown that the harmonised implementation tools have significantly contributed to this.

Joint development → positive impact on ownership and application.

Change of mind-set (“my programme is maybe not so special”).

Significant reduction of required resources in the development of templates and corresponding IT-systems.

16. INTERACT - II

I. Background of the simplification practice and key issues addressed

Please describe, in brief, the background of the simplification practice, designed and implemented to reduce the administrative costs and burden around the selection of operations.

In particular, please provide information on:

- *The ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*
- *The key issues/problems around the selection of operations which had induced the authorities to develop the practice (i.e. how was the selection of operation working* ***before*** *the practice was implemented)*

I.1 ERDF/CF Operational Programme(s) under which the practice was developed*:*

Interreg Programmes

I.2 Key issues/problems around selection of operations before the practice was implemented

Too long application process (& too low quality of application) (from the time of the call announcement to the moment of communicating selection results to the applicants).

II. Rationale and specific objectives

With reference to the key issues/problems reported in the previous section, please indicate the rationale and specific objectives of the simplification practice.

II.1 Rationale:

It's actually a set of smaller practices, which helps to speed up the time needed between submission of applications & approval/rejection and also contribute to avoid irrelevant and too poor-quality applications.

Background is that in many Interreg programmes, the time between submission and decision on applications can take up to 12 months. This is often caused by two factors: The assessment process in itself is too complicated, but also because too many (irrelevant) applications are received.

This often leads to frustration on MA and applicant side. But very often also to new realities on project side and from the beginning of the implementation the original application and activities have to be changed.

II.2 Specific objectives

- To speed up the application process and improve the quality of applications
  - allowing faster start of implementation (also good for decommitment and cash flow)
  - avoiding changes at the beginning of the project
  - create more transparency
  - avoiding irrelevant applications

III. Key steps of the practice

Please describe how the practice was carried out (from the starting point to present date), providing, for each key step involved in the design and implementation of the practice, the following information:

- *What activities were implemented and how (contents and timing)?*
- *What authorities and stakeholders (e.g. MA/IB/AA/beneficiaries) were involved and what was their role/contribution in developing the practice?*

Please include also the activities carried out in the preliminary/preparatory phases of the practice (e.g. design of the call for proposal, (re)definition of the selection criteria).

Steps	Description on the activities carried out within each step	Timing (approx. number of weeks to complete the step)	Authorities/stakeholders involved and respective roles/contributions
1	Go fully electronic: - All exchanges (submission of application & additional documents) to be done via web-based systems. - Use standardised templates, across calls for proposals, but also across programmes (if possible) - Only ask REALLY relevant information (strictly limited to Regulation) and additional documents to be submitted - Use automatic functions (e.g. cumulative information (events) and automatic calculation (budget), automatic checks & error messages if information is missing or not coherent) and single entry approach to avoid errors.	N/A	Applicants & MA
2	Clear assignment of responsibilities in the assessment procedure, including decision making, - Publish assessment criteria with call for proposals. Provide final assessment conclusions to projects, should be in narrative form (do not “hide” behind scores) - 4-eye principle without repeating the work, one person doing the assessment, one person checking consistency & coherence of assessment and only key aspects of the application, - Clear & transparent rules for monitoring/steering committee to increase efficiency in approval process. To ensure that the right decisions are taken at the right level (see next point) - To work with approval under conditions, with the MA having the discretion to decide the final approval, after the applicant makes necessary changes to the application (conditions to be formulated at assessment stage)		MA & monitoring/steering committee
3	Separate strategic and operational assessment. - Differentiate between strategic (achieving the objective of programme) criteria and operational (can it be done with the activities/budget proposed?) criteria - Start with strategic assessment		MA

	- Only projects passing the threshold for potential approval with the strategic criteria should be assessed under operational aspects. Saves significant time. No resources wasted on assessing irrelevant applications.		
4	Self-assessment tool for applicants, based on assessment criteria. This helps applicants to check if they are complying with the relevant rules before submission. Helps to increase the quality of applications and to avoid irrelevant applications		Applicants & MA
5	Self-assessment tool for potential applicants. Helps to encourage applicants to apply and to avoid irrelevant applicants. Should be integrated in the IT system and can be linked to availability of the application, e.g. only if X questions are answered with yes – the application form is available.		Applicants & MA
6	Use plain and simple language – nothing is more discouraging than EU slang for non-EU professionals. Get external communication help.		MA
7	Simplify the contractual procedure. If signatures from both MA and beneficiary are required, use a static grant agreement, meaning to not include in the contract any parts of the project which could change. Those should simply be annexed. In the contract the annexes are referenced as “latest approved version”, which allows that only the annexes are touched during implementation.		Beneficiary & MA

IV. Problems/challenges and solutions

Please provide a brief description of the main challenges/problems you have addressed in developing the practice as well as of the solutions you have found to overcome them.

Challenges/problems	Solutions
Receiving to many irrelevant and poor applications, which eat to many resources on MA side and lead to frustration on applicants’ side. And contributes to too long application processes, overall (between submission & approval)	Self-assessments tools (before starting the application, before submitting the application), electronic-web-based application forms with single entry approach and automatic checks, first strategic and if good enough operational assessment.
Untransparent procedures and decision making	Establishing and publishing assessment criteria and decision making. Establishing clear rules of procedures, which allow efficient and timely decision making (what should be decided at MA level and what at monitoring/steering committee level).
Addressing problems with the application ex-ante (and not trying to solve issues known at the application stage during the implementation of the project).	Using conditions & clarifications before final approval.

Poor communication due to EU slang	Use communication experts to use plain and straight forward language towards applicants.

V. Outcomes and added value

Please describe the key outcomes and added value of the practice, in terms of simplification / reduction of administrative costs and burden, for ERDF/CF authorities and stakeholders (including beneficiaries).

All of the approaches mentioned above have helped to save time and money. Furthermore, they also helped to reduce frustration on applicant and MA side.

VI. Conclusions: lessons learned and recommendations

What lessons have you learned and what recommendations (do's and don'ts) would you share with your colleagues from other Member States <u>in the view of transferring/replicating the practice under their Operational Programmes</u>.

When it comes to assessment of operations, all persons involved in assessment and selection underpin all decisions with arguments (i.e., no hiding behind scores, behind blurry 'bulk decisions').

To sum up, we'd like to see selection process technically simple and transparent, but well governed.