



# ***Simplification Report on the meetings of the High Level Group***

**EMFF expert group  
Brussels, 2 March, 2016**

# Background

1. 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.
2. Chairperson: Mr Siim KALLAS
3. The Group consists of 12 members
4. Information

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/how/improving-investment/high-level-group-simplification/#1](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/how/improving-investment/high-level-group-simplification/#1)

# Working method of the HLG

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

## First meeting of the High Level Group - 20 October 2015

### Panel 1: simplification - EU Institutions' perspective

- *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.*

### Panel 2: simplification – stakeholders' perspective

- *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*
- *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*



## Second meeting of the High Level Group - 1 December 2015

1. Presentation of the results of the **study on new provisions on the consideration given to administrative burden in programming documents.**
2. Evidence on **e-Governance**
  - Welsh European Funding Office,
  - Estonia and
  - Flanders.
3. Evidence on **simplified costs**
  - Danish Managing Authority,
  - Northern Ireland's ERDF Managing Authority,
  - Malta and
  - Canary Islands.

# E-Governance

- *Facilitate the possibility in the next period for Member States to have a **common platform or system across the ESI Funds** that would provide a consistent approach for beneficiaries to audit issues and information technology.*
- ***Reducing the number of programmes**, and therefore the number of different operating systems, would provide a significant streamlining in the management of the funds.*
- *A **more consistent approach to audit is needed and clarification on acceptability of electronic documents** for all funds and ensuring there is agreement from all relevant audit bodies, including the European Court of Auditors.*
- *A **partnership approach to e-Governance should be encouraged** and assistance provided to Member States and managing authorities with **training for partners**.*

# Simplified Cost Options

- *Commission needs to ensure that **the barriers and uncertainties** around their use, especially in terms of conflicts with other EU rules such as state aid, **are clarified as soon as possible** and by legislative changes if needed.*
- ***More support is needed for programme authorities** and to give them an **up-front assurance** of their SCO schemes by opening up the possibilities already contained in Article 14 of the ESF regulation and/or providing a fast track approval of methodologies developed by programme authorities.*
- *Legislative changes may be needed to remove some of the restrictions that complicate the use of SCOs and make the flat rates currently possible for some funds or objectives available to all.*



## Third meeting of the High Level Group - 2 February 2016

1. Discussion on conclusions and recommendations from the high level group on **e-Governance** and **simplified costs**.
2. Evidence on **access to EU Funding for SMEs**
  - UEAPME,
  - Region of Emilia-Romagna and
  - EASME.
3. Evidence on **financial instruments**
  - Greater London Authority and the London Energy Efficiency Fund,
  - META Group, and
  - Estonian Ministry of Rural Affairs.





# Access to EU funding for SMEs

- *Only had an **initial discussion** but evidence from stakeholders suggests a more consistent approach that puts the needs of SMEs at the centre of the processes.*
- *This seems to work best when there is a clear commitment from the Member State through setting targets to **reduce the time and administrative burden** especially at the stages of applying for funding, producing documents and receipt of the grant.*
- *Good practice example of **combining funding for SMEs** so that the company can apply for different projects such as R&D, training, energy efficiency but within the same process or call.*
- *Need to find a solution to the question of the state aid rules.*

# Financial Instruments

- *From the initial discussion, the problems around financial instruments seem to stem from the fact that they **require as much information and administrative burden on the beneficiary as is the case for grants.***
- *Possible areas for improvement are centred on the need for a **more flexible approach to reflect the different nature of financial instruments** and that a different framework and expertise are needed than for traditional grants.*
- *This is an area where the group will **need more discussion** to address the complexity of these instruments.*

# Work Programme

<b>June 2016</b>	<u>Fourth meeting of high level group</u> (focus on goldplating)
<b>Nov/Dec 2016</b>	<u>Fifth meeting of high level group</u> (focus on results of study on simplification and cross-cutting audit issues)
<b>March 2017</b>	<u>Sixth meeting of high level group</u> (focus on post 2020)
<b>June 2017</b>	<u>Seventh meeting of high level group</u> (focus on post 2020 and new territorial tools such as CLLD and ITI)
<b>February 2018</b>	<u>Eighth meeting of high level group</u> (final report)



# Continuing the discussion online

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>

***Thank you for your attention!***