



Ensuring the Visibility of Cohesion Policy: Information and Communication Rules 2014-2020

COHESION POLICY 2014-2020

The new rules and legislation governing the next round of EU Cohesion Policy investment for 2014-2020 have been formally endorsed by the Council of the European Union in December 2013.

This factsheet is one in a series highlighting key elements of the new approach.

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Why communicate?

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Cohesion policy is the most important investment vehicle of the European Union (EUR 351.8 billion proposed for the period 2014-2020) to achieve the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy ⁽¹⁾. Providing information and communicating on the aims, funding opportunities and results of cohesion policy programmes and projects is therefore a key task for the Managing Authorities and the beneficiaries in the Member States by addressing questions such as:

- » What investment opportunities exist?

- » How does a beneficiary go about tackling publicity issues?

- » Who is being funded and for what purpose?

Informing potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities is a crucial part of programme management. In order to ensure that cohesion policy invests in the most relevant and innovative projects, the widest possible audience of potential beneficiaries needs to be informed. This happens not only by highlighting the investment opportunities, but also by showcasing the results achieved. The Managing Authorities, together with project beneficiaries, have to demonstrate to the region's citizens as well as to the media and politicians at all levels, the results of these investments. Taxpayers within the EU have the right to know how their money is spent.

As a positive side effect, EU cohesion policy can contribute to strengthening public support for the European Union as a whole, by highlighting the positive impact that the many projects have in each of the 274 regions across the Union.

What has been adopted?

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The information and communication rules in the proposed regulation for 2014-2020 are the outcome of intensive consultation and discussion with the cohesion policy communication officers from the 28 Member States (INFORM and INIO networks) in order to ensure that the communication rules are practical and relevant.

Articles 115-117 and Annex XII of the regulation ⁽²⁾ are largely a continuation of existing practices. In some areas, such as transparency and accessibility of information, improvements have been achieved:

- » by including clearer requirements for the publication of information on projects and beneficiaries in the 'list of operations' ⁽³⁾; and

- » by requiring a single cohesion policy website or portal in any given Member State.

Moreover, a number of elements were simplified and responsibilities were clarified

(1) http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

(2) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0320:0469:EN:PDF>

(3) http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/country/commu/beneficiaries/index_en.htm

The main elements of the new information and communication rules:

- » A seven-year communication strategy (plus yearly action plans to be adopted annually by the Monitoring Committee), for which formal Commission approval is no longer needed;
- » Single website (or portal) for all EU cohesion policy programmes in a Member State;
- » List of operations with clearer, more informative and comparable data.

Clearer definition of the responsibilities of the Managing Authority, which has to ensure:

- » that information and communication measures are implemented in line with the communication strategy;
- » that activities receive the widest possible media coverage, using various forms of communication;
- » that a programme launch event/annual major information activity is organised;
- » that the EU flag is displayed at Managing Authority premises;
- » that the list of operations is published and updated at least every 6 months;
- » that examples of projects are posted on the web also in an alternative widely-spoken EU official language other than the official language(s) of the Member State;
- » that updated information about programme implementation is published, including main achievements; and
- » that information and publicity kits (also in electronic format) are provided to beneficiaries (Annex XII, 3.2.2).

The main responsibilities of the beneficiaries include:

- » Any communication activity has to acknowledge support from the Funds by displaying the EU emblem, with a reference to the EU and the specific Fund(s);

- » Information about the project has to be provided on the beneficiary's website, including a short description of the aims and results, and highlighting the support received from the EU; » Upon request of the Managing Authority, communication activities have to be described already at the project application stage (Annex XII, 3.1.2 e);
- » Placing at least one poster with information about the project 'at a location readily visible to the public';
- » For European Social Fund (ESF) operations and other educational projects supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) or the Cohesion Fund, the beneficiary shall inform participants of this funding;
- » A billboard or permanent plaque shall be displayed for ERDF/CF infrastructure/construction operations receiving above EUR 500 000 of public funding.

What are the main differences compared to 2007-2013?

The proposed rules were drafted to achieve greater flexibility, to simplify certain processes and clarify some responsibilities of the Managing Authority and the project beneficiary.

Simplification

Communication strategy with annual updates: The document setting out the approach and the budget for the communication activities of a programme will be called the 'communication strategy' ⁽⁴⁾. This document no longer requires the formal approval of the Commission, thereby increasing ownership of the communication strategy, for which the Managing Authority (or the Member State) and the Monitoring Committee have to take full responsibility.

While there is no longer an obligation to report on information and communication activities in the Annual Implementation Report – apart from 2017 and 2019 – systematic reporting and review of the communication activities is foreseen on an annual basis in the Monitoring Committee meeting. At the same meeting, a communication activity plan for the following year shall be adopted.

Communication rules integrated in the main Regulation: The information and communication rules receive better visibility as they are laid down as part of the Regulation adopted by the European Parliament and the Council and not, as was the case for the period 2007-2013, in a Commission Implementing Act.

Easier financial management of multi-Fund communication activities: More and more Member States have recognised the advantages of pooling resources when communicating about EU cohesion policy. However, while the joint financing of, for example, joint ESF and ERDF communication campaigns is currently possible, this is difficult from a financial management point of view as costs have to be allocated to the respective technical assistance budget of the participating Funds. In future, each of the Funds may finance technical assistance operations eligible

under any of the other Funds (Article 119 of the EU regulation 1303/2013). This provides greater financial flexibility.

Increased transparency

Single cohesion policy website or portal: This is proposed in order to facilitate access to information about cohesion policy in a Member State. Rather than having to search for the different Operational Programmes on the web, one website will inform about or provide links to all.

List of operations: The information about the beneficiary will now be complemented by information about the project content. In addition to the project title, a short project summary should be added.

Moreover, the data formats should be harmonised (XML or CSV) to allow for better comparability of the project and beneficiary data inside one programme, across different programmes or even Member States. The publication in PDF format is no longer allowed, as it does not allow the data to be sorted, ranked or otherwise grouped. 6-monthly updates are introduced as it is no longer acceptable to update the beneficiary data only once per year.

(4) In the programme period 2007-2013 only a communication plan was required, which was valid for seven years, unless formally changed in the Regulation. The procedure to amend the communication plan was ambiguous.

Clearer recognition of the role of the national information and communication officer:

The national information and communication officer has a clearly defined role as:

- » co-ordinator of the communication activities of one or more Funds;
- » co-ordinator of national communication network(s);
- » the person responsible for the maintenance of the national cohesion policy website/portal; »

the one responsible for providing an overview of communication measures taken at national level.

The Commission will continue facilitating the work of the communication networks whose members will exchange good communication practices and share results about the implementation of the communication strategies. Moreover, the Commission will complement the communication activities of the Member States and regions with its own communication activities according to its communication plan(s).

For more information

Communicating on cohesion policy:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/informing/index_en.cfm

Portals to lists of beneficiaries:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/country/commu/beneficiaries/index_en.htm

and

<http://ec.europa.eu/esf/home.jsp?langid=en>