

Evaluation of the Design of the IROP First Calls

Executive Summary

The study aimed first and foremost to verify the design of the first IROP calls regarding the possibility to improve the process of implementation, namely by its acceleration, more effective targeting as well as by reducing the administrative burden. One of the basic pillars of this study was the applicant's perspective. Three focus groups were held to obtain the necessary primary data. The information, opinions and suggestions shared by the applicants' representatives and elaborators of project applications were put in the context of administrative data on the first stage of the implementation process.

The focus group findings indicated four areas covering most of the suggestions: early provision of information, understandability, simplification, and communication.

The applicants would appreciate information on the planned calls provided well ahead. The administrative data show that except for the 19th continuous call of IROP the registration of applications ended 6 months before the closing of the call. In round calls, it was usually 2 and 3 months. Thus, it can be assumed that the calls could be open for a shorter period of time, but the timetable of planned calls should be medium-term and available. Also, early information on changes, not only in the timetable, but also in the wording of calls and rules, status of evaluation, etc. was demanded. The process analysis findings reveal that creation of timetable has a significant impact also on the length of evaluation, it is undesirable in terms of optimisation of the use of administrative capacities to close the calls – round calls in particular – at the same time. That poses a higher burden on elaborators of projects and, through the cumulation of applications, also on evaluating capacities and project managers.

The suggestions regarding understandability focused on unambiguity and uniformity of interpretation of the wording of calls and rules. The analysis of revisions, made by the IROP MA, indicates that majority of modifications were done in order to increase the understandability. These modifications (in the context of demand of applicants for early provision of information on changes) could be more effectively communicated, namely towards the applicants and the implementation structure with a view to ensuring uniformity of interpretation. In this respect, effectiveness of the existing information channels (e.g. websites) can be increased by enhancing their clarity and stronger links with calls. The understandability affects also the process of evaluation – better understandability of rules can make the process of evaluation easier, the justification of evaluation clearer and can contribute to reducing the number of appeals (review proceedings).

Simplification is to a certain degree linked to better understandability of calls, rules and evaluations, but it also aims at further reduction of administrative burden. The most specific of the proposed options were the following: a proposal to eliminate redundant duplications (the need to provide the same information multiple times, e.g. in case of budgets, or feasibility studies and similar documents) and a proposal to modify the eCBA. On the very contrary, against the simplification were the proposals to reinforce individual communication channels – they could contribute also to creating or increasing the risks for transparency, uniformity and equal approach, and with respect to process analysis they do not offer any benefit for the system either. In this respect, more appropriate seems to be e.g. reinforcing or modifying the existing communication tools (such as OP websites) that are

available to those who are interested, to applicants, representatives of implementation structure, and control bodies.

The evaluation has resulted in a few recommendations arising primarily from the second part of the study – group discussions and feedback from applicants.

<i>General recommendations: preparation of project applications</i>
To improve the wording of the Specific rules for applicants and beneficiaries, to make sure that the text is unambiguous and to use the same division into chapters in different calls.
To modify the feasibility study template and to keep the necessary information, to avoid duplicating the chapters and to abstain from requiring information included in the application for support or its annexes
To focus on the way of communication at call and project level, to ensure that information is available to the applicants sufficiently ahead of time
To better explain, in the general Handbooks for applicants and beneficiaries, the mechanism of assessing and approving changes in projects, to better explain the changes in itemised budgets
To announce earlier the closing date for receipt of applications for support and to better inform about the fact that the applications for support compete for a limited volume of funds
To look into the possibility to cancel the opinions of expert bodies received by all the applicants.
To examine the quality of information and to insist on providing information of equal quality by the CRD
To better communicate the conditions and the programme interpretation towards the external control bodies in order to prevent the risk of different results of controls
To examine the possibility to introduce flat rates for incidental expenditure
To stipulate in the General rules and in the legal act conditions the parameters for rentals (short-term, long-term) – the possibility to rent the entire project output (e.g. terminals) and to describe revenues in projects, and the possibility to collect money from visitors
<i>General recommendations: submission of the application for support</i>
To make the price setting for the budget in the feasibility study easier to understand
To modify dispatches in order to make them understandable
To check the possibility to avoid duplicate budgets in projects – ISKP (Final recipient information system), feasibility studies, itemized budget, budget at the level of main activities
To check out the possibility to modify eCBA, from the applicants perspective its current version has no benefits and it has no sense for small and non-business projects
<i>General recommendations: Evaluation process</i>
To focus on control of quality and comparability of evaluators with respect to their knowledge of the Rules and related information (FAQ), to better interlink the roles of evaluators and consultants, to make sure the application is evaluated in its entirety
To cut short the length of the review proceeding and re-evaluation
To examine the possibility to extend the deadline for amending the application for support
To examine the issue of (non)separability of the land's price from the building's price

Other specific recommendations

To better describe activities that may take place in community centres – cultural, educational, recreational, scope of social works and services

To find out whether the community centres and social services need to have the entrustment issued by the Region throughout the period of SGEI provision, or short-term interruptions can be tolerated.