



High Level Group on Monitoring Simplification for Beneficiaries of the ESI Funds

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Recent history of Simplification

- **Amendments to cohesion policy regulations for 2007-13** in response to the economic and financial crisis including introducing simplified costs for ERDF, changes to thresholds for major projects and eligibility from date of application, and 10% flexibility at closure.
- **Revision of the Financial Regulation** in 2013 including new provisions for shared management such as designation and annual accounts, and new rules for financial instruments.
- **New regulation (CPR)** for the 2014-20 period with a number of additional provisions for simplification and reduction of administrative burden.

Establishment of the High Level Group

The Commission set up the High Level Group of Independent Experts on Monitoring Simplification for Beneficiaries of the European Structural and Investment Funds on 10 July.

The Group is to advise the Commission on the simplification and reduction of administrative burden for beneficiaries of the Funds.

Tasks of the High Level Group

- Assess the uptake of simplification opportunities by Member States including Member States' commitments to reduce the administrative burden for beneficiaries as set out in their partnership agreements covering the ESI Funds for 2014-2020, taking into account the specificities of the different ESI Funds.
- Analyse the implementation of simplification opportunities in Member States and regions, taking account of a study on the use of new provisions on simplification during the early implementation phase of the ESI Funds and their impact on administrative burden and costs;
- Identify good practice in matters concerning the reduction of administrative burden on beneficiaries; and,
- Make recommendations to improve the uptake of simplification measures for 2014-2020, in particular in view of its mid-term review in 2016, and on the way forward for the post-2020 regulatory framework for the ESI Funds.



Chairperson

Siim Kallas

- extensive experience with how the EU works having worked two terms in the Barroso commission and familiar with the challenges of simplifying regulations at the European scale;
- an ex-Prime Minister and finance minister of a small and well-functioning country with an effective administration;
- a background in economics and finance and is currently a visiting professor at the University of Tartu;
- offer a fresh view on the possibilities of delivering the ESI Funds on the ground in a simpler manner.

Membership

- Around 320 applications were received following an open call from 10 July to 20 August.
- Selection process included a High Level Selection Panel (Directors-General and Deputy Directors-General of relevant ESIF DGs).
- The Group consists of 12 members and they are appointed in a personal capacity.

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/how/improving-investment/high-level-group-simplification/#1

First meeting of the High Level Group - 20 October 2015

➤ Panel 1: simplification from the perspective of the EU Institutions

Main messages focused on:

- *tackling the barriers to accessing funding caused by gold plating or overly strict national interpretation of national rules;*
- *risk averse authorities who lack confidence to use the new tools and simplification measures;*
- *proportionality in terms of control of the funds relative to both the amount of funding, geographical coverage and the objectives;*
- *preoccupation with compliance over results; and,*
- *the challenges of other EU rules such as public procurement and state aid in the context of the implementation of the funds.*

First meeting of the High Level Group - 20 October 2015

- Panel 2: simplification from the perspective of stakeholders

The main challenges identified were:

- *the lack of co-ordination between the ESI Funds and other EU funds such as Horizon 2020 which have a lighter touch approach in some case;*
- *Goldplating and the lack of trust between the different layers of management and control; and*
- *the conflict between results and compliance with the focus of many authorities on the control side, often as a result of Commission and ECA audit; and proportionality.*

Work Programme

1 December 2015	<u>Second meeting of high level group</u> (focus on e-governance and simplified costs)
2 February 2016	<u>Third meeting of high level group</u> (focus on access to funding for SMEs and financial instruments)
June 2016	<u>Fourth meeting of high level group</u> (focus on gold plating)
Nov/Dec 2016	<u>Fifth meeting of high level group</u> (focus on results of study on simplification and cross-cutting audit issues)
March 2017	<u>Sixth meeting of high level group</u> (focus on post 2020)
June 2017	<u>Seventh meeting of high level group</u> (focus on post 2020 and new territorial tools such as CLLD and ITI)
February 2018	<u>Eighth meeting of high level group</u> (final report)

Reports from the meetings

- A note of each meeting will be available on the webpage dedicated to the group.
- For each topic discussed, the rapporteur will present a conclusions and recommendations paper to the next meeting of the group for endorsement.
- The conclusions and recommendations papers will be available online once endorsed.
- There will be a final report to consolidate the rolling conclusions and recommendations papers.

How can I participate?

- The Commission has established an online platform for discussion on simplification for the ESI Funds
- The **Simplify ESIF** platform allows you to share your experiences, present your ideas, engage with other stakeholders, and help us reach a more effective and efficient management of the funds.

<https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/simplify-esif>